DEserting Dixie: A History of Emigres, Exiles, & Dissenters from the American South, 1866-1925

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VITA

Christopher L. Jones was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on October 12, 1976. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Amherst College in 1999 and a Masters of Arts from Brown University in 2003. He taught history at Phillips Academy, Andover from 1999 until 2002. He has conducted seminars on race and American history for secondary school teachers at Bristol Community College. He published articles in the Gale Library Encyclopedia of Slavery. He was the recipient of an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship for graduate studies and a Gilder Lehrman Fellowship for research.
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# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................. 1

Chapter 1 ......................................................... 17

Chapter 2 ........................................................ 67

Chapter 3 ........................................................ 136

Chapter 4 ........................................................ 186

Epilogue .......................................................... 233
INTRODUCTION

But the victory was, in fact, almost entirely illusory. If this war had smashed the Southern world, it had left the essential Southern mind and will — the mind and will arising from, corresponding to, and requiring this world — entirely unshaken.
—W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South, 1941

“There may not be a political South,” Edward Pollard wrote the year after the Civil War ended, “Yet there may be a social and intellectual South.” This notion, proposed in his massive 1867 chronicle of the war The Lost Cause, was among the earliest predictions that the South could survive as a distinct region under Yankee rule. Pollard meant it to sound a note of optimism for a Confederate spirit shaken by military defeat. He was a Virginian, a secessionist, a wartime editor of the Richmond Examiner, a Union-held prisoner of war, an uncompromising white supremacist, and a relentless warrior for the values he held dear as a Southerner. While he admitted that, in defeat, the South had to accept “the restoration of the Union and the excision of slavery,” he defiantly predicted the South would wage a “war of ideas” in the coming decades to preserve its superior culture and regional identity.¹

Just what paths Southerners would take to counter the sea change threatening their regional distinctiveness was a matter of some debate. Those who mourned the passing of the Old South and feared the social changes promised by Reconstruction adopted a

strategy of resistance through remembrance. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, they fostered a culture of preservation that consecrated the memory of Old Southern values. As this social mythology grew and took shape, its branches extended into all reaches of a sacred bygone South: the bucolic glory of the plantation lifestyle, the cavalier ethic of white Southern men and women, the tragic inevitability of Confederate defeat. Like all useful myths, the reconstructed memory of the Old South was an artful explanation of a turbulent historical moment, a requiem for an irretrievable past and a salve for wounded pride. Borrowing the title of Edward Pollard’s book, Southerners named their reinvented conception of the Civil War “the Lost Cause,” as it came to represent less a contest for Southern independence than a sacrificial defense of a way of life whose time had come. As Southerners convinced themselves of this awful certainty, their memory of the war and of the Old South grew into something both elegiac and celebratory, guising lineaments haunted by slavery and defeat with a mask of pristine nobility.

Alternatively, advocates of a New South, who attributed defeat to the South’s lack of industrial production and its reliance on foreign manufacturing, wanted to develop an economy that resembled their conqueror’s in order to ensure the region’s future prosperity and economic independence. From the 1880s and 1890s, New South devotees like the white journalist, Henry Grady, and the black educator, Booker T. Washington, pledged that investment in industry would enrich the South. In “The South and Her Problems,” an 1887 speech replete with New South philosophies, Grady warned that “Agriculture alone—no matter how rich or varied its resources—cannot establish or maintain a
people’s prosperity. No commonwealth ever came to greatness by producing raw material.”

Old South or New South, Southerners subscribing to either school of thought shared a fundamental conservatism, a desire for the South to remain a distinctive region controlled by white Southerners. Both groups drew strength from the cultural effort to mythologize the Old South, which in one incarnation smiled upon the plantation past and in another claimed the over-reliance on agriculture led to defeat. And both groups fought on the same side in the “war of ideas.” Old South and New South came to represent drastically different economic philosophies, but they shared a wellspring: a devotion to Southern regionalism.

There was, however, a third way for the defeated South to respond to the destruction of their society. There were some Southerners, black and white, who perceived in the horrible aftermath of war an unprecedented opportunity to build something new. Dissatisfied with the choice of Old South or New South, they argued for a different South, a region that would remain distinct, but whose distinctiveness would not rely on traditional dogmas or prejudices. Their attempts to re-envision a different homeland, a better homeland, began with the understanding that the Old South was gone beyond recovery and a New South required more than railroads and lumber mills. They were Southerners willing to do battle in the “war of ideas” for a distinctive, forward-looking South, but they did not align themselves with Edward Pollard or the majority of

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2 Henry Grady, “The South and Her Problems,” October 26, 1887 in Life of Henry W. Grady Including His Writings and Speeches, Joel Chandler Harris, ed. (rpr. New York: Cassell Publishing Co, 1890), 111.
their Southern brethren. And they often paid a price for their non-conformity. When the sentiment of other Southerners rose against them, their final response was to leave, choosing exile rather than remain in their former homeland. In deserting Dixie they became Southern Apostates, though they did not realize it at the time.

The stories of the Southern Apostates explored in the following chapters suggest that postwar Southern identity was forged in the “war of ideas” that raged from 1866 through the turn of the century, not solely in reaction to the Civil War. In part by scavenging the ruins of Old Southern culture, and in part by decreeing which New Southern concepts were permissible, the winners of the “war of ideas” set the terms of Southern distinctiveness. The resulting regional identity has not always been easy to describe. Historian Carl Degler began an investigation of Southern distinctiveness guided by only these parameters: “If there is a South then the people who live there should recognize their kinship with one another and, by the same token, those who live outside the South ought to recognize that Southerners are somehow different from them.” Yet, as imprecise as Degler’s definition is, it seems appropriate to the stories of this dissertation, in which proponents of a different kind of South found themselves either motivated or pressed to leave it.

This dissertation is about a selection of these Southern Apostates. Until now they have been studied, if at all, as individual anomalies in the overarching drama of Reconstruction. But to examine them as a group is to see that their stories, though richly

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varied, share a pattern of conflict and failure that played out in three parts. First, as the steel-edged Southern nationalism that had led to secession sputtered out along with the Confederacy, the Southern Apostates adopted a reinvented Southern regionalism colored with utopian hues. Ignoring the defiant tones of Confederate fire-eaters, or the laments for antebellum plantation life, their visions for a renewed South often involved cooperation, pragmatism, engagement, and compromise. Second, they approached their respective quests to remake the South with unbridled optimism, reflecting their belief that, in that brief postwar moment, the South was as close to a *tabula rasa* as any entrenched society could be. Third, their attempts to redefine the South failed utterly, and the consequences almost always involved a communal renunciation of their Southern identity. Taken together, their trajectories offer a counter narrative to the familiar postwar histories of the South, both its failures and its victories.

**On Southern Identity**

For all its complexities, Southern identity developed along a relatively linear path leading up to the Civil War. The origins of Southern identity overlapped the nascent identity of the nation itself. Historian C. Vann Woodward once noted, “after all, it fell the lot of one Southerner from Virginia to define America.” Yet even as Thomas Jefferson put pen to paper in 1776, the growth of two distinct political economies within the country suggested that sectional identity would come to mean as much as national

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identity. As the South came to depend on racial slavery in the late eighteenth century, while the more populous North abandoned it in favor of free labor, the identity of the South gradually shifted into an oppositional posture. This trend was exacerbated in the 1830s, when Southern slaveholders grew apprehensive that an increasingly vocal antislavery movement in the North threatened slavery, its expansion, and the plantation culture of the South. Steadily, the defense of sectional rights usurped national loyalties, until, in 1860, the progression of Southern identity reached its terminus in full-blown Confederate nationalism.

The iconic figure representing this evolution was South Carolinian John C. Calhoun, longtime Congressman and Vice President of the United States from 1824 to 1832. His political labors in the 1810s and early 1820s, notably his hawkish encouragement for the War of 1812 and his support for the Missouri Compromise in 1820, consistently reflected his belief that Southern interests and national interests coincided. But a dispute with President Andrew Jackson over federal tariff policies that, Calhoun felt, put the agricultural interests of the South at a disadvantage, led him to champion the sovereign right of a state to nullify federal laws.\(^5\) Though repudiated by Jackson and other statesmen, the doctrine of nullification would serve for a generation of Southerners as the backbone of the political philosophy legitimating secession. Calhoun himself ended his career as a Senator tirelessly defending slavery, white supremacy, and the sectional interests of the South, irrespective of any national concerns. On the eve of

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his death in 1850, he stood adamantly opposed to the compromise under debate that year in Congress, certain it would tip the balance of political power away from the slaveholding South, despite the claims of its proponents that the Compromise could avert a crisis of the Union.

Of course, not all Southerners shared Calhoun’s political perspectives or his sectional ardor; nor indeed can such a brief sketch do justice to Calhoun himself. His life story does, however, provide the framework for an explanation of why more than half-a-million white Southern men, some of whose fathers and grandfathers had fought for American independence, enlisted in a violent rebellion against their own country. They had, whether enthusiastically or begrudgingly, bought into Confederate nationalism. For the vast majority of the Southern people, from 1861 to 1865 to be Southern was to be Confederate, and to be Confederate was to take part in the armed defense of the issues Calhoun had spent the second half of his life defending in public office.

But within this antebellum progression separate currents of Southern thought competed for recognition. Historians have since debated which identity achieved primacy. Eugene Genovese located the region’s identity in the hegemonic anticapitalist culture of the plantation economy, grounded in the relationship between the master and the slave.\(^6\) James Oakes disagreed, finding that a capitalist ethos premised on slaveholding defined the South.\(^7\) William Freehling argued that debates about slavery

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between Southern moderates and extremists revealed an underlying agrarian utopianism.\(^8\)

Taken together, the breadth of scholarship on the antebellum South cautions against the suggestion of a dominant, monolithic identity. Indeed, elements of each of these identities, although subsumed by Confederate nationalism during the sectional crisis of mid-century, reemerged for better or worse after the Civil War, when the very idea of the South was up for grabs. The question “Who or what is a Southerner?” became a far thornier issue the moment the Confederacy died, when gray uniforms and state borderlines no longer delineated such identities. With the dream of an independent South extinguished, Southerners faced the unwelcome prospect of reconstituting their Confederate nationalism into a regional loyalty that could, once again, coexist with their national identity as Americans. That task, in turn, meant processing the meaning of the war.

Most scholars have argued that the Civil War cast a gravitational shadow across Southern history, influencing every event, painting every memory, anchoring the identity of the region in its failed rebellion. Referring to the war, C. Vann Woodward made the case that “Southern history, unlike American, includes large components of frustration, failure, and defeat.” The signifying features of life in the South after the Civil War—poverty, underdevelopment, hardship, and shame—formed an ironic counterweight to the American narrative of virtue, opulence, and success. The postwar South continued

to exist as a unique region because Southerners bore the burden of losing a war.⁹ By contrast, Eugene Genovese has claimed that the wartime destruction of the plantation economy had a singular diminishing effect on Southern identity. Writing that, “Slavery made possible the defense and preservation of a system of values that was unraveling in a North based on bourgeois social relations that undermined all tradition,” he argued that Union victory, coupled with emancipation, ushered into the South capitalist forces that eroded the core of Southern distinctiveness: the paternal bond between master and slave.¹⁰

In contrast, Edward Pollard’s “war of ideas” linked the fight for postwar Southern identity to issues that transcended the brief existence of the Confederacy. The South, he reminded his readers, had not seceded in a fiery rush to defend abstract principles of constitutional government, nor as a last-ditch attempt to shield an agrarian economic system, nor even to protect their property, human and otherwise. The South fought for slavery, simply because slavery acted as “a barrier against a contention and war of races.” All that Union victory had accomplished was to break down that barrier. If the South could rebuild its society in such a manner that blacks remained subordinate to whites, Confederate surrender in 1865 would mean very little indeed. Americans would look back on the war as ritualized bloody politics, nothing more. What mattered most was returning whites to power, and to that end white Southerners, he ominously foretold, “have taken up new hopes, new arms, new methods.”¹¹ In his manifesto for postwar

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Southern identity, Pollard proclaimed that the Civil War, “did not decide negro equality; it did not decide negro suffrage; it did not decide State Rights; it did not decide the orthodoxy of the Democratic Party.”¹² These were the ideological battlegrounds on which Southerners and Southern Apostates fought to realize their visions of a distinctive South. And the contests waged reverberated with themes that stretched back through Southern history. Three orthodoxies in particular require mention:

First, the most significant question at stake in the “war of ideas,” was whether to keep the South a white man’s country—what historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips called the “central theme of Southern history.”¹³ No one feature defined the antebellum South more than slavery, and the Civil War left no greater legacy than emancipation. When the Confederate government first came into being in 1861, Vice President Alexander Stephens wrote that "Its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery is his natural and normal condition."¹⁴ But the postwar South had to swallow emancipation as the law of the land, and then, within five years of its surrender, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, which together promised to set African Americans on equal footing with whites. Southerners had to circumvent these laws in order to reestablish the indispensable quality of the region’s antebellum uniqueness. The South had to be a place

¹² Pollard, The Lost Cause, 750.


where, in the words of the writer W. J Cash, “a white man, any white man, was in some sense a master.”

Second, honor, the code of ethics that dictated so much of male behavior in the Old South, found new outlets as white Southerners formed new postwar loyalties. Southern honor had always been a distinctly white parlance, but it had an inextricable relationship with slavery and paternalism, infusing it with the grammar of the master-slave relationship. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, a scholar of Southern honor, described its meaning for Confederates in this way: “Honor embodied the revolutionary heritage of freedom by which they meant the right of community self-governance. It also embraced \textit{laisser asservir} — the white man’s right to hold human property and dispose of it as he saw fit.” Along the same lines, honor also constituted a slate of masculine ideals against which Southern men could measure themselves. When the Confederate armies surrendered in 1865, many Southern men had to cope with feelings of shame, bitterness, depression, and emasculation. But by the time Reconstruction was waning, Southern men had resuscitated the ethics of honor, linking it to white supremacy rather than slavery, and to Democratic politics rather than Confederate nationalism. As Southerners used the Democratic Party to dethrone the Republicans and regain control of their home states, the political victories of the 1870s assuaged the shame of military defeat a decade earlier. As a result, Southern identity—specifically male identity—wedded itself to the Democratic

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Third, in spite of the despair wrought by Confederate defeat, Southerners developed an enduring faith in the South’s rebirth, which they rapidly associated with long traditions of regional autonomy and destiny. This belief manifested itself in various and, at times, contradictory ways. In part, because a rejuvenated nationalism (or, in this case, a regionalism) required a new and storied history from which to draw nourishment, some Southerners devoted themselves to mythologizing their past. Through mediums of all types—letters, reminiscences, articles, literary works, histories, parades, museum exhibitions, Decoration Day speeches, regimental reunions, and political campaigns—they romanticized the virtues of the Old South’s plantation economy. Locating Southern virtue and Southern identity in an agricultural economy became a generational pattern, from the old planter elites in the 1860s to the Southern populists in the 1890s to the Southern Agrarians of the 1930s. New South proponents, who conceived of a South rising from its agrarian ashes to be reborn in a more modern form, could also trace the roots of their vision to a desire for another kind of regional autonomy: industrial productivity and economic independence. The South would rise again, they promised, if Southerners but stayed in the region and worked.

Of course, these were just three pillars of postwar Southern identity, not the entire edifice. I would not argue that a Georgian or a Louisianian or a Virginian had to publically endorse these concepts, or to actively take part in the “war of ideas,” to be secure in the knowledge that he was Southern. My interest here is in the sin of Southern

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apostasy, that to vocally take a minority opinion on any one of these issues was to court the wrath of the community and the loss of Southern identity.

The Southern Apostates

Ironically, Southern Apostates acted out of sincere devotion to the South. Among the Apostates were people who spoke out against the racist social order, who refused to join the chorus of Lost Causers, who withheld their support for a Democratic consolidation of the South, or who simply believed the land was beyond redemption, but they were not wild-eyed radicals, bohemian revolutionaries, or even anti-traditionalists. (Tellingly, the major figures in all of the following narratives worked to uphold at least one of these conservative Southern ideals, if not more.) They were, in most cases, fair-minded, practical reformers who wanted to implement moderate change, and they perceived in the wake of the Civil War an opportune moment to do so. If their stories have been largely sidelined until now, it is because scholars have so often used the tension between Old South and New South as a lens to understand postwar Southern identity. Within that duality, dissenters from one camp were usually classified with the other. But the roads to Southern distinctiveness that the Apostates walked should not be measured with the same yardstick. My goal is to follow the trajectories of the key dissenters to illuminate not only their goals for the region, but to offer, through the lens of their experiences, an alternative glimpse of the South they left behind.

The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 1 retraces the journey of a group of Southerners who responded to Confederate defeat by emigrating to Brazil. Calling
themselves *confederados*, they abandoned the South in order to recreate it abroad, so convinced were they that Union victory had destroyed Southern culture within the United States. Chapter 2 focuses on John Mosby, a Confederate Colonel from Virginia and a famed cavalry officer during the war. Mosby supported Republican Ulysses S. Grant in the 1872 presidential election and advocated political compromise with the Republican Party for the rest of his life. Chapter 3 examines the strange career of Martin Delany, an African American activist who spent his life searching for the proper homeland for his race. When the Civil War ended Delany relocated to South Carolina, entreated African Americans to support Democrats, and endorsed former slaveholders and white supremacists for public office. Chapter 4 considers the life and literature of George Washington Cable, a native of New Orleans and a master practitioner of local color writing in the late nineteenth century. In the 1880s, Cable published a series of non-fiction essays arguing, among other racially progressive reforms, that African Americans deserved equal protection of the laws.

To look at the journeys of these Southern Apostates will, I hope, shed some light on one of the most fundamental questions of Southern history. Precisely how did the Civil War change the South? The answers are far reaching and complex. The stories of the Southern Apostates are a reminder that the idea of Southern culture rebuilt on the foundation of a victimized nationalism did not hold everyone in thrall. In the minds of the Apostates, the Civil War did not contain the elements of true historical tragedy. They mourned their personal losses and privations; some of them mourned the death of the Confederate cause for a time. But the irretrievable loss of Old Southern culture did not
affect them as it did other Southerners. The *confederados* imagined the renewal of the Old South in more perfect form in Brazil. John Mosby envisioned a reconstructed Southern society strengthened by political compromise between Republican and Democrat. Martin Delany shared a similar optimism for the South, though his was based on cooperation between whites and blacks. George Washington Cable perceived a chance for the postwar South to unburden itself of the weight of racial discrimination. For all the Southern Apostates, their dreams for better Souths were birthed by the Civil War. The death of the Confederacy evoked from them utopian ambitions.

Yet the most compelling quality of the Southern Apostates was their utter failure to realize these ambitions. This pattern is all the more curious because their utopianism was rooted in moderate policies. In the social conflicts polarizing postwar Southern culture, they wanted, each in their unique ways, to become masters of the middle ground. Mosby and Delany both eschewed reflexive, vigilante politics for accommodationist discourse and political cooperation. Cable rejected racial discrimination in the law by acknowledging the organic phenomenon of segregation in the South. Even the *confederados*, the most antimodern of the Southern Apostates, based the viability of their plantations in exile on the modernizing of Brazil. The Apostates were living paradoxes in the late nineteenth century South: ex-Confederate Republican, African American Democrat, utopian realists, and antimodern modernists. The ostracism they experienced revealed that, in the “war of ideas,” such subtleties were not appreciated or even tolerated and the social construction of a postwar Southern identity inflicted casualties even as it welcomed converts.
Ultimately, the universal failures of the Southern Apostates represent for the South the roads not taken after the Civil War and Reconstruction. When Reconstruction ended, Southerners reestablished a regional distinctiveness infused, as it had been before the war, with conservative principles and racist ideologies. The opportunity that the Civil War had presented—the source of the Apostates’ utopian idealism—vanished by the turn of the century. By then, the rebuilding of the South had taken place on Edward Pollard’s terms and the Apostates who were still alive had exchanged their optimism for resignation or bitterness. Watching from the margins of society, they felt the burden of Southern history perhaps most keenly of all, and could only wonder what might have occurred had the South not forced them out.


CHAPTER 1: THE CONFEDERADOS

But the rich glow of hope that then animated my bosom, and the bright gleams of anticipation which I then felt seemed to illuminate my whole being. After returning to camp, and drying my clothes as best I could, I was too weary to sleep, but tossed upon my cool couch of palm leaves, unable and unwilling to banish the bright vision of a new, and happy home, for the brave men and fair women of my native land, where we may, without fanatical interference, bring up our sons to emulate the virtues of the wise and good; and our daughters, as the “polished corners of the temple.”

—Reverend Ballard Dunn, Brazil, the Home for Southerners, 1866

In August 1865, George Scarborough Barnsley, until recently a Confederate doctor in the 8th Georgia regiment, gazed at the ruins of Georgia plantation “Woodlands” and wondered, “Whither now shall I tend?” He had intended to “practice and farm” after the war’s conclusion, but the damage wrought by Union soldiers seemed too extensive to repair. Discouraged by his “inability to start and the deprivation of [his wife] of a home,” and convinced that the South he spent the last four years defending was gone, he began searching for a new place his family could settle, somewhere outside of the reunited Union. “I have no other hope but emigration,” he wrote his father. “I cannot conscientiously take an oath to the U. S. Govmt. for now I have not the shadow of an excuse. I am utterly ruined – in hopes, in fortune, and all save honor gone – then why should I remain to weep over war-torn graves. No I must go.” As to where, in the immediate aftermath Confederate surrender the destination mattered less than the
departure. He wanted only to leave the South as quickly as possible. Brazil was a
distinct possibility, but if Brazil did not work out, “could I not do well in Mexico?” he
asked his father. “I could get a position there in the Army.”1 His letter voiced the abject
resignation shared by many other Southerners, that with Confederate nationalism dead
and the region conquered there was nothing left of their Southern homeland to salvage.

Barnsley was part of a much greater exodus of ex-Confederates from the South.
Some historians estimate as many as 10,000 Southerners emigrated to foreign countries
after the Civil War.2 As his letter hinted, the largest fraction went to Mexico and Brazil
(though the lack of immigration records makes establishing firm numbers impossible),
with the wartime circumstances of the emigres usually determining one destination over
the other. Confederate soldiers in the western theater of the war, fleeing the advancing
Union armies, headed for the relative safety of Mexico. Brazil presented a more
challenging target. One could not simply escape on horseback to South America; getting
there took some planning. Brazilian emigres by necessity were a self-selecting group,
usually civilians or, like Barnsley, non-combat soldiers, free from the anxiety of Union
reprisals that drove their western counterparts to Mexico. Most were not planters—not
yet at least. Most hailed from middle-class professional families across the South.
Organizing themselves into colonizing groups after the war, they removed themselves
from the American South to South America. By the late 1860s, Southern emigres in

1 George S. Barnsley to his father, August, 1865, Edwin S. James Papers, Manuscripts Division, South
Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia. (Hereafter: SCL).

2 Cyrus Dawsey and James Dawsey, “Leaving,” in The Confederados: Old South Immigrants in Brazil, ed.
Cyrus Dawsey and James Dawsey (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995) 13; Andrew Rolle, The
Brazil, who called themselves *confederados*, had settled in six major locations. The names of the colonies reflected the strange juxtaposition of cultures newly met: Santarem on the Amazon, Linhares on the Rio Doce, “New Texas” near the port of Iguape, “Lizzieland” near Iguape, Xiririca near Iguape, and Santa Barbara north of Sao Paulo city.

For Barnsley and other *confederados*, Brazil seemed the ideal place to begin a new life abroad, a tropical empire where planters still raised their crops in peace and the imperial government still sanctioned the ownership of slaves. Colonization in Brazil as well as Mexico offered emigrants the perfect chance, so they believed, to rebuild the plantation society of the Old South and create a safe haven for Southern culture that would otherwise perish under Yankee oppression. They dismissed, as Barnsley did, any notion of rebuilding the South through either accommodation or conflict with the North—why wage a “war of ideas” in America when it could be won without a contest in Brazil? By leaving their homeland the *confederados* and the emigres to Mexico acted out the last undiluted impetus of Confederate nationalism, an ideology based on the premise that the Southern character could only exist within a society that cherished and protected the critical components of antebellum Southern identity: plantation agriculture and white supremacy.

Realizing such dreams was hardly plain sailing. Like the *conquistadors* of old searching for El Dorado, the emigres in Brazil and Mexico were absolutely convinced, though the evidence was thin, that their imagined Southern utopia existed. Enamored with the promise of a Southern life abroad, they dismissed the storm clouds gathering on the horizon: the insurrection tearing Mexico apart, the liberal reform movement sweeping
across Brazil, the lack of infrastructure in both nations, and the ambiguous customs of race relations in these multi-racial societies. Partly, the horror of Yankee dominance in America dwarfed these concerns. But emigres, especially men, found the allure of merging two archetypal identities, the planter and the pioneer, just as compelling. Tropical colonies constituted a new frontier in which Southern men could simultaneously tame the wilderness and don the paternal mantle of plantation owner. All the elements of Southern manliness, subverted at home by Confederate defeat, were within reach in Brazil and Mexico. For the confederados, emigration at its heart was a quest to reach the pinnacle of the Southern cultural hierarchy. Emboldened by their cause, blinded by their confidence, the emigres embarked on their quixotic, doomed venture to save the South by abandoning it.

The Impulse to Run: Confederates in Mexico

The story of the confederados in Brazil must be preluded with a brief investigation of the Southern emigrant experience in Mexico for two reasons: one, the actions of the emigrants in both nations reflected their common belief that “the South” was an idea more than a space and therefore could be transplanted to another region; and two, Mexico was far easier a destination to reach than Brazil and, at first glance, just as appealing. That many Southerners chose to go to Mexico as the war came to a close begs the question why would other emigres a year or two later attempt the more expensive and more perilous voyage to South America?

Mexico had much to recommend it to Southerners contemplating emigration. The
tropical climate it enjoyed gave many emigres cause to believe that is potential for a plantation economy was capacious. Mexico, too, was an empire, an attraction for men who felt American republicanism had stolen their liberties. Its ruler, Emperor Maximilian I, had taken power April 10, 1864 through the intervention of the French ruler Napoleon III and with the support of conservative Mexican monarchists. Maximilian I was Austrian by birth, a member of the dynastic Hapsburg family, though (eventually) he took to heart the interests of his inherited nation. He prioritized encouraging agricultural and, mirroring a strategy that emperor of Brazil Dom Pedro II also employed, he courted emigres from the United States, particularly Southerners, who knew the science of agriculture.

Push factors as well as pull factors favored emigration to Mexico. Desperate to evade capture by victorious Union forces, many Confederate officers operating west of the Mississippi sought entry into Mexico in the final weeks of the Civil War. They thought a mad dash for Mexico was their only remaining option to avoid possible imprisonment and federal court martial. All one had to do was cross the Rio Grande. Among the prominent Confederate officers and politicians in the western theater who led their men into Mexico were General Joseph Shelby, General Edmund Kirby-Smith, General Sterling Price, Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury, and Governor Thomas Caute Reynolds. Other Southerners, most notably Jefferson Davis, also attempted to flee there but failed to outrun Union forces. The exodus became widespread enough that Ulysses Grant and other Union leaders, concerned that Mexico would become a safe haven for Confederates, tried to stop the flow emigres to Mexico. In April of 1866, Grant
closed all ports in Louisiana and Texas to passengers leaving the United States who did not have permission from the office of Union General Philip Sheridan.³

After Confederate soldiers spent years defending a Southern cause that prized personal honor and martial valor, running to safe ground in Mexico risked seeming cowardly. Once in Mexico, military emigres spent their time and energy justifying their flight. The most popular method emigres used to exonerate themselves was to adopt a form of Southern nihilism, a belief that the new social order in the South under Northern rule was unchangeable, unredeemable, and worthy of nothing but self-destruction. Having declared the South dead and buried, no one could accuse emigres of disloyalty. The editors of the *Mexican Times*, the English-language paper run by Confederate emigres in Mexico City, skillfully wielded this rhetoric. They used their paper as a propaganda machine to condemn Southern prospects for rebuilding and to extol life in Mexico. They repeatedly published stories describing the “ruin and desolation” in the South, the perils Southerners faced in remaining there, and the desires of many to emigrate.⁴ Harping on tales of Northern oppression also helped the cause. Imprisoned Confederates like Jefferson Davis and John Singleton Mosby were favorite topics in the *Times* (though the injustice the incarcerated men suffered appears only to have been that they did not share the same lenient paroles as other Confederates).⁵ Taken as a whole, the *Times* emphasized rumor over fact, catering to an audience that welcomed any news from

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³ Rolle, *The Lost Cause*, 55.
⁴ Ibid., 158-159.
⁵ Ibid.
home, real or otherwise, vindicating their decision to leave the South.

General Joseph Shelby personified this Southern nihilism. He and his men had symbolically dropped the Stars and Bars into the Rio Grande when they crossed the river in July of 1865. In a letter to a friend written that November, Shelby complained of Republican rule over the South in the same spirit as the *Mexican Times*: “I am not one of those to ask forgiveness for that which I believe to day is right. The party in power has manifested no leniency.” But he directed the better part of his bitterness toward the South itself. “I am here as an exile; defeated by the acts of the southern people themselves,” he wrote, and then twisted the dagger. “Why? Because they loved their ‘niggers,’ their estates, more than principle.... Let them reap what they deserved, *eternal disgrace*. Damn ‘em, they were foolish enough to think by laying down their arms they would enjoy all the rights they once had.”⁶ If Shelby never revealed exactly what “principal” he fought for—clearly not just the right to own human property—it did not seem to matter. To him, the end of the Confederate nation signaled the end of Southern nationalism. Ritual giving the Confederate flag to the river was a funeral ceremony. The South no longer existed.

A few emigres in Mexico had an alternative justification for their exile, believing that they could rally the Confederacy from Mexico and retake Texas and the Southwest. At the very least, from Mexico they could launch raids and continue to kill Yankees (Jefferson Davis’s loose plan when he fled). Of these die-hards, none could match the zealotry of ruthless, unforgiving Lieutenant-General Jubal Anderson Early. Early was a

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⁶ Joseph Shelby, November 1, 1865, quoted in Rolle, *The Lost Cause*, 99.
temperamental Virginian, called “Old Jube” by his men and fellow officers. Northerners knew him best as the Confederate general who burned Chambersburg, Pennsylvania to the ground after the town refused to pay him a ransom. In the late spring of 1865, after a series of reversals forced Lee to relieve him of command, Early set out for Mexico on horseback, disguising himself at times like a farmer. He secured a berth on a ship to Vera Cruz, escaping the South three months before Grant ordered Sheridan to detain Southern emigrants. Determined, as other Southern emigres, to “get out from the rule of the infernal Yankees,” he hoped to exploit the tensions between the United States government and the Mexican Empire to ignite a new war against the Union.7

After arriving in Mexico in early 1866, Early was quickly disappointed. The expatriate culture did not inspire confidence that Southern emigres wanted to keep fighting. The defeatism of Confederates like Shelby disheartened him. More significantly, Mexico itself was in the throes of civil conflict. Republican revolutionaries led by Benito Juarez had never accepted imperial rule and were staging an effective guerrilla campaign against Maximilian I. The presence of the emigres added fuel to the fire. Juarez’s men, decidedly nativist, took no pleasure in seeing Confederate soldiers coming into their land. They had not, after all, forgotten the Mexican War in which they had battled these very same soldiers. For his part, the emperor desired diplomatic recognition from the United States to solidify his government’s legitimacy and help curb the rebellion, a distinction United States Secretary of State William Seward had as of yet

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withheld. Maximilian risked a great deal encouraging Confederate emigration to aid Mexico’s agricultural economy. To Early’s dismay, he would not also endorse cross-border hostilities against the Union.

Privately, Early thought Maximilian’s empire was an “infernal humbug.” He remained in Mexico only a few months before leaving in May of 1866. He traveled to Cuba first, but pushed on soon after to Canada, where he wrote his memoirs defending his military record during the war and establishing his reasons for leaving the South. Like nearly all emigres, he couched his departure as a defense of liberty: “I have come into exile rather than submit to the yoke of the oppressors of my country.” But unlike others, Early kept his eye on the South, waiting for an opportune moment to safely return.

As it turns out, Early’s decision to leave Mexico proved a good one. The empire was falling apart. Juarez and the republicans put such a strain on the resources of the government that the insurrectionary pressure forced Napoleon III to withdraw French support for Maximilian. By the spring of 1867, Juarez had surrounded the remaining imperial forces and on May 11, his men captured the emperor. They executed him on June 19. The few Confederate colonies remaining in Mexico—some had already been destroyed by Juarists—disintegrated after the empire fell. Some Southern emigres, if they had not died in the fighting, re-migrated if they had the means. Others accepted the protection of the United States. Even the self-proclaimed unrepentant Joseph Shelby

8 Ibid., 404.

9 Jubal A. Early, A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence, in the Confederate States of America (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), xxiv.
sailed back to America on the Union gunboat *Tacomy*, which the U. S. Navy sent to evacuate Americans after Maximilian’s execution. Only a handful remained to stick out a life in the newly created Republic of Mexico.

The return of the emigres from Mexico to America in 1867, and Jubal Early’s return from Canada in 1869, foreshadowed the pattern of failed emigration that would take place in the Brazilian colonies of the *confederados*. The emigrants tended to see what they wanted to see in their chosen destinations: pulpits from which to eulogize the South, staging grounds to reclaim it, or mirages of Southern liberties. In Mexico, a political revolution snapped the illusion. In Brazil, where the government was stable, the illusion would play out along its own pretexts.

The Emigration Debate

In mid-September of 1865, Dr. James McFadden Gaston, an ex-Confederate in search of a new home, arrived in Rio de Janeiro to scout parts of Brazil as possible destinations for his family and for other Southern emigres. With the aid of the Brazilian government, he set up a commission to facilitate his search. The *Diario De Sao Paulo*, the local newspaper, ran an editorial September 26 supporting the commission and the influx of emigres from the former Confederacy to the empire of Brazil. If the emigres were the right sort of men—not “adventures” looking to get rich quickly, but “men who will establish themselves diligently” and “make common cause with us”—then the newspaper optimistically predicted “the American emigrants that come will remain with
us, and will never return to their country.”

The Diario’s editorial was part of a broader Brazilian national discourse on immigration that had been linked for years to the country’s reform agenda. The Liberal Party, the political arm of the republican reform movement and a rising power in the imperial parliament, supported an open immigration policy to offset the nation’s labor shortage. The population of slaves, historically the primary labor force in Brazil, had been in steady decline for decades. In 1822, slaves comprised more than fifty percent of the population; by the end of the 1860s, the percentage of slaves dropped below twenty percent. The emancipation movement across the Atlantic world compounded the slave labor problem. After two decades of pressure from Great Britain, Brazil outlawed international slave trading in 1850, although slavery itself and domestic slave trading were still legal. Illegal trans-Atlantic slave trading continued, but the numbers could not meet the labor demands of Brazil’s coffee, sugar, and cotton industries. In response to pressure from outspoken Liberals, Emperor Dom Pedro II sent recruiting agents abroad to Europe and the United States. In 1860, the Brazilian empire adopted an official policy to stimulate immigration. The government implied, though did not guarantee, that immigrants setting up self-governing colonies would receive subsidies for schools, churches, and roads. The arrival of Gaston and other men from the former Confederacy in 1865 and 1866 spurred further encouragement from Liberals, who were thrilled that a

10 Diario De Sao Paulo, September 26, 1865 in James M. Gaston, Hunting A Home in Brazil, manuscript, Edwin S. James Papers, SCL,

pool of immigrants from the Southern United States, the most coveted demographic, had arrived. In 1866, they formed the International Organization of Immigration as a public voice for their immigration agenda, asking the government and the Brazilian people to welcome the Southern emigres.¹²

Both sides looked to profit from the arrangement. Brazilian Liberals assumed that the Southern immigrants would have a background in producing agricultural commodities, familiarity with a plantation labor system, and little desire to return to their native land. Elite Southern whites like Gaston saw the availability of cheap and plentiful land, a nearly perfect climate for growing staple plantation crops, the promise of autonomous communities, and legalized slavery. In short, Brazil offered a blend of attractions for Southern emigres they could not find anywhere else. In 1866, only Spanish Cuba and Brazil of the nations in the Western Hemisphere sanctioned slavery. But Cuba did not have limitless tracks of arable land available to emigres as Brazil did and, like Mexico, its government stood on the brink of revolution. The answer to the emigre question appeared to be Brazil.

That the principle parties involved in the emigration plans operated at cross-purposes did not seem to bother anyone. The confederados ignored the fact that the Liberal reformers courting them also called for emancipation and a republican government, a disquietingly similar platform to the American Republican Party from which they fled. The Liberals, for their part, did not seem concerned that the

confederados came to establish a lifestyle based on the slave labor they sought to abolish. Nor did they notice that virtually none of these Southerners had previous experience as planters.

The reports of men like Gaston, who traveled to Brazil ahead of other emigres to judge its suitability for settlement and scout potential sites for colonization, predicted only success. The “advance agents,” as they were called, took it upon themselves to persuade as many Southerners as they could to emigrate from the South and choose Brazil as their destination. Several travelogues, printed in pamphlet or book form, circulated throughout the United States between 1865 and 1867 with titles like Ho! for Brazil, Brazil, the Home for Southerners, or Gaston’s own book Hunting A Home In Brazil. A typical circular written by W. W. Legare and distributed to the South Carolina press in August 1867 illustrated the hard sell advance agents gave Southerners regarding Brazil’s plantation potential. “We have reliable information,” the circular read, “from gentlemen of our acquaintance that in Brazil we can find everything an agricultural people can desire,—a delightful climate, an honorable and hospitable people, a most excellent government, stable and free, and which gives to emigrants all the aid they need, a fertile soil, yielding all our great staples in profusion, and many others, with much less labor than required here.” To ease the anxieties of Southerners contemplating emigration but still on the fence, Legare pointed out that “fortunately for us, colonies of our Southern people already established in the most desirable locations—containing hundreds of families, and growing larger every month.”

13 W. W. Legare, “Circular,” August 1, 1867, SCL.
In spite of their enthusiasm, descriptions like Legare’s were only moderately effective as propaganda. His circular represented the minority opinion on emigration. Southern newspapers consistently editorialized against leaving the South. James D. B. DeBow, editor of the popular journal DeBow’s Review, ran some of the pro-emigration circulars, but added a caveat that spoke for most Southern editors: “There is room enough, and enterprise enough for the Southern people at home, and prospect enough of their success in their struggle with radicalism, bureauism, etc., etc.” Their message underlined their conviction that the South was still alive and still worth defending. “Let us make the effort bravely and wait results,” DeBow recommended with a tug on the strings of Southern honor.14

Anti-emigration editorialists had a persuasive spokesman on their side: Robert E. Lee. The revered general had bowed out of public affairs since the end of the war, but his final words to his soldiers at Appomattox preached reunion: "Boys, I have done the best I could for you. Go home now. And if you make as good citizens as you have soldiers, you will do well.” Lee himself remained in the South after the war. In 1866, a Virginian named Robert W. Lewis wrote the general inquiring more specifically about his views on emigration. Lee replied, “The South required the presence of her sons... to sustain and restore her.”15 He was even more plainspoken in a letter to John Letcher, the wartime governor of Virginia. Former Confederate soldiers “should remain, if possible, in the


country; promote harmony and good feeling, qualify themselves to vote and elect to the
State and general legislatures wise and patriotic men, who will devote their abilities to the
interest of the country and the healing of all dissensions,” he told Letcher. “I have
invariably recommended this course since the cessation of hostilities, and have
endeavored to practice it myself.” As with DeBow, Lee based his anti-emigrationism on
loyalty to the South. Honor and obligation to their home required Southerners to remain.
Most Southerners agreed with him. The number of emigres to Brazil was small
compared to the expectations of the Brazilian government, and the expectations of the
advance agents, who expected thousands to follow behind them.

The anti-emigrationists won the battle of public opinion in no small part because
most Southerners felt that to leave their home was to abandon the Southern cause.
Rebuilding was not the martial cause of the Confederacy, but it was compelling
nonetheless: a “war of ideas” to reclaim some measure of political autonomy from the
imperial policies of the Republican Party and to reestablish white supremacy in the wake
of emancipation. With the dream of an independent slaveholding Confederacy
extinguished, postwar Southern nationalism gloved itself in Democratic politics. Most
white Southerners overtly rejected Reconstruction policies, but their protests no longer
seriously questioned the South’s place within a unified American nation.

With the redeployment of Southern nationalism in new guise, pro-Brazil
emigrationists had to articulate their reasons for leaving the South in its time of great

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Historians like Eugene C. Harter and Edwin S. James argue that fleeing Yankee rule was the primary reason Confederates left the South. See Harter, *The Lost Colony of the Confederacy* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000); James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL. Harter, it should be noted, is a descendent of *confederados*.

W. W. Legare, “Circular,” August 1, 1867, SCL.

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17 Historians like Eugene C. Harter and Edwin S. James argue that fleeing Yankee rule was the primary reason Confederates left the South. See Harter, *The Lost Colony of the Confederacy* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000); James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL. Harter, it should be noted, is a descendent of *confederados*.

18 W. W. Legare, “Circular,” August 1, 1867, SCL.
empire of freedom and plenty.”19 “Freedom,” as the *confederados* understood it, meant only the defense of the antebellum Southern worldview. They did not seek an abstract defense of inalienable rights in foreign lands, but rather the protection of *their* inalienable rights, as they saw it, to rule themselves and to own slaves. They did not reject tyranny in its ubiquitous forms, but they rejected the will of the majority to legislate against *their* wishes. Thus, without any sense of contradiction, the emigres could decry the victorious Union’s imperial control of the South while fleeing to the imperial government of Brazil. As McMullen explained it, Brazil was “a monarchy (thank God!) in name, and a TRUE Republic in practice.”20

Invoking nihilistic descriptions of the Reconstruction South was a crucial aspect to this discourse. With Reconstruction cast as a lost cause even before it began in earnest, they could challenge their obligation to remain in an unredeemably unjust society. With the Southern nation pronounced dead, emigres could depart without dishonor. “Shall any Southerner be blamed,” one advance agent asked, “if he seeks a land where the night of vengeance has not come, that his day may not be one of threatening?”21 For emigres, Southern nationalism no longer cleaved to a region or polity, but to a culture manifested in the Southern character. Unlike Joseph Shelby they did not consider Southern

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21 Ibid., 4.
nationalism dead; they only believed it dead in the American South. They set out to build a new home where Southern culture could survive and flourish.

**Slavery and the Brazil Fantasy**

If the first task of the advance agents was to convince Southerners to leave the South, the second was to sell them on Brazil. In 1865 and 1866, Southerners plotting their departure from the South read reports of Mexican civil strife in the newspapers, but in the same papers they read dispatches from the Confederate emigres already there, extolling life in Mexico and the benign imperial rule of Maximilian I. Yet the leading emigration agents, Frank McMullen, Dr. James McFadden Gaston, and the Reverend Ballard S. Dunn, preferred Brazil. Years later, Sarah Ferguson, a member of one confederado colony, would reflect on the oddity of this choice: “On looking back now, one wonders why sensible men with such a crowd of helpless women and children should undertake such a hazardous venture as crossing the great ocean in a sailing [ship].”

The distinguishing feature of Brazilian society, the institution that set it apart from Mexico and nearly every other country in the western hemisphere, was the existence of slavery. Though the trans-Atlantic slave trade had been made illegal, slaves were still bought and sold within the empire. As one historian has argued, “racism in the guise of opposition to black equality was the decisive factor” in leaving the South for Brazil, a

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“land of African slavery.” More commonly, though, historians have dismissed Brazilian slavery as a compelling motive for emigration, noting that few emigres transported slaves with them or purchased slaves within Brazil. As a result, such historians argue, the history of the confederados has been constructed on an idea of a Southern nationalism not contingent on slavery or race.

In fact slavery was an essential component in the emigres’ imagination of their new life in Brazil. All of the advance agents mentioned it in their guides and correspondence. The Reverend Ballard Dunn dealt with the issue directly. “Many believe,” he wrote, “because they have been told so, by designing knaves and politicians, who wish to detain them in this country, that foreigners cannot hold property in Brazil; particularly in slaves. This is utterly without foundation.” In a statement revealing that slaveholding in the colonial context trumped Southern unity, Dunn went on to assure his readers, “I know a Massachusetts Yankee, who refuses to be naturalized, and yet he owns several slaves.” Dunn recognized also that rumors of “negro equality” in Brazil and the specter of an interracial society would dissuade many potential emigres. Brazil was an interracial society in stark contrast to the antebellum South. African blood did not necessarily relegate a citizen to slave or lower-class status; laws and social customs did


25 Dunn, Brazil: the Home for Southerners, 40.

26 Ibid.
not inhibit free blacks of middle or upper-class standing from interacting socially with whites of the same class. Still, Brazilian society’s strict hierarchical nature appealed to Southerners, who saw in its patriarchal traditions echoes of the Old South. In Dunn’s mind, attitudes towards race in Brazil compared favorably with the racial upheavals in the postwar South. As he pointed out, a Southerner who “takes fright at ‘negro equality’” in Brazil would be foolish to “mend the matter by returning to the land where negro superiority is just now a prevailing mania.”

Brazil, in other words, could not be worse than the Reconstructed South.

For other emigres, the question of acquiring adequate slave labor was more significant than the social shock of living among free blacks. James Thomas sailed to Brazil in December 1866 to look for a new home for his wife and children. Brazil, he reported back, had “a rich country, healthy climate, good water also,” and “a great portion of the people appear to be very rich.” Securing enough slaves to work the land was essential though: “My dear, this is no doubt a great country, but there is difficulty here. Labor that is Free labor is no better than in the States, for the Free Negro can live without work. Slave labor is all that can be relied upon.” From everything he had heard, the prospects for procuring slave labor were good. A slave was “worth from five hundred to eight hundred dollars in the city–I am told where we are going they are worth from two hundred to five hundred. If I am pleased with this country and can buy a plantation and

27 Ibid., 20.

28 James A. Thomas to his wife, December 23, 1866, James A. Thomas Papers, SCL.
hands on time I will do so.”

But the rumors of available labor had been exaggerated. When Thomas could not find a plantation and enough affordable slaves to work one, he changed his mind and returned to his family in the United States.

Thomas traveled a country on the brink of profound social and political change. After Maximilian died in Mexico in 1867, Brazil was the last remaining empire in the Western Hemisphere. Reformers cried out for a republican government. The institution of slavery was under siege as well. The same Liberals who supported ex-Confederate migration to Brazil also pressed the imperial administration for emancipation. Emperor Dom Pedro II faced international pressure to emancipate Brazil’s slaves as well. Even after the 1850 legal ban on international slave trading took effect, Britain pushed Brazil to emancipate all its slaves. International evangelical groups lobbied against slavery. War with Paraguay between 1864 and 1870 accelerated emancipation, because of a policy stipulating that slaves who enlisted in the Brazilian army earned their freedom. In 1871, the Lei de Ventre Livre, or “Law of Free Birth,” declared that all slave children born from that time in Brazil were free. In 1885, the government freed all slaves over the age of sixty. Three years later, the Lei Aurea, or “Golden Law,” emancipated all slaves regardless of circumstance.

Emancipation laws challenged the expectations of many confederados. The Judkins family, wealthier and more fortunate in their colonial experience than most other Southern families, relied on slave labor. Lucy Judkins, born in Georgia on January 8, 1865, spent her first few years of childhood on her grandfather’s plantation in Brazil.

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29 Ibid.
Years later, she composed her “Brazilian Recollections,” in which she claimed that, after Lee surrendered at Appomattox, the South was a “war cursed landscape.” “There were men of that period who did not wish to live under the Dominion and there were others who did not know how. To which my grandfather Judkins belonged, I do not know, but I suspect to both.”

30 Of the emigration itself, Lucy said, “It was a radical undertaking for my grandfather, who was a man past sixty years; but there were compensations as there were slaves in Brazil and not Yankees!”

31 According to Lucy, the Judkins family moved to a 30,000 acre plantation, called Fazenda du Bangu, twenty-five miles from Rio de Janeiro. Ninety slaves worked the plantation, producing rum, coffee, sugar, sugar cane, corn, and manioc.

32 By 1870, however, a desire had taken hold among the Judkins’ friends and the Judkins themselves to return to the United States. Lucy wrote, “I remember hearing my father say that an unrest was falling upon the land, because Dom Pedro wanted the slaves freed. Without slaves we would again be wanderers, so the pointers of the Big Dipper guided us back to the North Star and those we loved at Tuskegee and the ‘Bluffs.’”

33 Thus, the same star which for two centuries led African American slaves toward freedom in the North, beckoned the slaveholding Judkins family back to the South.

Advance agent James Gaston was concerned about slavery and the conduct of free

30 Lucy Judkins Durr, “Brazilian Recollections,” 3-4, in Edwin S. James Papers, SCL.

31 Ibid., 6.

32 Ibid., 11.

33 Ibid., 21.
blacks in Brazil. In an honest bit of self-disclosure, Gaston described in his guide *Hunting a Home in Brazil* an encounter with a Catholic priest, “a mulatto of more than ordinary intelligence,” that left him unsettled.34 “My prejudice to being associated with those having the negro blood could not be so entirely put aside as to make me feel at ease with this colored gentleman.” Nevertheless, for Gaston such moments, however awkward, could be overcome. Even emancipation—and Gaston admitted “slavery may be destined to cease in Brazil at some future day, by gradual emancipation,”—did not deter him from impressing upon his readers the most important point: “...the elements of society which have resulted from the mastery of the white man will never be erased entirely from the people.”35 Slavery was ideal, but even a society without slavery, so long as it was built on the premise of white superiority, would suffice.

Gaston and the other advance agents sought more than an escape from the conquered South. Consequently, their inveighing against the tyranny of Yankee oppressors was only part of their rhetorical battle. They also plotted to resurrect the Old South in Brazil. Therefore, after first declaring the Old South dead in the United States, they set about selling the promise of a plantation life abroad. Slavery and white supremacy, the backbone of antebellum Southern identity, still existed enticingly in Brazil. Had the advance agents examined Brazil with a more discerning eye, they might have concluded that the empire was already on the road to republicanism and emancipation. They refused. The picture of Brazil that they painted for their audience

34 Gaston, *Hunting A Home in Brazil*, manuscript, Edwin S. James Papers, SCL.

35 Ibid.
indulged the dreams of every Southerner who contemplated emigration: the South was there in Brazil, just waiting for determined Southerners to carve it out of the rough.

No one articulated the Brazilian fantasy with greater enthusiasm or rhetorical force than the Reverend Ballard S. Dunn. Dunn had been the minister of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in New Orleans. He served as a chaplain for the Confederate Army during the war. By 1866, he was a leader in the emigrationist movement and the author of the movement’s most compelling guidebook, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*. The exact origin of his zeal for emigration is difficult to pinpoint, but he had no patience for the editors of Southern newspapers and other advocates of postwar reconciliation. Although he issued a disclaimer in the first paragraph of his guide, that “No attempt has been made, at giving reasons, why any should leave this country,” Dunn listed every reason he could think of in the first chapter.36 Northerners, he claimed, “are energetic, aggressive, ambitious, and ravenous. In them you see the foulness of life, and cruelty of policy, methodized into a system.” After comparing the lot of ex-Confederates to slaves at the mercy of “barbarians,” he asked “Why should we remain in a country, where we find that there is neither present, nor prospective, security, for life, liberty and property?”37 The only things Southerners who stayed in the United States could expect were “to pay exorbitant taxes, to meet the demands of the debt incurred in our subjugation; and to pay the enhanced salaries of those who have grown glorious by butchering our kindred, destroying our cities and towns, our fields and firesides; and

36 Dunn, *Brazil, the Home for Southerners*, i.

37 Ibid., 5.
insulting our women, as they robbed, and turned them, and our little ones, out into the storm and the night?” Dunn’s rant aimed at free blacks as well as Yankees, raising the specter of bloodthirsty, hypersexed former slaves “butchering” whites and raping Southern women.

Dunn and the other advance agents had set a difficult task for themselves. Enticing Southerners five thousand miles south of the former Confederacy to rebuild the Old South required more than demonizing Republican rule and promising slaves to emigres. Southerners contemplating emigration needed to know if land was available in Brazil, and at what price. What crops would grow in Brazil? Could cotton flourish? Could they employ the same agricultural techniques? Were there markets for these goods. How would they transport their crops to markets? The emigration guide books that Dunn and the other advance agents published aimed to set all these fears to rest. Brazil, as they described it, was an ideal destination for planters. “This region,” Gaston promised his readers, “is well adapted to the growth of tobacco, cotton and coffee.” In a report he submitted to the Brazilian Minister of Agriculture, Gaston noted that in certain areas, the potential for cotton growth “far exceeds the best results of cotton growing in the United States. Not only is the soil here well adapted to cotton, but there is a decided advantage in the continuous growth of the plant from year to year, whereas in the United States it is killed annually by the frost and the crop cut short.”

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38 Ibid., 5.

39 Ibid.

that “Here are lands equal to any in the world.... Here almost anything grows.” Dunn reprinted a January 6, 1866 editorial from the *Anglo-Brazilian Times* in his guide that argued cotton would easily supplant coffee as Brazil’s major crop and “Brazil could afford to undersell the producers of the Southern States even in their home ports.” In fact, cotton exports had decreased since the turn of the nineteenth century, but the Union embargo of the Confederacy’s ports during the Civil War caused a spike in demand. Between 1860 and 1870, Brazilian long-staple cotton represented over twenty percent of Brazil’s exports. In the long run, cotton could not hold a candle to coffee, which already constituted over fifty percent of exports by 1870. By 1880, the cotton bubble had deflated and sales declined once more.

The authors of these guides intended their tone to be measured and objective, and the beginning of their surveys read this way. Certainly, an emphasis on sound judgment was the spirit behind the lengthy subtitle of Dunn’s guide: *A Practical Account of What the Author, and Others, Who Visited That Country, for the Same Objects, Saw and Did While in That Empire*. The advance agents wanted to persuade their audience that emigration and a new agrarian life in Brazil was a realistic choice. The disconcerting truth—that the authors possessed little experience as agriculturalists and could not speak authoritatively on any aspect of becoming a planter—helps explain why attempts at objectivity gave way to deceptive, out-and-out hyperbole. Frank McMullen referred to

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42 *Anglo-Brazilian Times*, January 8, 1866 in Dunn, *Brazil: the Home for Southerners*, 223.

43 Graham, “1850-1870,” *Brazil: Empire and Republic*, 115illus., 117-118.
his chosen site for a colony as a “modern Eden,” and concluded, “In fact, there is not another nation under heaven which contains so many of the elements of greatness within itself as Brazil. In point of climate, soil, good water, navigable rivers, water-powers, we stand without parallel.”44 Major Robert Merriwether and Dr. H. A. Shaw, advance agents for the Southern Colonization Society, an emigration group based in Edgefield, South Carolina, reported that “The vast domain of Brazil, contains the most fertile soil in the Universe, and more cheap lands to allure the emigrant than any other nation under the sun.”45 Moreover, emigres fearing the dangers of the natural world, or really unnatural death in any form, could rest easy according to Merriwether and Shaw: “Since the memory of man, there has been no earthquake there, no subterranean fire, no volcanic eruptions to appal the hearts or to disturb the security of its inhabitants, and its men and women live to a riper old age than even in this once favored country.46 Other advance agents drew startling comparisons with the Old South. Dr. R. M. Davis, in a letter to Dunn subsequently printed in his guide, asserted that “All the productions of the Southern States may be raised here, in as great abundance, and with less labor, than in the Southern States at any former period of their history.”47 Gaston, more evenhanded than most of his colleagues, wrote in his concluding journal entry that “The great variety and superior


46 Ibid., 242.

47 Dr. R. M. Davis to Ballard Dunn, June 28, 1866, printed in Dunn, Brazil: the Home for Southerners, 73.
quality of the products present advantages not to be realized in the United States."^{48}

Likewise, the guides extolled the Brazilian government as a reassurance to their Southern audience that the political landscape in Brazil was just as ideal as the agricultural. The authors evaded specific inquiries or concerns about the imperial Brazilian government by instead directing thinly veiled insults at the United States. The Brazilian government, in their view, guaranteed every right that the Republican Party in America had trampled during the secession crisis and the war, as well as the crimes it was undoubtedly on the verge of committing against the South during Reconstruction. In Brazil, Dunn explained, “The rights of property, as guaranteed in the constitution, are carried out to the letter. The Senator, with the highest title of nobility, does not presume to enter the humblest dwelling, without first asking permission; and should permission be withheld, he does not enter, except at his own peril. This is because the constitution makes every man lord supreme in his own domicil; however humble or lowly it may be.”^{49} The language was telling; Dunn’s praise of Brazilian constitutionalism mirrored the discourse of property rights that Southerners had always invoked to defend slavery from the specter of abolitionist tyrants. In that vein, the advance agents described Emperor Dom Pedro II (who, ironically, was an autocrat and would eventually sponsor abolition) as “a wise and magnanimous ruler, sprung from an intellectual and illustrious

^{48} Gaston, *Hunting A Home in Brazil*, manuscript, Edwin S. James Papers, SCL.

race.” Dunn went so far as to quote the Emperor himself, cleverly addressing the fear of tyranny while simultaneously communicating his intimate connections within the Brazilian government. The Emperor, he claimed, “frequently remarks... ‘I am a constitutional monarch; and cannot, therefore, go beyond the letter and spirit of the instrument that gave us independence and nationality.’”

Frank McMullen supplied the most extravagant description of life under Dom Pedro: “We have the best system of government known to man; while it combines all the elements of strength requisite to insure its stability against every emergency, it guarantees PRACTICAL EQUALITY to ALL its citizens.” It was under this administration and the rule of the “good Emperor” that Brazil’s “destiny must be onward and upward to a degree of prosperity unknown to other countries.” McMullen, of course, was endorsing equality exclusively for whites. He wrote this in 1868, the same year the United States, the nation he advocating deserting, ratified the 14th Amendment defining citizenship and promising to its people equal protection of the law.

When Dunn, Gaston, McMullen and the other advance agents admitted to the challenges facing emigres, they were always prepared with a quick solution. Transportation routes, they conceded, were not always reliable. (This would prove to be a crucial weakness of the colonies.) Guides promised that the government was in the


51 Dunn, Brazil: the Home for Southerners, 38-39.

process of establishing better roads and shipping routes. Proper supplies, especially crop seeds and farming equipment like plows, were difficult to procure, so they encouraged emigres to bring as much as possible from the United States. The dearth of labor was a trickier obstacle to overcome. One *confederado* smoothly postulated that after “a good fixed employing class, such as a good army of your cotton-growers” was in place, a fixed laboring class would materialize to meet the demand—an appealing if tautological solution, because all it required of emigres was, in fact, emigration.53

While glossing over the pitfalls awaiting them in Brazil, the advance agents focused instead on the quality of the emigres themselves. They worried that the excessive fertility of the land and the wealth of Brazil’s resources would breed sloth in the colonists. “Vicious Europeans,” for instance, could not profit from relocating to Brazil because they “are not improved morally, intellectually, nor industrially by emigration. On the contrary,” Dunn observed, in language that harkened back to climate-based theories of race formation, “they easily fall into the indolent habits of the more virtuous and ingenuous natives of the lower classes. The fruitfulness of Brazil is such, that they can subsist almost without exertion; therefore they cease to perform that labor, which necessity, in their native land, rendered compulsory.54 Dunn was applying a cautionary filter to potential emigres. For all their hyperbole about the destination, the advance agents were determined to attract only the right sort of colonist, wooing the incorruptible


while discouraging the riffraff. The rebirth of Southern civilization depended on the
Southern virtues of its colonists. If all went according to plan, Brazil would not be
merely a safe haven for refugees. Nor would it be solely a place for cheap opportunists to
quickly amass a fortune. Dunn specifically warned his readers that “they could not
improve their pecuniary condition by emigrating to Brazil,” since “this is an unworthy
motive from which to leave one’s country.” For those emigres who fancied accruing
wealth over building a new South, Dunn bluntly said, “We do not desire them. If they
have no higher, nobler more painful motive than this, and only flee now from the federal
tax-gatherer; it would not be difficult to trace them back, and identify them with that class
who failed in their duty; who shrunk from sacrifices, when sacrificing might have availed.
Such men are not good members of society, and therefore not desirable in the community
we hope to establish. Dunn had reversed Robert E. Lee’s argument. Emigration, far
from the coward’s choice, was a path only for those deserving Southerners who had
fulfilled their duty. Most Southerners were inclined to side with Lee, but the hundreds of
*confederados* that bought into Dunn’s fantasy subscribed to a new and paradoxical
philosophy, that Southern identity in its purest form could only exist outside the South.

**Emigration & Southern Manhood**

The proper motives for emigrating were, as Dunn put it, “manly motives.”

Underpinning the entire emigration enterprise was a last-ditch defense of Southern

55 Ibid., i-ii.

56 Dunn, *Brazil: the Home for Southerners*, i.
masculinity. The chance to rebuild the Old South in another nation represented an opportunity to prove that Southern manliness remained intact. Pioneering in Brazil, founding colonies, and reestablishing the patriarchal life of the Southern planter were demonstrations of manliness free of the dangers that four years of combat had posed. Enlisting in the Confederate Army ran the risk of life and limb, naturally, but fighting also entailed the emasculating peril of survival after defeat. The bravado of Southern men at the onset of the war was exposed for its hollowness when Northern men proved their equals or betters on the battlefield by the close of the war. Such threats to the Southern man did not exist in Brazil; there was no conflict there, no reminders of military defeat, nor any Yankees interfering in the lives of Southern men.

Issues of manliness preoccupied some of the advance agents more than they did subsequent emigres, perhaps because the vicissitudes of the war and its aftermath mounted greater personal challenges to their masculine identity and honor. Frank McMullen, a pro-slavery Georgian with previous military experience in the 1850s under William Walker’s ill-fated attempt to take over Nicaragua, never fought in the Civil War. Tuberculosis forced him into retreat in the arid, high-altitude climate of Mexico for the duration of the conflict.57 Ballard Dunn served as a chaplain during the war, but afterwards became embroiled in a public argument with the leaders of his church in New Orleans that left his reputation with the congregation bruised.58 Of all the advance agents, however, the legacy of the war haunted James McFadden Gaston the most. His


experiences illuminate the significance of masculinity to Southern identity and its intrinsic connections to the story of Brazilian emigration. It would be impossible to understand Gaston without stepping back and looking at his career before he became an advance agent.

Gaston was thirty-six years old when war broke out in 1861. He practiced medicine in Columbia, South Carolina, where he lived with his wife and children. When Confederate gunners fired on Fort Sumter, Gaston organized a company of volunteers called the Columbia Grays, in which he enlisted as a private. At the mustering of South Carolina’s soldiers, however, Confederate commanders deemed Gaston’s medical background too valuable to expend him as a combat soldier. He was transferred to the staff of Brigadier General M. L. Bonham, the commander of South Carolina’s forces. Bonham appointed Gaston chief surgeon and a Division Surgeon General.59

Performing surgery and directing medical affairs behind the front lines were not what Gaston had in mind when he volunteered. He would have preferred to fight alongside his brothers, enlisted men in the militia drilling with their regiment in preparation for the coming conflict. Still, professional pride and a sense of obligation to the cause motivated Gaston, so he turned his attention to the medical organization of South Carolina’s forces.

Gaston’s family had a long history in medicine. His father, John Brown Gaston, was a doctor. After James earned his bachelor’s degree from South Carolina College at age nineteen, he became his father’s apprentice in the Chester district of South Carolina.

59 Edwin S. James, notes on “The Beloved Physician,” Edwin S. James Papers, SCL.
In 1844, James began attending a medical lecture course at the University of Pennsylvania, to that point his only time living outside the South. Returning the following year, he took courses at the Medical College of South Carolina in Charleston and received his M. D. in 1846 at the age of twenty-one. James spent the next six years in partnership with his father before marrying Susanna Brumby, the daughter of another prominent South Carolinian doctor and scientist, R. T. Brumby. He joined Sue in Columbia, South Carolina in 1853. He lived there over the next eight years, practicing medicine for a time on his own and then with a partner.\footnote{Much of the biographical information taken from notes on “The Beloved Physician” and other notes on Gaston in the Edwin S. James Papers, SCL.}

When Gaston entered the Confederate Army, his wife became his chief correspondent and confidant to all his military ambitions. “If General Bonham is in chief command,” he told her in April 1861, “I will have chief control of the entire medical department. At any rate I will have a prominent place in the picture.”\footnote{Gaston to Sue, April 25, 1861, Gaston Papers, SHC.} His prediction was only partially correct; Gaston did witness some of the war’s major engagements, but he never had a significant role shaping military medical regulations and practices.

Professional pride caused Gaston to flout the authority of ranking officers from time to time. “There is a limit of instruction beyond which I cannot recognize your right to control my movements,” he wrote in early 1861 to his superior, the militia’s Surgeon General.\footnote{James McFaddon Gaston to Surgeon General R. W. Gibbes, April 19, 1861, James McFaddon Gaston Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. (Hereafter: SHC).} Though he managed to sidestep the wrath of higher-ups by transferring to
different staffs, he nearly lost his position to bureaucratic oversight when South Carolina’s militia was incorporated into the larger Confederate Army. In a panic, he asked Sue to request that her father use his influence with the Department of War and secure him a post somewhere in the Confederate Army. He ended up a brigade surgeon under General P. G. T. Beauregard just before the launch of 1861s summer campaigns.63

Like most Southern men in 1861, Gaston was eager for the upcoming fight and confident of Southern victory. “My hope is that the first general battle will end the war,” he told Sue, “and though many valuable lives be sacrificed it will be better for our people to pass through this fiery ordeal than to bear the continued oppressions which would have resulted from a connection with the fanatics of the North.” The Confederacy won their anticipated victory less than a month later at Manassas Junction—Gaston sent Sue a newspaper clipping from the *Richmond Dispatch* describing the battle with an eight-page addendum of his own detailing his personal contributions to the victory—but to his surprise there was no quick end to the war.64 As the conflict dragged on, it took its toll on Gaston’s family. In 1861, his brother Isaac died in a military hospital in Fairfax County Courthouse. In May 1862, two more brothers died during the Battle of Seven Pines, news he broke to his wife in a letter: “Our brothers Lucius and William both fell on Saturday last, nobly fighting for our rights.”

The loss did not dampen Gaston’s belief in the Confederate cause. It may have steeled his resolve even further. In early 1863 Gaston was concerned that the declining

63 Gaston to Sue, May 15, 1861, Gaston Papers, SHC.

64 Gaston to Sue, August 2, 1861, Gaston Papers, SHC.
morale in the Confederacy might lead to a premature armistice, one that would “operate against securing a permanent and satisfactory settlement with the North.” Such “dispositions of peace” might cause the reestablishment of the Union “upon its original basis” and betray “all the sacrifices of life and treasure” gone before, he said in an indication of how he would view the postwar South after surrender. Gaston was thinking of his fallen brothers. Personal tragedy laced the idea of compromise with bitterness. “I trust therefore that our government may not be misled,” he wrote Sue. He condemned the posturing that “some individuals at the political marts of Yankeedom are now presenting as bids for influence and power among their people.”

By the time the Army of Northern Virginia invaded Pennsylvania in June 1863, Gaston was certain a greater victory awaited the South that would make obsolete any discussion of compromise. “The Yankee army will speedily follow in the course of destruction,” he predicted in a letter from his camp in Fayetteville, Pennsylvania in early 1863.

The Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, however, shook Gaston’s confidence. Worse, the Union’s ongoing assaults on South Carolina’s coastal fortifications made him anxious for his state’s defenses and the safety of his family. Still, he maintained an optimistic view of the Confederate situation. He reassured his wife that “I sincerely trust that Charleston may be able to resist all the attacks which may be brought against her forts or that may be made in any shape, and that we may keep the invaders foot from

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65 Gaston to Sue, March 8, 1863, Gaston Papers, SHC.
66 Gaston to Sue, June 27, 1863, Gaston Papers, SHC.
desecrating any more of South Carolina’s soil.”

By the end of 1863 Gaston had been transferred away from field service to work in city hospitals in Marietta, Fort Valley, and Fort Gaines, Georgia. He was spared observing the slow demise of Lee’s army, whose greatest victories he had witnessed firsthand. Instead, he found himself directly in the path of William Tecumseh Sherman, whose forces cut through Georgia in the final months of 1864. The following spring, Sherman’s army marched into South Carolina, mocking Gaston’s hope that his native state would resist invasion. Among the many buildings that Sherman’s army put to the torch was Gaston’s home outside Columbia.

Gaston’s experience was representative of many Southern men at the close of the Civil War. Saddled with the guilt of the defeated, Gaston was doubly injured for having failed to protect the sanctity of his home, both his figurative home of the Confederacy, and his literal home in Columbia. Weary and discouraged, he balked at the idea of rebuilding in the South. June 1865 found Gaston in New Orleans, negotiating a deal with Dom Pedro’s immigration agents to finance an exploratory trip to Brazil. Leaving his immediate family with relatives, he booked passage on a steamer for Rio de Janeiro a month later. On his forty-first birthday, alone in a foreign land, Gaston reflected on the dire straits in which the war had left him: “I find myself at the middle period of life with a crisis in my affairs which must influence the future of myself and family very materially.... I realize that many duties as a man and parent devolve upon me now that differ much from former years.”

His first responsibility was to his wife and children,

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67 Gaston to Sue, July 25, 1863, Gaston Papers, SHC.

68 Gaston, Hunting A Home in Brazil, manuscript, Edwin S. James Papers, SCL.
“deprived of a house and home,” as he put it, “by the ruthless hand of a hostile incendiary.” After six months of travel along the coast between Rio de Janeiro and Iguape, and then inland in the Sao Paulo region and the surrounding rural areas, he decided to bring his family to Brazil and build a plantation. His guide, Hunting a Home in Brazil, convinced dozens of other South Carolinians to emigrate as well. He selected the location of Xiririca for his colony, a rural, riverside spot southwest of Sao Paulo, with plenty of farmland the Brazilian government had designated for immigrant purchase. Gaston’s Brazilian expedition and his subsequent decision to emigrate reflected the desire of a man intent on reinventing himself. The lifelong doctor, whose education had prevented him from fighting for the Confederate nation as his brothers had, chose to become a planter, the emblematic figure of antebellum Southern masculinity. He saw in Brazil a chance to become a Southern man in a way the Confederacy had never made available to him.

But more than personal redemption was at stake. To Gaston, Brazil represented something transcendentally significant beyond the relief of his family. In colonizing Brazil, he believed he could save the Southern people. “Could the fruitless martyrdom of my three noble brothers be forgotten,” he wrote, “the sad fate of many who are left behind cannot be torn from my conscience.” In the aftermath of the war, Gaston and the other emigres could do for the South what its soldiers ultimately could not; they could guarantee the existence of Southern culture and remedy the emasculation of Southern

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.

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men. “There is a dignity and a hospitality among these people that correspond in many respects to the lofty and generous bearing which characterized the Southern gentlemen in former times,” he observed in his journal. “We find people in Brazil capable of appreciating the Southern character.” If desperation prompted Gaston to leave the South, triumph, not relief, characterized his mood in Brazil. He made his feelings plain in the final line of his guide, which assures the reader (with his emphasis) of the fate of Southerners: “I HAVE SOUGHT AND FOUND THEM A HOME.” Gaston and the other emigres believed they were living a latter-day Aeneid. How comforting and romantic a fantasy that they, the last scions of a mighty people tragically brought low, would be the forerunners of a high civilization reborn on foreign shores. Their emigration, their apostasy, was an exercise in mythmaking.

The Short, Unhappy Lives of Confederado Settlements

James Gaston’s colony at Xiririca was one of six major Confederado settlements, most purchased with financial assistance from the Brazilian government. Only one colony survived, the colony at Santa Barbara. The rest of the settlements, including Gaston’s, collapsed within a year or two. The grim realities of pioneer life in the tropics laid bare the misrepresentations of the advance agents’ guide books, forcing the Southern emigres to give up their collective dream.

The colonies of advance agents Major Warren Lansford Hastings and Colonel Charles G. Gunter suffered from bad planning and misfortune. Hastings required three

71 Ibid.
attempts just to transport colonists to Brazil—his first ship foundered near the coast of Cuba and smallpox ravaged the emigrés on his second ship. Hastings himself died of yellow fever on the third attempt and his leaderless colony rapidly disintegrated. Gunter made it to Brazil, choosing a spot for his colony on the Rio Doce River near the village of Linhares. Lush but remote, Gunter’s colony was cut off from the rest of Brazilian society. No one had yet built any roads to Linhares, so the emigrés had to use dug out canoes to reach their destination. Mosquitos spread malaria throughout the colony. Scratching out a bare existence on the banks of the river, living in mud huts, the colonists were unprepared for the conditions that the tropical Brazilian climate presented. The blistering heat and heavy rains wiped out their only harvest. The colonists, who had arrived in 1867, packed their bags and left the Rio Doce in 1868. Julia L. Keyes, the daughter of one of Gunter’s colonists, admitted in her journal the disappointment of her father: “All his hopeful visions of a coffee [plantation], orchards of fruit, etc., were gone, and his only alternative was to remove us to Rio.”

Gunter obstinately remained behind. He died in Linhares in 1873.

Frank McMullen’s colony, New Texas, suffered from bad luck as well. McMullen’s first ship ran aground off the coast of Cuba. After a detour through New York City, the McMullen group reached their destination fully nine months after they had departed from Galveston. Like Gunter’s colony, New Texas had few reliable transportation routes to Brazilian settlements. Equally problematic, the plantation properties were huge and scattered, so that colonists were isolated from each other as well.

72 James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL.
as from the outside world. McMullen died of tuberculosis just a few weeks after settlement. As the case with Hastings, his colonists dispersed after his death.

Ballard Dunn chose his colony’s site near Iguape. Once again, limited access to transportation routes and the scattered layout of the plantations contributed to the demise of the colony, which was purportedly on a tract of land “as large as the state of Delaware.” A flood washed away much of their early agricultural labors. Even relative to the other emigres, Dunn’s colonists had little money that they could use to recover from the disaster. To make matters worse, Dunn himself had gone back to the United States prior to the flood, supposedly on a recruiting mission, but he never returned to Brazil. The emigres he had led south accused him of absconding with much of the colony’s money.

Gaston’s colony Xiririca failed in similar fashion as all the rest. Gaston was not a fraud like Dunn, nor did he die in the early phases of this endeavor, as had Hastings, Gunter, or McMullen. Even his steadfast work could not save Xiririca from the problems that engulfed the whole Southern emigration movement. Unable to build and develop their land properly, starving for resources, and essentially unconnected to the commercial world, Gaston’s followers at Xiririca could not make the colony function. Eventually Gaston himself gave up and moved to Santa Barbara, the destination of other

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74 James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL.


76 James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL.
confederados who also had fled from their respective colonies.

Santa Barbara was originally just one plantation bought by Colonel William Norris and his son in 1866 near the city of Campinas. Their plantation grew into a permanent colonial settlement by avoiding the pitfalls that sunk the other colonies. Norris had come with assets: enough money to immediately purchase a 400-acre property and three slaves. Roads connected Santa Barbara to Sao Paulo and the plantation’s property line was close to the Sao Paulo railroad, though that was still in the process of being built. Those confederados, like Gaston, arriving from failed colonies, settled in clusters at Santa Barbara, so no one was too isolated. Though Norris and others planted cotton, they survived financially by producing a variety of crops, including sugar cane, coffee, and watermelons.

The plantation society of the Old South was an inherently flawed model on which to colonize Brazil, Mexico, or any frontier society. The vast tracts of land the would-be planters desired were available from the Brazilian government and from private sellers, but nearly always in isolated, underdeveloped areas. Splitting up the colonists on such large land plots hindered communication and social support. The emigres struggled to find the labor necessary to work their plantations. Few had the means to buy slaves. No one had much luck hiring wage laborers, because labor demand was so high nationwide.

77 James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL; Cyrus Dawsey, “A Community Center: Evolution and Significance of the Campo Site in the Santa Barbara Settlement Area,” in The Confederados, 141.

78 Dawsey, “A Community Center,” in The Confederados, 141-145.

79 James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL. In the global marketplace, cotton no longer commanded the prices it once did because of the rapid growth in supply from Egypt and India.
The seductive image of the plantation house, the beautiful manor standing alone amid the cotton fields, betrayed the emigres, who had convinced themselves that the plantation was an independent enterprise, a self-sufficient community within which lay inviolate the culture of the Old South. They overlooked the importance of the plantation’s access to and dependence on the world surrounding it: the roads, canals, ferries, railroads, warehouses, textile mills, merchant ships, middlemen, slaves, and slave traders; in short, they failed to take into account the capitalist economic infrastructure that made the Old South plantation culture possible.

The hard physical labor that the new colonies required did not appeal to the emigres either. Pioneer and planter were not complimentary roles. Julia Keyes remarked in her diary that “each day brought with it some new trial and our new pioneer experience was becoming a life of endurance rather than joy.” After abandoning their colonies, the emigres that survived disease and hardship trickled back into Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. They same government from which they had fled in the first place bailed out the bedraggled confederados. The United States Navy dispatched boats to Brazil to bring back any expatriates who wished to return. Of those emigres that stayed, even those like Gaston who made a home for a time in Santa Barbara, few carved out an actual plantation lifestyle.

Part of Gaston’s wish to become a planter stemmed from his desire to leave behind his days practicing medicine. Nevertheless, the failure of Xiririca compelled Gaston to support his family in the only way he knew how, as a doctor. He moved his

\[80\] Ibid.
family to the Santa Barbara region some time in 1869 or 1870 and, after applying for the necessary documentation from the Brazilian government, Gaston took up medicine again. He never liked it; in returning to the medical profession, he abandoned the agrarian Southern lifestyle for an entrepreneurial Yankee one. In 1882, he wrote to a colleague, “There are so many annoyances connected with the medical profession that I would not encourage anyone to enter upon it as a means of gaining a livelihood.... You and I have both seen enough of the ungratefulness of those to whom we have ministered, to appreciate the harassing features of this life.”

Medicine marked the end of his fantasy of living in Brazil as a Southern planter. The nearly twenty years Gaston spent in Brazil, much like his career during the war, did not turn out as he expected.

Gaston reserved some hope he could escape his profession and reverse his family’s fortunes in Brazil, but news from the American South reflected poorly on his decision to emigrate. At the end of the Civil War, R. T. Brumby had told Gaston not to leave the United States, advising him that circumstances in the South would improve. In 1869, as Xiririca was collapsing before Gaston’s eyes, Brumby wrote him with news that his business in America had, indeed, taken a turn for the better: “Tho Marietta [Georgia] and the country around it were devastated by Sherman and his Vandals, the boys and I have sustained our credit–three years... We have learned the business, have learned the centers of trade, and have connected a bookstore with our drugstore. By the sale of my land, and the collection of the entire debt due from the Pollards, I have been able to pay in

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81 Gaston to Dr. Nathan Bozeman, June 9, 1882, in James, “The Last Confederates Live In Brazil,” manuscript, SCL.
full for my original purchases, to meet our invoices promptly, and to enlarge and diversify our stock of drugs and books.”

Brumby closed by saying, “I have not changed my opinion. I firmly believe you could do better and be more useful in this country – Atlanta than in Brazil; and I do hope you will consent to return.”

Still Gaston refused to quit on Brazil. One might speculate that, as a believer in Old Southern values, news from his father-in-law of the industrial spirit sweeping the New South would disgust him. Gaston, however, was embracing that spirit too, trying his own hand at investing. In April 1870, he wrote a friend concerning the mining business and iron deposits near Ipanema. Gaston estimated that a successful foray into the iron industry required forming a joint stock company and raising five hundred thousand dollars. It was risky, to be sure, involving “sacrifices of time, labor, and money to meet at the outset,” but Gaston expressed hope it could be done. “My idea is to raise all that may be practicable in Sao Paulo, Santos, and Rio de Janeiro and afterwards make personal application to capitalists in England and the U.S. for stock, payable within one, two, and three years from the date of the concession of the established mint by the Brazilian Government.”

In the end, Gaston could not raise the funds he needed, but he was not the only emigre rummaging around Brazil, looking to turn the area’s vast resources into quick profit. George Barnsley had also stayed in the country in spite of the colonial disasters. By 1882, he could brag to his friends that he owned a ten percent share of a

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82 R. T. Brumby to Gaston, June 12, 1869, Gaston Papers, SHC.

83 Ibid.

84 Gaston to Habershaw, April 28, 1870, Gaston Papers, SHC.
railroad venture “starting in Iguape and traversing the Province of Sao Paulo.” The railroad, as Barnsley described it, “will go thro’ the gold mines of my privileges.... With me are associated persons in this city competent both here and in Europe through business connections to carry these affairs through. In a month’s time our engineers will return and I shall be able to demonstrate the richness of my mines.” The profits were welcome. “You will see,” he continued, “that I have at last consummated my great work of organization. The 10% is small, but enough on such great lines to give a comfortable sum.... I think the mines can afford to give labor to ten thousand men. Jointly with this we propose buying and selling lands to emigrants, both from the Govmt & from private hands.”

Within a few years, Gaston and Barnsley had been transformed from exiled planters, standard-bearers of a planter tradition from the Old South, into investors (or potential investors), industry men, land speculators, and opportunists looking to take advantage of the cheap land and vast resources of the underdeveloped country around them. They had become precisely the sort of unprincipled men advance agentguide books like Ballard Dunn’s had warned not to emigrate. They had become Confederate carpetbaggers masquerading as Southern patriarchs.

**Returning Home: The End of Confederado Apostasy**

George Barnsley remained in Brazil his entire life, but he was the exception to the rule. The majority of *confederados*, whose dream of a South reborn in Brazil ended


86 Ibid.
abruptly, returned to the American South by 1870. James Gaston, one of the few advance agents who survived the colonial experiment, stayed in Santa Barbara, but a visit to friends and family in the United States in 1880 awakened an impulse to return to the South permanently. He moved his family to Atlanta in 1883, opened a medical practice, and began writing essays on surgical techniques. In addition to professional writing, he cultivated a new hobby, writing fiction. Though he never published his stories, Gaston’s amateur forays into novel writing provide a small glimpse of how he came to reconcile his embrace of the postwar South with the Old South he had once dreamed of remaking in Brazil—a conceptual undertaking every returning confederado had to face.

Gaston’s first novel, *The Hoiden’s Triumph*, celebrated honor and manliness in the antebellum South. “Hoiden,” an archaic word dating to the medieval era, meant a “rude, ignorant, or awkward fellow,” and referred to the brash young protagonist who had to learn the virtues of Southern culture. The plot was a typical bildungsroman, a coming-of-age story set in the 1850s and 1860s. When the war came, Henry St. Clair, the effete son of a planter, proved his mettle as a Southern man (and earned the hand of his true love) by planning a daring raid to reclaim West Virginia for the Confederacy in the final months of the war. The story loosely reflected Gaston’s personal crisis of manhood during the war, for Henry, like Gaston, was not allowed to fight. In the novel Jefferson Davis refuses him permission to carry out his West Virginia insurgency. Yet ultimately Henry’s conduct, his courage, his intention to do his duty for the South brought him to the full flower of manhood. Gaston, perhaps, remembered his own role in the war and in Brazil that way too. On the title page of the manuscript, he listed the author as “Virtus in
arduis” which translates roughly into “Virtue in difficulty,” although a more literal translation might read “manhood in trouble.” At the bottom of the page, a single note reads: “The author is a man.”

Regardless of whether Gaston exorcised any inner demons in the writing of The Hoiden’s Triumph, the novel spoke to his abiding loyalty to the culture of the Old South. He gave most of his characters names taken from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a loosely veiled method of reclaiming the honor of the Old South from the woman who in his eyes sold millions of books defaming it. Though the details of the story were romanticized Southern boilerplate, the idea of redemption, writing a character who lived up to the virtues of his Southern homeland, indicated that Gaston still looked to antebellum archetypes as models of Southern identity. He never succeeded in establishing such identities in Brazil, but he tried within his writing. The 1880s, in any case, was a receptive time to celebrate the Old South. Reconstruction had ended. Federal troops no longer enforced Radical Republican law. White Southerners had wrested back power over their states. The memory of the Civil War as the Southern Lost Cause, a movement spearheaded by Jubal Early, was gaining traction at the same time as the rights of African Americans and the memory of emancipation was losing purchase. The nostalgic heart of The Hoiden’s Triumph was simply another component in the Southern culture of remembrance.

The South Gaston returned to in 1883 ironically fit the criteria that he had established for a successful colony in Hunting a Home in Brazil: it was a place where

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87 James M. Gaston, The Hoiden’s Triumph, Gaston Papers, SHC.
white Southerners enjoyed relative autonomy, an agrarian lifestyle, and the dominant position in the social hierarchy. He appreciated the similarities because, after finishing *The Hoiden’s Triumph*, he began writing another novel extolling the postwar South. Called the *The New Regime*, the truncated story—he died before completing it—tackled the one remaining challenge to Southern identity: how to control free blacks in a white society? Stating that African Americans had a “natural proclivity to evil” and that their “moral character... must be elevated by intellectual development,” Gaston argued that free blacks would pass through “a stage of licentiousness, which will yield to the restraints of the surrounding influences.” For the good of Southern society, those restraints had to come from whites. “Some striking and most extraordinary manifestations of violence have been met by sudden and severe retribution without the form of law,” he noted, “and such acts will doubtless continue to be dealt with harshly, whenever they occur.” Lynchings, he concluded, were both necessary and unavoidable. Nothing could stop the “spontaneous outburst” of white men “when violence is offered to their women by negroes.... The final result ought to be a correction of this vicious propensity.”

The apostasy of Gaston and the *confederados* grew out of their assumption that they had to save Southern identity from eradication after the Civil War. In *The New Regime* Gaston had come full circle, recognizing at the core of the new social order the same collective identity he cherished in the Old South. White men could no longer protect Southern honor with a master’s whip or a Confederate bayonet, but a rope in the hands of a lynch mob sufficed. Plantation owners no longer dominated Southern culture

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as they once did. On the other hand, Gaston discovered in Brazil that pursuing wealth in a typically Yankee manner had not undermined his sense of himself as a Southerner. Southern nihilists like Joseph Shelby, it turns out, had prematurely declared the South dead. The Old South was alive, well, and surprisingly compatible with the New South.

As for Gaston, he never admitted that deserting the South was a mistake. Neither did the South hold his apostasy against him or any of the *confederados*. When the prodigal Southerners returned, a postwar South that shared their racist social vision welcomed them back without complaint.
CHAPTER 2: JOHN SINGLETON MOSBY

I did change my politics—because politics changed. Politics, said Burke, is the science of circumstances. I had sense enough to see the new political conditions that had arisen in the South, and the courage to defy popular passions and prejudices. I did not according to the cant of the day, “go with my people”—Judas Iscariot did.

—John Singleton Mosby, letter to S. M. Yost, April 10, 1897

Early one evening in May of 1872, John Mosby, one of the more celebrated Confederate cavalry officers in the Civil War, entered the White House to see President Ulysses S. Grant. John Lewis, the Republican Senator from Virginia, had arranged the introduction after Mosby had expressed to him, rather mysteriously, a desire to meet the President. For his part, Lewis believed that Mosby, a Virginian, might offer the president some insight regarding the upcoming presidential campaign. The Liberal Republicans, a splinter group of the Republican Party, had just nominated Horace Greeley to challenge Grant for the Presidency. Lewis and other Republicans wanted to know from Mosby what sort of political reception Grant could expect in the South that summer and fall.

A meeting between two such high-ranking Civil War adversaries had not occurred since Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House seven years prior. When that climatic encounter occurred, several artists immortalized the scene on canvas, helping to shape the romanticized memory of the generals. Grant’s simple perseverance was represented in the drab blue coat he wore. Lee, resplendent in full dress uniform,
universally depicted as the breathing ideal of Southern dignity unbowed by defeat. Both were presented as national heroes, the first reconcilers between Yankee and Confederate. In the 1872 meeting that night at the White House, the players pulling the strings conceived of Mosby’s meeting with Grant in the same spirit of North-South unity. If Lee could surrender to Grant and still retain his status as the paragon of Southern virtue, then Mosby, a Confederate hero in his own right, could speak with Grant, too.

Still, someone as well versed in Reconstruction politics as Lewis knew the odds were long that Mosby would give Grant useful advice. The former Confederate Colonel had stayed out of politics since the end of the war, resurfacing only in 1869 when he supported a conservative Democrat for governor of Virginia. It seemed that Mosby adhered to the same code of loyalty to the Democratic Party as most other Southerners. The outcome of the meeting surprised Lewis as much as it pleased him. As the two soldiers talked and smoked cigars in Grant’s private parlor, Mosby became convinced that political cooperation with the Republicans would facilitate the South’s quest to secure as much regional autonomy as possible. Knee-jerk support for the out-of-power Democrats, on the other hand, would relegate the South to a permanent minority political status. After some words of encouragement for the president, Mosby returned to his home state of Virginia to stump on behalf of Grant. On election day Virginia cast its electoral votes for the Republican ticket. Grant had found an unlikely political ally; Mosby had forged an improbable friendship.¹

White Southerners saw the new relationship differently. They had linked the vestiges of their Confederate nationalism, their determination to free the South from the control of Republicans and their African American allies, to the political success of the Democratic Party. Converts to this new Southern regionalism considered Mosby’s political defection to the Republicans tantamount to treason, a sign of how much had changed in the short time since Lee surrendered to Grant. During the campaign in 1876, the animosity leveled against Mosby rose to such a pitch that he left Virginia the following year to take a position as Consul to Hong Kong in the Hayes administration. After stints working in the Far East, California, Colorado, and Nebraska—jobs garnered through Republican favors—he returned east to Washington D. C., where he worked and wrote his memoirs of the war. He never returned from exile to live in Virginia again.

Mosby’s story stands at the intersection of four historical forces at work in late-nineteenth-century American South: the persistence of an antebellum honor system, the mythologizing of Confederate heroism, the crisis of postwar Southern manhood, and the politics of national reunion. For most white Southerners, the convergence of these forces represented the great ideological challenge of their time: the “war of ideas” in which they sought to justify secession, redeem the Confederate cause, and reestablish white hegemony in the South. Why had Southerners fought the war? Surely not to defend slavery—the civilized world condemned the institution. They fought to defend their homes against invasion and to protect the sovereignty of their native states. Secession,

they maintained, was a principled and righteous rebellion. The Lost Cause, the mythologized belief that Confederate defeat was inevitable, became a cultural rallying point, a selective, sanitized memory of the war unstained by the history of racial oppression or mention of slavery and designed to protect the masculine dignity of men defeated in battle. Southern manliness and honor, naturally associated during the war with military service, became entwined with the strict defense of conservative Confederate dogma after the war.

As Mosby’s experience indicates, endorsing the postwar South’s ideological memory of the war was by 1872 the crucial safeguard of a Southern identity, even trumping a heroic record during the war itself. Mosby had made his name famous taking on the Union armies in Northern Virginia, but political treason during Reconstruction severed his bond with the South and resulted in his exile. Southerners who had wanted to canonize him a Confederate hero instead had a scalawag on their hands. While Mosby saw himself pragmatically pursuing a postwar South free from Northern interference, they condemned him for betraying his Southern identity. The value of honoring a mythologized Southern past—the signature virtue of the confederados and the reason why, at this very time, they were welcomed back after deserting the South—betrayed his plan to build a post-partisan South. In the face of overwhelming resentment from his native region, Mosby doggedly confronted the task he had set for himself: to defend an unpopular, conciliatory vision of the South’s future while simultaneously redeeming the integrity of his regional loyalty. He fought a losing battle. Political dissent left him vulnerable to the relentless attacks of Lost-Causers until, alienated and emasculated, he
was diminished into cultural irrelevancy.

Mosby in War

On the eve of America’s sectional crisis, John Singleton Mosby was a slaveholding Union man. In the election of 1860, he announced his support for Stephen Douglas and the Northern Democrats, one of the few men to do so in Bristol, Virginia. The public declaration for Douglas, an indication of Mosby’s courageous and confrontational style, surprised most of his friends and neighbors. He had never exhibited any particular political affiliation up to that time. Writing a reminiscence in later years, J. A. Sperry, the editor of the local secessionist newspaper the Bristol Courier, commented, “I am now inclined to think his politics was like his subsequent fighting,—independent and irregular.”

In early 1861, Sperry and the twenty seven-year-old Mosby, an up-and-coming lawyer, wrangled over the secession crisis. Sperry defended the sovereign right of states to secede and Mosby railed against the bloody war he believed would ensue. Pressed by Sperry, Mosby claimed that, should it come to war, he would “fight for the Union, Sir,—for the Union, of course.”

When next Sperry saw Mosby, the young man wore the gray uniform of a private in the Confederate cavalry. In the intervening time, South Carolina had attacked Fort Sumter and Lincoln had issued a proclamation calling for 75,000 men to put down the insurrection. Lincoln’s quick move toward military submission enraged the people of  

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3 Ibid.
Virginia, including Mosby. “In the delirium of the hour, we all forgot our Union principles in our sympathy with the pro-slavery cause, and rushed to the field of Mars,” he remembered.⁴ “I went along with the flood like everybody else.”⁵

John Mosby came from a slaveowning family with roots in the Virginia piedmont. He was born December 6, 1833 at Edgemont, his grandfather’s farm in Powhatan County, Virginia, though his father would move the family to Charlottesville a few years later. He was a weak child. The family doctor predicted he would die from his bouts with tuberculosis before reaching adolescence. At school, other boys bullied him for being sickly, frail, and bookish. Inspired by the chivalric legends of Sir Walter Scott that he loved to read, he fought back and invariably lost.⁶ His parents grew so concerned for his health that they had one of their slaves escort him to school and back, until the day his schoolmates in jest staged a fake auction to sell off the slave. (For a time they fooled the distraught John into thinking the sale was real.) Home life agreed with him more. Alfred Mosby, his father, provided a comfortable living for his family. A great admirer of Thomas Jefferson, Alfred stressed reading, learning, and intellectual debate in the enlightenment tradition.⁷

John had an opportunity to hone his intellectual skills when Abby Southwick, a

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⁴ Ibid., 19.
⁵ John S. Mosby, Mosby's War Reminiscences, (Camden, South Carolina: John Culler & Sons, 1996), 6. Mosby had joined a local cavalry weeks earlier to drill supposedly “in anticipation of these events.” He may have suspected the federal government might raise an army against the South.
young abolitionist from Massachusetts, came to live with the family in 1849 to help care for John’s younger sisters. John now had at his disposal someone to debate the relative merits of slavery and abolition on a daily basis. Southwick’s impression on John’s intellectual development was indelible. Slavery in the Upper South had been a contentious issue for decades. With tobacco’s decline as a profitable commodity and the climate unsuitable for cotton cultivation, an economic impetus for slavery scarcely existed. Unlike cotton growers in the deep South, Virginians had speculated that slavery might be more trouble than it was worth. Nat Turner’s bloody rebellion in 1831 turned fears into reality, sparking the state legislature to consider gradual emancipation and colonizing blacks abroad to remove them from Virginian society. The debate ended with no action taken, but questions about slavery lingered. John’s opinion of slavery grew out of this ambivalence. Was slavery a positive good, a necessary evil, or an outdated institution? The presence of Southwick in his home, however, exposed John to a view of slavery that most Virginians did not share, that slavery was fundamentally an unjust and unnecessary evil. She did not turn John to her point of view, but she was a living example of abolitionism as an intellectual movement, an inoculation of sorts against the Southern stereotypes of Northern antislavery fanatics. The student in John could appreciate a reasoned argument, even if he disagreed with it. On the eve of secession, he still believed in slavery—he would take a loyal family slave with him to war—but his education prepared him to accept emancipation with greater equanimity than many of his Southern brethren and allowed him to look back on slavery with rare intellectual honesty.

In the autumn of 1850, Mosby enrolled in the University of Virginia. He fell into
the same pattern there as his grammar school days, suffering frequent bouts of illness and landing himself in trouble. An encounter with a local ruffian named George Turpin led to an incident ending his collegiate education. Witnesses told many different accounts of the altercation that arose between Turpin and Mosby in 1853, with varying details regarding insults thrown and threats made, but they all concluded with Mosby shooting Turpin in the face with a pistol. Turpin survived. Despite popular sentiment applauding the act—no one around town liked Turpin—the authorities arrested Mosby. The University subsequently expelled him.

The different accounts of Turpin’s shooting are worth noting since, regardless of the veracity of any one, they all portray characteristics of Mosby that made him so dynamic an historical figure: self-reliance, rash decision making, and a fierce instinct to defend his honor. The Baltimore Sun reported that the shooting occurred because Turpin had threatened Mosby after hearing second-hand a “humiliating” comment. Mosby, upon learning Turpin was out to “chastise him,” calmly attended his mathematics class in the morning, slipped a pistol in his pocket directly afterwards, and walked out to the boarding house the Turpin family maintained. When Turpin advanced towards him, Mosby fired. In his defense, Mosby claimed that Turpin had gone to his house, not the other way around. Historian Jeffry Wert has argued that Turpin actually insulted Mosby first, after which Mosby sent him a note demanding an apology. “Such a message from a frail-looking nineteen-year-old enraged Turpin,” and the bully proceeded to go to Mosby’s

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8 Mosby, Memoirs, 6-9.

9 Ibid. Mosby reprinted the Baltimore Sun story in his memoirs.
house and get shot. Another historian, Kevin Siepel has cited the diary of Mosby’s
classmate, who wrote that Mosby, “a graceless scamp,” pulled the pistol on Turpin, after
which Turpin advanced, and then Mosby fired. Siepel also implied that Mosby disdained
Turpin because he was an athlete, “a class alien to Mosby.”

Mosby spent seven months in prison before the governor pardoned him, a
sentence undoubtedly truncated because Turpin survived. In a twist of fate, he emerged
fascinated with the judicial system that had convicted him and proceeded to study law
under Judge William Robertson, the man who had sentenced him. Four years later
Mosby was a practicing attorney in Howardsville, Virginia, a town near Charlottesville.
There he courted and married Pauline Clarke, the daughter of a former Congressman.
When the secession crisis hit, Mosby had a devoted wife, two children, May and Beverly,
a promising law practice, an abiding respect for the Union, and an ambivalent opinion of
slavery. He seemed an unlikely prospect for a Confederate volunteer.

He also had a weak body unsuited for the physical duties of a soldier. But at the
urging of friends he enlisted in the cavalry of the Virginia militia anyway. William
Blackford, one of those friends, later recalled, “he was rather a slouchy rider, and did not
seem to take any interest in military duties.... We all thought he was rather an indifferent
soldier.” But Mosby delighted in training. “I like a soldier’s life far better than I ever

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12 Wert, Rangers, 27.
13 Siepel, Rebel, p. 11.
dreamed I would,” he told Pauline, “and were it not for the uneasiness and anxiety of mind which I know it gives to those who are near and dear to me I would be perfectly happy.”  

He had little time for family. By midsummer the two fledgling armies of the Union and the Confederacy were gearing up for their first battle. His company soon left home to become part of the 1st Virginia Cavalry, commanded by Colonel James Ewell Brown “Jeb” Stuart. Only a few months older than Mosby and younger than some of the other volunteers, Jeb Stuart had the aura of a superior soldier professionally trained at West Point. He exuded virility. Mosby regarded him with the sort of uncritical devotion a boy reserves for a childhood hero. To him Stuart seemed venerable in youth, worthy of adulation, and so tremendous in stature as to be unknowable. “The distance between us was so great,” remarked Mosby of the first time he saw Stuart, “that I never expected to rise to even an acquaintance with him.” In his Reminiscences he described Stuart in that moment: “He was just twenty-eight years of age—one year older than myself—strongly built, with blue eyes, ruddy complexion, and a reddish beard.... His personal appearance indicated the distinguishing traits of his character—dash, great strength of will, and indomitable energy. Stuart soon showed that he possessed all the qualities of a great leader of cavalry.”

15 Wert, Rangers, p. 28.
16 Mosby, Memoirs, p. 31.
17 Mosby, Reminiscences, 11-12.
It took some time before Stuart noticed Mosby, but when he did, he espied potential. The maverick qualities in Mosby that made him a substandard foot soldier enhanced his potential as a cavalry scout. He disregarded rules, traditions, and standard procedures. He detested camp life. He enjoyed taking risks and he thrived on uncovering information. In the spring of 1862, Stuart offered him a place on his personal staff as a scout. Mosby, who could not believe his luck, set to work at once.

The military collaborations between Stuart and Mosby over the next few months cemented their friendship. When Stuart took a celebrated four-day ride around the Army of the Potomac during the 1862 Peninsula campaign, it was on Mosby’s suggestion and along a route Mosby had scouted. The stunt was a grand, well publicized event that succeeded in humiliating the Union more than achieving tactical advantage. Stuart was, for a moment, the South’s favorite son and Mosby had made it possible. “Everybody says it is the greatest feat of the War,” Mosby wrote his wife. “I never enjoyed myself so much in my life.” In December, Stuart entrusted him with his own command, a squad of fifteen men gathered for the winter in Fairfax County, Virginia. They became the nucleus of Mosby’s Rangers. All the fame Mosby acquired in his subsequent military career leading the Rangers he felt he owed Stuart, to whom he gave his lifelong loyalty. Such personal attachment to one man, a characteristic of Mosby’s that would repeat itself in his political life, came to mean more to him than even the larger Confederate cause.

Military command gave Mosby the kind of power and status that eluded a man like Dr. James Gaston stuck working behind the lines in the medical tents. By providing

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Mosby with a path to military success, Stuart’s true gift to the young cavalryman was a claim on the ideal of Southern manliness. Mosby could at last slough off the identity of the sickly boy, the frail intellectual, and the poorly trained soldier. At the head of his regiment, the 43rd Battalion of Virginia Cavalry, he had found a martial, honorable, and manly role to play in the conflict between North and South. He was a superb cavalry officer. The initial fifteen men under his command in early 1863 faced more than 3,300 federal soldiers in northern Virginia, yet their forays and skirmishes were executed so deftly they rarely suffered any casualties. As their fame in the region spread, recruits signed up with greater frequency. Mosby’s greatest coup came on March 8, 1863. With approximately thirty troops, Mosby entered Fairfax Court House, a Union-held town, and escaped a few hours later with fifty-eight horses and thirty-two captured soldiers, including a Brigadier General. News of his nighttime raid spread quickly around the nation, sending a gleeful South into transports of delight over their latest hero. Stuart sent a dispatch to Lee and had a copy read to every cavalry regiment under his command:

“This feat, unparalleled in the war, was performed in the midst of the enemy’s troops... without loss or injury.”

Union forces in Washington, paranoid that Mosby might sneak into the capital and steal away the president, began to nightly remove the planking that stretched across the chain bridge connecting Washington to Virginia.

The methods of guerrilla warfare that Mosby used to conduct his cavalry operations did not always square with the kind of warfare Southern men believed the

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19 Mosby, Memoirs, 184.

20 Wert, Rangers, 48.
Confederacy ought to have waged. In response to the raid on Fairfax Court House, Generals Lee and Stuart ordered Mosby to officially integrate the Rangers into the Army of Northern Virginia with Mosby commissioned as captain. The formal recognition was partly a reward, but also an attempt to place a conventional stamp, and thus a modicum of control, on a highly unorthodox fighting unit. Guerrilla warfare, in material terms, was the warfare of the weak against the strong. What seemed like fitting tactics to Mosby in the winter of 1863, troubled other Southern officers. Most preferred to fight in what historians Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson have argued was a “traditionally Celtic way,” by assaulting the enemy directly, regardless of how entrenched the defenses were. Such recklessness reflected the bravado of a culture caught up in self-made myths of their own masculinity. (The syllogism was simple and appealing: the South had superior men; superior men would conquer lesser men in battle; therefore the South would defeat the North.) The presence of guerrilla soldiers, also called partisans, in the Confederate Army challenged the Southern notion of superior manhood. Behind Union lines, partisans had to subsist on what they scrounged or stole. Looters and other men of low moral caliber gravitated to such companies. Worse still, a society that believed honorable men should line up in proper ranks and meet the enemy on an open battlefield would disdain the unorthodox campaigns, night time raids, sneak attacks, ambushes, and quick retreats that comprised the guerrilla life. Lesser men hid in the bushes sniping at their adversaries. Even Stuart, who championed Mosby, cautioned him to “ignore the term ‘Partizan

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If cultivated properly, however, the image of guerrilla warfare could also be powerfully romantic. The Fairfax raid violated every tenet of proper warfare, yet it made Mosby a hero to the South. He had a knack for dramatic gestures that comrades, civilians, and at times the press found irresistible. One story, run in the *Washington Star* and later recounted in the *Confederate Veteran*, had him entrust a lock of his hair to a woman traveling into Washington to deliver to Lincoln, with the added promise that he would follow soon after to take a lock of Lincoln’s hair. The dash, the roguishness, reminded people of the legends of Robin Hood. The *Richmond Examiner* extolled him as “our prince of guerrillas.” Likewise, the *Richmond Whig* commented that “If he has not yet won a Brigadier’s wreath upon his collar, the people have placed upon his brow one far more enduring.” Besides solidifying his reputation throughout the South, legends of Mosby, some true, most false, won him the sympathy of local Virginians, whose support would prove crucial to his military success. The four counties he operated in the most, Fairfax, Louden, Prince William, and Fauquier, became known as “Mosby’s Confederacy.” As the myths grew in popularity, so too did the South’s willingness to accept Mosby’s methods. They wanted the glorious mythology; they could overlook the

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24 *Richmond Examiner*, September 7, 1864.

25 *Richmond Whig*, October 18, 1864.
irregularities.

The romantic perception of the partisan life attracted droves of recruits to Mosby’s command. Upon arrival, newcomers discovered a paradise compared with the standard infantry life. Rangers had just two expectations to meet: they had to have at least one horse (Mosby, at one point, had five or six) and they had to find a place to sleep.26 There were no Ranger camps for Union patrols to discover. Mosby’s men usually lived with the local residents, who kept them well fed and hidden. Many houses were equipped with secret closets that could harbor two or three Rangers if federal soldiers came searching. Mosby convened the Rangers using a complex system of signals indicating where and when to meet. Routinely dismissing troops to their own devices and counting on their voluntary return did not ordinarily make for sound military policy, but as Mosby himself revealed, “the true secret was that it was a fascinating life, and its attractions far more than counterbalanced its hardships and dangers.”27 Soldiers walked to Mosby’s Confederacy after leaving their own regiments on furlough. Men came from hospitals still recuperating from their injuries. Deserters frequently tried to sign on, though Mosby sent these men back to their units. Even Union soldiers deserted to join Mosby. High turnover in the 43rd helped spread the rumor of the partisan lifestyle throughout the Confederate Army. The ease with which Mosby recruited men between 1863 and the spring of 1865 testifies to the reputation the Rangers held throughout the South. Over that period, about 1,900 men served under Mosby. At the end of the war,

26 Wert, Rangers, 80.

27 Ibid., 45.
the 43rd had over 700 men enlisted into eight companies.\textsuperscript{28}

If the partisan lifestyle lived up to the rumors, the 43rd’s famous commander belied the stories told about him. Mosby went about his operations pragmatically. Neither the morality of warfare nor the more specific traditions of honorable military practice mattered to him. He could be brutal. He burned out Yankees his men had chased into houses. When residents of Middleburg, Virginia, under threat that Union soldiers would raze their town, pleaded with him to stop pursuing guerrilla warfare, he replied, “Not being yet prepared for any such degrading compromises with the Yankees, I unhesitatingly refuse to comply.”\textsuperscript{29} He attacked trains indiscriminately, and later defended his tactics as a “belligerent right.” At the prospect of women and children on targeted trains, he claimed, “it would have been all the same to me.”\textsuperscript{30} He filled the ranks of the 43rd with whatever bodies were willing and able. Young men, some in their mid-teens, ran away from home to join the legendary Rangers. Mosby allowed Walter W. Faulkner, only fourteen years old, to join in 1864. He let injured men convalescing in a Confederate hospital secretly take part in nighttime raids with the Rangers, then return to their sickbeds by day, which he considered a marvelous ploy until he “got one of the cripples killed.”\textsuperscript{31} When Yankees executed six captured Rangers, reportedly in the presence of their officers, Mosby retaliated viciously. With the consent of Lee and James

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 74-75.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{30} Mosby, \textit{Reminiscences}, 145.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 32.
Seddon, the Confederate Secretary of War, he ordered the hanging of seven Union captives, then dispatched a note under a flag of truce to the Union declaring that for every crime committed against his men, he would return it upon the North. In Union military circles, Mosby became associated with savagery and deception, but in the South, few of these stories penetrated the romantic veneer surrounding him.

**Mosby in Myth**

The mythologizing of Mosby in popular culture set the terms by which the South would celebrate him during the war and cut him adrift during Reconstruction. His alternative form of heroics piqued the interest of artists and authors North and South. In 1868, a Confederate veteran commissioned three artists—Jean-Adolphe Beauce, Henri Emmanuel Felix Philippoteaux, and Charles Edourd Armand-Dumaresq—to capture the essence of the cavalry hero on canvas. In a collaborative three-part series the artists depicted a raid by the Rangers on a wagon train near Berryville, Virginia. Mosby did not sit for these paintings as he had for earlier portraits. The French artists worked only from photographs and reminiscences of Mosby, so their paintings reveal much about the evolution of the Mosby myth, which at that moment was only three years removed from the war.

The task confronting these painters was a singular one: Mosby had won his fame by orchestrating victories without being seen. How, then, to champion heroic elusiveness instead of the traditional topic of heroic engagement? Beauce, Philippoteaux, and Armand-Dumaresq responded to the challenge by keeping Mosby in the background,
placing him among his men in broad battlescapes, and using subtler techniques to indicate his leadership. Philippoteaux used sunlight and elevation to identify an otherwise inconspicuous Mosby, who sits atop a horse on the far left of the middleground overlooking his men on the attack. While Philippoteaux emphasized Mosby the strategist, Armand-Dumaresq focused on the fraternity of the Rangers in the final scene of the triptych, *Mosby Returning from a Raid with Prisoners* (c. 1868). In the foreground, two of the Rangers play fiddles on horseback as the line of men behind them wave their caps in the air and cheer. The scene is celebratory, even mirthful. It would brilliantly represent the romantic, adventuresome spirit of the Ranger myth if Mosby himself, stiffly looking on from the right side of the canvas, were not looking so dour.32 Nevertheless, the image of Mosby’s triumphant men was a joyous homage to the Confederacy’s unique partisan hero.

In the North, myths of the “Gray Ghost” adhered to Union soldiers’ perceptions of the less-than-honorable Mosby, an enemy treacherous and invisible. Though Matthew Brady had photographed Mosby in 1867, his mysteriousness made him a natural subject of writing, not portraiture. “A Glimpse of War’s Hell-Scenes,” Walt Whitman’s brief sketch of Mosby in *Specimen Days*, describes an attack the Rangers made on “a train of wounded.” Working off second-hand stories, Whitman described the Rangers as “a demoniac crowd,” which looted the train and killed all their prisoners, including those that had surrendered, by “stabbing them in different parts of their bodies.” Another

Union force, coming to the aid of the train, captured some of the Rangers and immediately executed them in retaliation for “the bloody corpses of three of their men hamstrung and hung up by the heels to limbs of trees by Moseby’s guerillas.” Such stories, though largely unfounded, fueled the Northern imagination of a singularly diabolical foe.

Herman Melville came upon the Mosby myth during the war in its source and stronghold, northern Virginia. He had traveled there to visit his younger cousin, Charles Russell Lowell, a colonel in the advancing Army of the Potomac. When a scouting mission set out to discover the whereabouts of Mosby and his Rangers, Melville tagged along. The hunt was the closest thing to combat he experienced during the war. Though he never encountered the enemy, nor found a trace of their quarry, Melville became transfixed by the Mosby myth whispered by soldiers on patrol and in camp. In *Battle-Pieces*, his 1866 collection of verse, Melville included a poem about Mosby called “The Scout Toward Aldie.” It was by far the longest poem in *Battle-Pieces*, containing 114 stanzas each seven lines long. The poem told a story, loosely based on Melville’s brief adventure, of a young Colonel leading a group of federals in search of Mosby. The Colonel, determined to prove his quality to the regiment, as well as to his new bride, professes a naive ambition to capture Mosby—“the young man talked (all sworded and spurred) / Of the partisan’s blade he longed to win.” His second-in-command, a more experienced Major, is less sanguine about their success. As the company proceeds deeper into the wooded hills of Mosby’s Confederacy, they capture along the way five freshly

recruited Rangers, “sophomores from the glen of Mosby,” one of whom becomes injured. Leaving the wounded prisoner behind with a local family, they press on. The federals next detain a negro and a veiled woman on a wagon. After searching the woman they find a letter revealing Mosby’s location: the Rangers plan to celebrate a victory, the letter informs them, in a nearby town the following day. The Colonel lays his plans and, at the appointed time, the federals approach the town, only to find too late that they have been duped. The Rangers ambush the federals and the young Colonel is killed. The negro and the woman were, in fact, Mosby’s men in disguise. The letter was planted as bait. Mosby himself was the injured soldier left behind.  

Duplicity had ruled the day.

Setting aside the poem’s literary value, which resides in the quintessential Melvillian theme of the chase, “The Scout Toward Aldie” illuminates the Mosby myth in all its complexity. The image of Mosby that Union soldiers in Virginia feared, a cruel and pitiless enemy, is omnipresent. Melville likened Mosby to a predatory animal. The name Mosby lurks somewhere in the final two lines of every stanza, a menacing hint that the federals, not the Rangers, are the ones being hunted, and by unscrupulous men no less.

“No bullets nor bottles,” the Major sighed,

“Against these moccasin-snakes—such foes

As seldom come to solid fight:


They kill and vanish; through grass they glide;

Devil take Mosby!”—his horse here shied.36

The poem reaches its darkest moment when the survivors return the Colonel’s body back to camp, where the bride-turned-widow awaits. Then Melville pronounced his final judgments of the partisan captain: “‘Tis Mosby’s homily – Man must die”; “The bullet of Mosby goes through heart to heart!”; “To Mosby-land the dirges cling”; and, most hauntingly, “Though the bride should see threescore and ten, / She will dream of Mosby and his men.” Mosby’s malevolence, though not so bloodthirsty as in Whitman’s account, was inescapable. His spirit pervaded the land the federals patrolled, “All faces stamped with Mosby’s stamp.” In a disturbingly preternatural way, Mosby perverted everything to his own design, even the relationship between husband and wife on their honeymoon. The reckless desire to win “the partisan’s blade” lured the Colonel away from his bride to his doom, a death that bore none of the heroic qualities of dying in battle, for he was tricked and ambushed. The bride will forever dream, not of her lost love, but of Mosby, the instrument of his premature death.

Yet even in Melville’s brooding poetry, admirers of Mosby could find their hero, cunning, effective, and at times romantic. Southerners could smugly point out that much of the poem was based on Mosby’s actual exploits. He was once shot by federals and left for dead with a Confederate family, much like the disguised Mosby in the poem. (During the real event, he had adroitly hidden his officer’s insignia after taking the wound, thus avoiding recognition. The Union troops only realized their error a day later, but returned

to find him gone.) The Confederate invalids who from time to time aided Mosby by night war surely prompted Melville to make Mosby’s disguise that of a wounded man. The woman and negro on the wagon may have referred to actual stories of Mosby’s wife and slave aiding him. Melville also underscored the intimate and very real relationship between the civilians in Mosby’s Confederacy and the Rangers.

Of all the elements of the legend, the image of Mosby and the Rangers as amoral celebrants of death found the most durable purchase in popular imagination. Both Northerners and Southerners seized on it. In Melville’s poem, the false invitation to the Rangers’ celebration, which so easily lures the federals into the ambush invokes the same representation of Mosby’s men that Armand-Dumaresq painted in *Mosby Returning from a Raid with Prisoners*. The idea of fiddle-playing revelry at the expense of defeated Union prisoners was, of course, a bitter pill to swallow for Northerners. Melville compounded the embarrassment by using that image as the bait for the Colonel, who hoped to nab the Rangers in the midst of a party. After Mosby’s ruse worked to perfection, the federals’ defeat was made all the worse knowing that, as they mourned their dead, somewhere not far from them Mosby and his Rangers really were celebrating. The Northern frustration, in the poem and in reality, stemmed from the utter unfairness of his methods. What Mosby described as pragmatic tactics, Northerners considered dishonorable warfare. Edmund Wilson put it best: “For [the Northern Army], he was a different kind of Southerner, a fighter who could never be counted upon to behave in the traditional Southern way.”

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37 Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*, 312.
From the Southern perspective, the revelry of Mosby and the Rangers affirmed their Southern identity. Mosby made real the otherwise false Confederate chestnut that one Southern man defending his homeland could match ten Yankee invaders. Using unconventional tactics, operating behind enemy lines, Mosby kept thousands of federal soldiers occupied with only hundreds of his own. And he achieved success after success. By celebrating those victories, by indulging in some merrymaking, the Rangers exhibited the passion and flamboyance that distinguished them from their Northern enemies. Revelry added an essential romantic ingredient to the Mosby myth, without which people North and South would have judged him and his troops horse thieves, looters, and murderers. Instead the myth instilled a wry sense that, one way or another, Mosby would find a way to put the South on top. As the power of the mythology eclipsed any perspective of the real Mosby, Southerners began to take it at face value. Regardless of the situation, they counted the captain of the Rangers in their corner. When Mosby defied them all during Reconstruction, he punctured the myth and stole away from the South one of its favorite heroes.

**Honor, Manliness, & Political Apostasy**

The war ended for Mosby in a characteristically unorthodox manner. His formal membership in the Army of Northern Virginia ought to have conferred upon him the same terms of parole granted to every other Confederate soldier in the terms Grant and Lee agreed to at Appomattox Court House. Instead the Union high command decided
that “the Guerrilla Chief Mosby is not included in the parole.”

General Winfield Scott Hancock had this addendum to the parole read aloud on April 10, 1865, the day after Appomattox, in the town center of Winchester, Virginia. Presumably word would reach the hidden ranger captain. Hancock left little doubt as to how the Union felt about Mosby and his men: “The marauding bands which have so long infested this section, subsisting on the plunder of the defenceless, effecting no great military purpose, and bringing upon you the devastation of your homes, must no longer find shelter and concealment among you.” After threatening to respond to “every outrage committed” by Mosby, Hancock explained that Grant purposely singled out Mosby and his men in order “to destroy utterly the haunts of the bands.” The exception the Union took in his case and the curious circumstances by which Mosby finally obtained parole deserve closer examination, for both were issues entwined with redefining postwar Southern honor for Southern men.

The cult of masculinity that existed in antebellum Southern society, built upon the patriarchal relationships of husbands over wives and masters over slaves, sustained a nearly fatal blow when the Union defeated the Confederacy. Southern men, who had led their states into secession and war, now faced the humiliating prospect of compliance with the forces of Union and emancipation that they had sworn to defy. The dilemma was plain to everyone. Six days before the end of the war, Mosby’s mother wrote in her

38 Winfield Scott Hancock, Order of Parole, April 10, 1865, Winchester, Virginia, in Letters, Mitchell, ed., 251.

39 Ibid.

diary of the “craven spirit” in the hearts of Southerners: “If overpowered we will have to submit to the powers that be, but I would feel that the Yankees themselves would despise us, if we recanted our Southern principles. They would have no confidence in us and look with contempt on us, as they should do. I think a deserter on either side the most degraded human being that breathes. Yes, we hate them, and the Yankees do too, and they will hiss them.”

Her observations reflected the transformation underway in the Southern psyche. She was, like many other Confederates anticipating surrender, redefining her loyalty to the Southern nation. The challenge inherent in defeat was to make compatible submission to the Union with fidelity to “Southern principles.” Though she refrained from articulating those principles, her rhetoric makes evident the stakes of “recanting.” Betraying “Southern principles” was equivalent to treason, and the transgressors no better than “deserters.”

For Mosby, cleaving to “Southern principles” meant first and foremost acting with honor. The Southern concept of honor had wielded profound influence over Mosby ever since he was a boy, yet close as he came the fulfillment of the masculine ideal eluded him. He remained for the better part of his life caught between what historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown has described as two polarities of Southern honor, with piety, intelligence, and kindness prized on the side of gentility, and valor, ferocity, and manliness

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41 Extracts from the diary of Virginia Mosby quoted in: Mosby, Memoirs, 357.
emphasized on the side of primal honor. Mosby was predisposed to the former traits, the qualities of gentility. Southern honor’s physical requirements, the more violent realm of primal honor, tended to elude him. Growing up, the emphasis on strength and appearance troubled him the most. Soldiering called attention to his physique, which appeared more feminine than masculine. John Esten Cooke, one of General Grant’s aides, described him as “slender, gaunt... A plain soldier, low and slight in stature.” During the war, recruits seeking out the Rangers could not believe, upon their initial meeting with Mosby, that he could possibly be the same soldier about whom they had heard so many legends. He certainly did not compare well with other Confederate commanders, least of all his own idol, the ruddy, handsome Jeb Stuart. He did not even wear a beard.

Northerners after the war were surprised and embarrassed that this enemy who had done them so much harm was, in fact, a diminutive man. The Washington Evening Star reporter covering the 1872 meeting between Mosby and Grant was astonished at the sight of him: “Colonel Mosby hardly comes up to the popular idea of a guerrilla chief... He is a little below the medium height. His face is smooth shaved, and he is apparently about 35 years of age... to converse with him one could scarce bring himself to believe that he is really the man who harassed the rear of our armies in Virginia during the

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44 Mosby sat for two portrait artists during the war by coincidence during the few short weeks he tried growing a beard. He was otherwise clean shaven and remained so for the rest of his life.
rebellion.” Mosby’s insecurity about his unimpressive build led to many of the incidents in which his temper got the better of him. His schooling in Virginia had been a daily reminder that weakness invited bullying. The only response he learned was confrontation. The shooting of George Turpin, the scourge of his university days in Charlottesville, was the violent outburst of a young man marginalized by the code of primal honor.

Foregoing the tests of primal honor for the more gentlemanly standards of gentility would have suited Mosby better. Raised an intellectual, educated in the classics, and born the eldest son of a slaveholding family, he lived in an environment conducive to the trappings of gentility. Moreover, gentility and slaveholding were interdependent ideas in the Old South. As elite Southern men assumed their role as the masters of slaves, their paternal obligations demanded a new, genteel set of behaviors, thus a new code of conduct. Yet here again Mosby came up short. Perhaps because of the influence of Abby Southwick, slaveholding never captured his imagination in the same way it did other Southern men of his class. Nor did cherishing the Homeric form and the chivalric ideal earn him much recognition, even at the University of Virginia. Mosby’s upbringing and place in society put him on the threshold of the ruling elite’s worldview, but not fully within it. Besides, one could not simply bypass the physical expectations of young manhood by laying claim to a different, more intellectual masculine identity. An appreciation of the canon did not ward off bullies. That Mosby had a pistol in his pocket after class with which to shoot George Turpin demonstrates that he, at least, understood

the limitations of gentility, not to mention his own frailty.

The curious result of the Civil War was to indelibly alter the bifurcated honor system in the South, primal honor and gentility, without affecting Mosby’s devotion to its precepts. The onset of war for a time elevated the significance of primal honor. The prospect of engaging enemy Yankees had trumped the local disagreements and duels that normally played out within the community. In 1861, valor could be won on actual battlefields. The impulses of primal honor and Confederate nationalism had merged in an unprecedented fashion. But defeat, which entailed more than just military submission but the eradication of slavery too, struck heavy blows against both the notions of primal honor and gentility. The physical might and fighting prowess of Southern men had ultimately failed them. Nor could those men who coveted the trappings of gentility use slavery as a tool for identity formation or personal mythmaking after Appomattox.46 Surrender brought about a crisis of Southern manhood that even the elusive Ranger captain could not escape.47

Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, and their advisors worried that a protracted guerrilla war carried out by Southerners who refused to give up the Confederate cause would jeopardize a lasting peace. Grant offered Lee lenient terms at Appomattox in large part to alleviate this concern. They had to address their nervousness about Mosby, however, in a more direct fashion. He was, after all, a guerrilla already, whose reputation for flouting traditional military practices made him, of all Confederates, the likeliest


candidate to initiate a postwar insurgency. They could not count on him simply
disappearing after the peace. Previous military reports as well as the Northern press had
erroneously proclaimed him dead two or three times during the war. His habitual
reappearances gave the Union leadership little confidence that he would disappear after
Lee surrendered. He might melt away for a while, but he would come back to vex them
again.

Lincoln, Grant, and Hancock had misjudged their man. Mosby did not desire to
live out the rest of his days in hiding. He disbanded his regiment with this final message
to his Rangers: “The vision we cherished of a free and independent country has vanished,
and that country is now the spoil of a conqueror.”\(^48\) Then he went into hiding, wandering
about Virginia and evading capture for the remainder of 1865. Unsure of his intentions,
Grant placed a $5,000 bounty on his head. Friends and family tried to arrange a peaceful
surrender to ensure his safety. In June, Mosby’s brother William attempted to secure
Mosby a parole from the provost marshal of Lynchburg, Virginia. When Mosby showed
up the next day to receive his parole, he found that someone had countermanded the
orders and that the provost marshal had received new instructions to arrest Mosby.\(^49\) The
commanding officer in town, knowing Mosby had entered Lynchburg armed, decided not
to provoke a confrontation. To defuse the situation and to save the Confederate hero, the
wealthier Southern men of Lynchburg said to Mosby, as he later recollected, “that if I
wished to leave the country they would furnish me all the money I needed. I declined the

\(^48\) Mosby, Memoirs, 360-361.

\(^49\) Wert, Rangers, 154-155.
offer.... I [was not] willing by flight to confess that I had been guilty of any act that should make me an exception from other Confederate officers.\textsuperscript{50} Having ruled out emigration, he had to make some kind of peace with an unforgiving Union.

Two days later, Grant himself ended the standoff and issued Mosby his parole. Over the next few months, however, troops in federal garrisons across Virginia continued to question Mosby or impede his travels. In early 1866, Mosby was taken into custody again in Leesburg, Virginia. He wrote to Pauline: “I was just in the act of starting home this morning when an order came for my arrest. I am now under arrest here, awaiting orders from General Ayres. Don’t be uneasy.”\textsuperscript{51}

Pauline did become uneasy. She traveled to Washington, without her husband’s knowledge, to seek President Andrew Johnson’s assistance and ask him to put a halt to the constant harassment of her husband. In spite of Johnson’s avowal late in the war that “treason must be made odious, and traitors must be punished and impoverished,” rumor had it that as President he took a soft approach to dealings with ex-Confederates and might lend Pauline a sympathetic ear.\textsuperscript{52} She had a personal connection with Johnson too; years prior her father had served in Congress with him. To her surprise, Johnson reacted to the request rudely and offered no help to her incarcerated husband.\textsuperscript{53} Pauline walked straight from the White House to the War Department and sought out General Grant. The

\textsuperscript{50} Mosby to Sam Chapman, January 12, 1907, in Siepel, \textit{Rebel}, 155.
\textsuperscript{51} Mosby to Pauline Mosby, January 8, 1866, in Mosby, \textit{Memoirs}, 363-364.
\textsuperscript{53} Mosby, \textit{Memoirs}, p. 390.
Union general, according to Mosby, “treated her as courteously as if she had been the wife of a Union soldier.”

Grant proceeded to write an order allowing Mosby to “travel freely within the State of Virginia, and as no obstacle has been thrown in the way of paroled officers and men from pursuing their civil pursuits, or traveling out of their states, the same privilege will be extended to J. S. Mosby.” The order was issued on February 2, 1866, nearly ten months after Appomattox.

The parole of John Mosby was a small affair in the annals of the Civil War’s end, but it marked a germinal moment of Mosby’s political life. For a time he fell into lockstep with the vast majority of ex-Confederates, resenting federal occupation and the Republican Party alike. His words and actions echoed the sentiments his mother had confided to her diary. “I am getting on very well in my profession and if the infernal Yanks will let us alone I hope to be able to make my living,” he told a former comrade.

He did not dwell overlong on politics. That Southern regionalism and Democratic affiliation went hand in hand was already axiomatic. In his memoirs, he recalled that “As we had all been opposed to the Republican party before the war, it was a point of honor to keep on voting that way.”

The parole, however, planted a seed that the anti-Republican mood in the South

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54 Ibid.


56 Mosby to Dr. Aristides Monteiro, December 1, 1866, Warrenton, Virginia, John S. Mosby Papers, Museum of the Confederacy. (Hereafter: MOC).

57 Mosby, Memoirs, p. 384.
could not kill. From the moment Grant extricated him from prison, Mosby considered himself in Grant’s debt. A slow-kindled respect for his former enemy grew until, six years later, his curiosity got the better of him and he asked Senator John Lewis to arrange an introduction. The ensuing friendship between the Confederate hero and the Republican president, and subsequently Mosby’s public endorsement of Grant, breached the unwritten rules of conduct and loyalty Southerners adhered to after the war. In 1872, the Republican Party represented, from the Southern point of view, the interests of capitalists, emancipators, and occupiers. Voting Democratic became the postwar extension of the Confederate cause and the political embodiment of the “Southern principles” Virginia Mosby had alluded to: informal sectional independence from federal control and the reestablishment of white supremacy. Men of honor in the postwar South were Democrats.

But from Mosby’s perspective, his relationship with Grant, even his support of Grant, was the honorable and manly course. Even a cursory examination of the circumstances surrounding the parole puts this debt into a specifically gendered relief. To come before one’s enemy as a supplicant begging for freedom hardly conformed to primal honor. In this case, it was Mosby’s wife who had to ensure his safety, an inversion of the most fundamental quality of Southern manhood, the ability to protect one’s family, especially women in one’s family. When Andrew Johnson treated Pauline poorly during their encounter—a meeting in which she was accompanied by her six year old son Beverly—the absent Mosby could not demand redress. It was Grant who aided Pauline when she required help the most.
Equally significant, the exclusion of Mosby from the parole challenged the integrity of his style of irregular warfare. Partisans throughout the Confederacy, sensitive to the charge they did not fight as honorable men should, had attempted throughout the war to reform their image. As the historian Michael Fellman has written, “Guerrillas wished to believe they were the protectors, not the despoilers of home and family, and honoring this code was a daily demonstration of their ideals.” Nevertheless, the Union did not trust Mosby to lay down his arms. Northerners thought him a cold-hearted, treacherous butcher. Grant’s parole of the partisan chief was the first indication that he would gain acceptance back into civil society in an honorable fashion. Whether Mosby never knew or chose to ignore the uncomfortable truth that Grant had denied his parole in the first place (and put a bounty on his head) mattered not at all. When Grant changed his mind, Mosby took it as a validation of his conduct during the war, and by extension his manliness.

Mosby’s parole illustrated that Southerners could interpret and act on their code of honor in multiple ways. The dictates of Southern honor pulled Mosby toward the Republican Party even as it propelled other white Southern men into Democratic politics. It was not coincidence that Mosby brought with him his twelve year-old son Beverly to the White House in 1872, just as his wife had done six years prior. He wanted to acknowledge Grant’s gesture. After the introductions were made, he reminded Grant that Beverly had met him once before. He went on to say that, after Pauline and Beverly’s

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encounter with President Johnson, when he knelt to say his nightly prayers Beverly asked, “Now, mamma, may I pray to God to send old Johnson to the devil?” Upon hearing this, Grant replied, “A great many would have joined in Beverly’s prayer.”59 They exchanged a few other wartime anecdotes and then Grant invited Mosby, with Beverly in tow, to join him and some friends in a private parlor on the second floor of the White House. Gradually the conversation turned to politics. As they sat smoking cigars, Grant asked Mosby whether the South would lean toward his opponent, Horace Greeley, on election day. Greeley, longtime editor of the New York Tribune and supporter of the Union cause, had founded the Liberal Republican Party to challenge what he considered the gross corruption of the Grant administration. Since the Democrats were unable to field a viable candidate, Southerners had to choose between Republican or Liberal Republican. Mosby, however, advised Grant that “the South this time will not vote for a party, but for a man,” more specifically whichever man was “most generous to them.” He urged Grant to bring the same spirit of “liberality” to bear on the rest of the South as he had in paroling Mosby. “If Southerners can see that,” he concluded, “they’ll vote for you.”60 Mosby himself had already decided to vote for Grant. As he left the White House that evening, he began thinking about how best to convince his fellow Virginians to do the same.

The costs of this political apostasy were high. Mosby fell back into the same rash, sometimes violent behavior that had gotten him into trouble before the war. He became

59 Mosby, Memoirs, pp. 393-394.

embroiled in a number of duels when he still lived in Virginia, sparked by his support of
Grant. (Unlike the University shooting, the latter-day duels never actually took place. In
the most publicized case, Mosby’s’ friend, Judge James Keith, locked him and his
Democratic adversary Aleck Payne in prison until both cooled down sufficiently to call
off the duel.61) This pattern of provocations was more than just habit. The war had
changed him. Mosby’s unlikely heroism allowed him, for the first time in his life, to lay
claim to the masculine ideal associated with primal honor. The duels (or near-duels)
represented a new terrain, a battleground of politics and memory, on which he fought to
maintain his honor and reputation.

The residual instinct for posturing and dueling after the war was hardly unique to
Mosby. Few other alternatives were available even for older, more distinguished men.
Confederate surrender had corroded the foundations of gentility and the Southern
masculine identity. The plantation community and its macrocosm, the Southern Nation,
no longer existed as the hegemonic patriarchal ideal. Primal honor provided guideposts
for men otherwise lost in a homeland broken beyond recognition. For most Southerners,
the signs pointed to the Democratic Party; for Mosby, they led to Grant and the
Republicans. He would later defend his choices as the actions of political practicality, but
the significance of honor was paramount too. His parole crisis had instilled in him an
unqualified faith in Grant. Only this Republican president could have converted him so
effortlessly and so completely. In helping Grant win the presidency for the second time,
Mosby could at once discharge a personal debt and keep an honorable man in the Oval

61 Ramage, Gray Ghost, 279.
Office. He felt he was acting under the auspices of the Southern code of conduct, something other Southerners would respect. He never imagined that the South, which had always deployed that code of honor to buttress their cultural worldview, would interpret his politics as treason and brand him a scalawag.

Mosby attributed his decision to become a Republican to his genuine desire to reconcile Union and Confederate for the good of the South. He never publicly admitted that personal honor had anything to do with his endorsement of Grant. Two decades later, after countless indictments of his political betrayal, Mosby defiantly clung to a practical rationalization: “I am convinced that if the Southern people had followed my lead, that some Confederate soldier before this would have been elected President of the United States and Confederate soldiers would have been pensioned. I supported Grant from motives of public not private policy and never received any personal benefit from it.”

In 1872 such presidential ambitions were hopeless, but Mosby thought Southerners could make substantial progress toward regional autonomy. Cooperation with Grant might afford Southern politicians a degree of influence with the administration. He wanted to see fewer Republican candidates elected to state offices in the South. He, like most other white Southerners considered these carpetbagger and black politicians corrupt or incompetent. Compromise in national politics might induce greater generosity on the state and local levels from a Republican Party that, in the recent past, viewed the South as incorrigibly backward and resentful. In other words, Mosby believed that in supporting Grant he furthered the interests of Southern autonomy. From his perspective, refusing

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any sort of accommodation with the Republicans would allow the ideological rift between the two sections of the country to widen and the South, the subjugated half, would continue to suffer.

In the weeks after the meeting, Grant shepherded through Congress the Amnesty Act, a law which allowed over 150,000 former Confederates to vote and run for office again. It was the gesture of good will toward the South that Mosby had recommended in their May meeting. The effect on election day, to Mosby’s disappointment, was marginal. Grant won the national election, but the rapprochement between North and South never materialized. The Democrats did not make any significant gains in their local and state elections. In most areas the African American vote washed out the newly legal Confederate vote. In Virginia, the Republicans won back a number of Congressional seats they had lost two years before. In the South as a whole, the Republicans made similar comebacks, even winning a majority of seats in the previously redeemed state legislature of Alabama.

Unfazed by the disastrous results of his 1872 plan, Mosby kept advocating what he called a “policy of trying to conciliate, through the judicious use of patronage, the best classes of the South into harmonious relations with the government.” He envisioned a return of the proper ruling elite in the South, though he sought this restoration through unorthodox politics. He adamantly denied throwing his lot in with “the radical organization in Virginia which is composed almost entirely of carpetbaggers and negroes,” a decision that at the time he predicted “would simply have destroyed myself

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without effecting any good.”\textsuperscript{64} Instead he wanted to generate “a revolution in public sentiment in Virginia toward the Grant Administration.”\textsuperscript{65} Nearly two years after his meeting with Grant, Mosby remained more dedicated than ever to Grant and the politics of accommodation. In an 1874 letter, he surmised that “when our people make up their minds to be governed by common sense and not by their prejudices they will see that their only salvation is in the adoption of my policy.”\textsuperscript{66}

The Lost Cause & The Politics of Southern Identity

Mosby was not the first scalawag, nor was he the most infamous. That distinction belonged to General James Longstreet, Lee’s longtime second-in-command during the war. Longstreet failed to see the value in unrelenting devotion to the Confederate cause. He believed the war had decided the fate of the nation once and for all in favor of union, not separation. All the carnage of the war would be for naught unless reconciliation occurred, or as he said it, “I fancy that few of our brave men that have fallen in the late struggle would have risked their lives if they had supposed that the war was to settle nothing.”\textsuperscript{67} It seemed fitting to him that the men who led the Confederates into war should lead the ex-Confederates into reunion. Privately he urged Lee to speak out

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 48-49.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
supporting reconciliation. In June of 1867, Longstreet published a letter in the *New Orleans Times*—a letter his uncle predicted would ruin him—claiming that loyalty to the Democratic Party hindered reunion. As Mosby would do five years later, he advocated collaboration with the Republican party.68 Most Southerners rejected his proposals outright. They accused him of betraying the South and, as if presenting *post hoc* evidence of this treason, blamed him for the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg.

The personal attacks on Longstreet grew worse after 1870, when the mythology of the Lost Cause took shape in Virginia, seeking to establish in the memory of the South, and the nation as a whole, an interpretation of the Civil War sympathetic to Confederate nationalism. The Confederacy succumbed, its proponents argued, because of the North’s overwhelming numbers and resources. Northern victory did not vindicate the rightness of Union or emancipation, nor was the South wrong to fight for independence. Fighting for a Southern nation had been a lost cause, but one in which Southerners could still take pride and still defend by voting for Democrats. The leaders of the Lost Cause were high ranking though relatively undistinguished ex-Confederates. General Jubal A. Early, only recently returned to the United States from exile in Canada, Cuba, and Mexico, stood at the forefront of the new movement.69

Early had a checkered career as a Confederate officer and a burning desire to exonerate himself afterwards. He composed his memoirs abroad, a dissertation defending

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all his actions in the final months of the conflict. Hoping to garner an endorsement for his version of the events of the war, Early had forwarded a draft of his memoirs to Lee in 1866. Lee delicately recommended “that while giving facts which you think necessary for your own vindication that you omit all epithets or remarks calculated to excite bitterness or animosity between different sections of the country.” Early ignored him. Like other diehard Lost-Cauers, he refused to dilute with niceties what he considered the true history of the war, that “the struggle made by the people of the South was not for the institution of slavery, but for the inestimable right of self government.” In the preface to his memoirs, he prophesied the dire consequences of the war’s outcome: The “civilized world” would realize soon enough its irreversible error in giving freedom to blacks and “the people of the United States will find that, under the pretense of ‘saving the life of the nation, and upholding the old flag,’ they have surrendered their own liberties into the hands of that worst of all tyrants, a body of senseless fanatics.” Early had his own “war of ideas” to fight after 1865, a battle for the history books. “The future chronicler of that history will have a most important duty to perform,” he predicted, “and posterity, while pouring over its pages, will be lost in wonder at the follies and crimes in this generation.”

But initially Robert E. Lee stood in the way of Early’s crusade to control


71 Jubal A. Early, A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence, in the Confederate States of America (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), xxvi.

72 Ibid.
Confederate memory. Southerners took Lee’s testimony about the war like gospel, and from his post as president of Washington College, Lee had preached reconciliation just as Longstreet had advised him. Early and his colleagues had to tread carefully while pushing their agenda, for if Lee ever disagreed with them they risked losing their credibility. Lost Causers could not presume to lead the ex-Confederacy while the military leader of the Confederacy still lived. When Lee died on October 12, 1870, he left the vault of Southern memory of the war open and unguarded. Early leapt to fill the void. On November 4, 1870, less than a month after Lee’s death, the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia organized, selecting Early as its first president. The Southern Historical Society had already formed the year before; in 1870 Early became vice president of the Virginia chapter.

“A dead and perfect Lee,” as one historian has noted, “made a more useful hero than a live and perfect one.” With the memory of Lee now a tool at their disposal, Early and the other diehards initiated a campaign to publicize their “history” of the war, rendering the conflict in mythologized language. They cast the Confederates as a small band of heroes, hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned, yet unflinching in their duty to their homeland. The vocabulary, particularly the recitation of the North’s advantage in “numbers and resources,” was a cipher, sometimes not a very good one, for a desperate defense of Southern manliness. In an address to the Survivor’s Association of the State

73 Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 51.

74 Piston, Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant, 118-119; Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 50-53.

75 Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 52.
of South Carolina, Early pointed to the great advantage in population enjoyed by the Union and declaimed that a future historian would have to conclude “that the Southern people were nearly all men, and the Northerners nearly all women, or that their men were of a very inferior order of non-combatants.”

The emblems of Southern virility were its generals. Early spent the bulk of his energies deifying them. Lee, of course, sat at the center of the Confederate pantheon, but Lost-Cauers also incorporated a large supporting cast. Figures like Stonewall Jackson, A. P. Hill, and Jeb Stuart, who all died in combat, proffered a twofold convenience to Early: their sacrifice during the war was as absolute as their inability to betray it afterwards. With Longstreet’s postwar Republicanism in mind, he cautioned his colleagues that those former Confederates, who have “deserted since the close of the war, however high their previous position may have been,” were not welcome in the fold.

Longstreet was an easy scapegoat for Lost-Cauers. Early’s explanation that Longstreet lost Gettysburg on the second day appeased most Southerners, who preferred to blame a scalawag than General Lee. Moreover, Longstreet never appealed to the Southern imagination in the same way that other generals had. He bore the reputation of a stolid, conservative tactitian and a defensive specialist. Lee’s moniker for him, “my war horse,” was both affectionate and tellingly unromantic. He did not fit the mold of a florid, unconventional commander willing to risk all odds in defense of the South.

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77 Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 53.
Unlike Longstreet, Mosby was well suited for canonization into the Lost Cause, but two things kept him ostracized from the movement. First, Mosby and Early hated one another. Their mutual dislike dated back to Early’s unsuccessful 1864 military campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. Mosby’s rangers patrolled that territory as well. After the war, Mosby claimed he offered Early the aid of the Rangers in his operations multiple times, but Early never accepted his help. According to Mosby, one of Early’s staff officers later confided to him that, upon receiving one of the messages, Early exclaimed, “By God I was not going to do the fighting and Colonel Mosby do the plundering.” Early wrote in his memoirs that Mosby never made an effort to cooperate with him. Outraged at the published implication that he both lied and shirked his duty, Mosby demanded an apology. Early refused to back down. The bickering over the details of the bygone campaign fueled the bitterness of their later feuds.

Second, Mosby’s political about-face in 1872 effectively disqualified him from Lost Cause mythmaking. Mosby remained second only to Longstreet on Early’s list of postwar traitors. He may have thought that his fame would insulate him from the kind of acrimony Longstreet endured, but Southerners never saw Mosby’s conversion in sympathetic terms. Met with the choice between Early’s cry for unyielding fidelity to the Confederate memory and Mosby’s call for practical accommodation with their Republican conquerers, they sided with Early. Once Mosby declared his support of Grant, the Southern press criticized him mercilessly. Some editors harbored suspicions of

78 Wert, Rangers, 238.

79 Jubal A. Early to Mosby, April 21, 1867, Toronto, Canada, John S. Mosby Papers, LOC.
disloyalty because of his relationship with President Grant. One newspaper observed, “A man of strong feeling, of political temperament, it may be that great partizan chief was influenced by other reasons than political conviction in deserting the party of his neighbors. Indeed it was said that gratitude was a salient factor.”

Veiled barbs quickly turned to overt condemnations—“even Longstreet’s defection from his party did not create more execration in the South.”

Another editor drew what would become an all too familiar connection between Mosby’s politics and his soldiery: “Now that the cruel war is over, [Mosby] is bestowing upon the unhappy Democrats of Virginia the same sort of attention precisely that he gave to Grant and Meade, Sheridan and Banks... with the tricks of Puck and the malice of Sycorax he knows perfectly well what he is about, and is the most serviceable partisan Grant has in Virginia.”

It was a remarkable twist; Southerners began appropriating the same language that Northerners had once used to impugn Mosby’s guerrilla warfare. The press had resurrected the old misgivings about partisans. If partisans could not be relied upon to properly fight the Yankees in battle, why should Southerners be surprised that Mosby could not challenge the Yankees in politics? They described him as unscrupulous, full of treachery, “Benedict Arnold II,” and the “up-to-date Judas Iscariot.”

In October of 1872, only five months after his meeting with Grant, Mosby wrote his old friend

81 Ibid.
82 Unnamed newspaper, n. d. (early 1870s), William H. Payne Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond.
Alexander Stephens, “It is seldom now that I receive a word of cheer from a southern source and the last few months have been to me like a passage through ‘the Valley of the Shadow of Death’ so great has become the intolerance of our poor infatuated people.”

By 1874, Mosby had grown desperate for any recognition of his intentions to help Southerners in his home state. As the midterm elections approached, Mosby entreated an influential friend to assist in the campaign of a minor Virginia politician: “I hope, my dear sir, that you will waive all objections growing out of past differences and give him your support. I know that General Grant will regard his election as a signal for peace. Surely we have had enough of discord and strife. I am personally as much interested in the result as if I were the candidate—my own political fortunes are dependent on it.” But he had maneuvered himself between the hammer and the anvil. Northerners launched their own criticisms of Mosby. Republicans complained that Grant’s new ally in Virginia used his influence with the president and his leverage with anyone else to get Southerners appointed to state offices.

Reproach came from African Americans as well. They grew angry that Grant, the head of a Republican administration ostensibly protecting their rights, would honor Mosby’s requests by supporting Democrats and white supremacists for government positions. During the 1873 gubernatorial election in Virginia, which pitted James Kemper, a former Confederate general and the favorite of conservative white interests,

84 John S. Mosby to Alexander Stephens, October 8, 1872, quoted in Siepel, Rebel, 179.
against Robert Hughes, an African American Republican, Mosby campaigned for Kemper. The tension increased as the summer wore on. Though Grant officially endorsed Hughes, he refused to allow a prominent black Congressman to run for the post of Lieutenant Governor on the advice of Mosby and the lobbying of former governor Henry Wise. Headlines proclaimed: “Republican Congressman Snubbed to Please Mosby” and “A Prominent Negro Denied Office.” A reporter interviewed John W. Woltz, the secretary of the Republican State Central Committee, to investigate what the paper called “a new triumvirate—Grant, Wise, and Mosby.” “What do the colored Republicans,” the reporter inquired of Woltz, “think of the new brother who dictates the Virginia appointments?” Woltz answered, “I do not know what they think of Colonel Mosby outside of Fauquier, but when they learn that he has been instrumental in defeating the appointment of one of the ablest, most respectable, and qualified of their race to a position for which he was so highly recommended, to give place to some one not known outside of his county and without experience, they will be very much dissatisfied.”

Riding the tide of anti-Republican, anti-black sentiment, Kemper won the election. For a time he contemplated following Mosby’s policy of accommodation between Radical and Conservative, going so far as to ask Mosby to arrange a meeting with Grant. “The prospect for an alliance between Grant’s administration and the Virginia people looked bright. If consummated,” Mosby later reflected, “it meant the


88 Ibid.
death-knell to Negro government and carpet-baggery.” But when word of Mosby’s involvement leaked and associates of the new governor protested, Kemper begged out of the meeting.

Other politicians tried to exploit Mosby’s unique relationship with Grant and, like Kemper, learned that the former guerrilla was a poisoned pill. Former Confederate General Wade Hampton telegraphed him in December of 1876 after having just won the gubernatorial election in a vicious campaign marked by intimidation, fraud, and violence. With South Carolina in an uproar, Hampton wanted to ensure that Grant would not move the military into the state and possibly destabilize or unseat the new Democratic administration. Mosby delivered Hampton’s message and received Grant’s assurance that he would only use force to prevent anarchy. As with Kemper, word of the communication between Hampton, Mosby, and Grant reached the press. Hampton received a severe upbraiding the next day for employing Mosby as a middleman. In response, Hampton promptly stated that he would never have done that had he known how “odious” Mosby was to the people of Virginia. Mosby, for his part, complained that Hampton “used me and abused me.”

By 1876, Mosby had acclimated himself to the ubiquitous condemnations of his politics. “I know that I am misunderstood now by the public but it does not in the least distress me,” he wrote to a friend. “I am conscious of the rectitude of my conduct and

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89 Mosby quoted in Siepel, Rebel, 185.

90 Foner, A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877, 240-241.

91 Response to Hampton’s telegram, December 11, 1876, Columbia, South Carolina, Mosby Papers, Duke; see also Siepel, Rebel, 96-98.
know that time will vindicate me. For the present however, I must make up my mind to endure the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”

In spite of the alienation he endured throughout Grant’s second administration, he remained loyal to the president and hoped Grant would run again in 1876. Sick of corruption and cognizant of the popular desire for political retreat from Reconstruction, the Republican Party nominated Rutherford B. Hayes. Hayes had dutifully supported Reconstruction measures in previous years, but now promised the South local self-government should he win. His opponent was Samuel J. Tilden, the Democratic governor of New York.

The early summer of the centennial election year was a life-altering time for Mosby. Grant, his friend, mentor, and the source of his political influence chose not to run for re-election. On May 10, his wife Pauline died from complications of childbirth. As he struggled to recover from that loss, his infant son Alfred died a few weeks later. In spite of these tragedies, Mosby canvassed Virginia through the summer and fall, drumming up as much support for Hayes as he could muster. He did not have a personal relationship with Hayes as he did with Grant, in fact he did not know Hayes, but he was now tied to the fortunes of the Republican Party. Mosby considered 1876 an opportunity to demonstrate to Virginia and the rest of the South that principles of reform and reconciliation, not loyalty to a friend, motivated his politics.

When the chance came to publicize his reasons for endorsing Hayes, he reached

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92 Mosby to Alice (no surname), September 21, (no year), John S. Mosby Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, CB# 3926, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

93 Foner, A Short History of Reconstruction, pp. 239-240.
for it with both hands, composing a blistering manifesto for the *New York Herald* addressed to a “former Confederate comrade.” In the letter, he struck right away at the perception that “all Southern people, and especially the Confederate soldiers” stood united behind Tilden. “I thought you knew that I ceased to be a Confederate soldier eleven years ago, and became a citizen of the United States. As a soldier, I did conscientiously what I thought to be my duty, as a citizen, I shall do the same thing as far as I know how.” Duty, he went on to explain, entailed breaking the conventional wisdom that linked the Southern identity with the Democratic Party. “In attempting to grasp too much the South will lose everything. The sectional unity of the Southern people has been the governing idea and bane of their politics.” He continued, “Do you not see, then, that as long as we keep up the fight on the old lines, with the same allies and same battle cries, the North will be suspicious of our good faith no matter in what form we protest it! As his writing built up momentum and passion, he could not help but return to Grant: “It was for these reasons that four years ago I urged the Southern people, if they really desired peace and reconciliation, to bury their passions and resentments, and support the man who was not only the representative of an overwhelming majority of the North, but was the most powerful, as he had been the most generous of our foes.” Instead, dogmatic loyalty to the Democrats had prolonged the agony of Reconstruction. Mosby blamed “those who adopted the fatal policy, ‘Anything to beat Grant.’ Having predicted all sort of evils to result from the election of Grant, they have done all in their power to make their predictions come true.”94 The Hayes campaign had prints of the letter drawn up to

94 John S. Mosby to former Confederate comrade, published in the *New York Herald*, August 12, 1876.
pass out at rallies. In Mosby’s home, insults, accusations, and another near-duel ensued. The letter ruined any chance Mosby had of forging alliances with Virginia conservatives.

When the returns filtered in on election night, Democratic candidate Samuel Tilden found himself with a majority of the popular vote and 184 electoral votes, including Virginia’s. He was one vote shy of the majority needed to win the Presidency. The Republicans disputed the returns of three states, South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. If all three swung Republican, it would give Hayes the required 185 votes. As an appointed electoral commission attempted to sort out the controversy, Mosby waited out the winter in his new home in Washington. He was unable to endure the defamation he received from his fellow Virginians in Warrenton anymore, and was undoubtedly anxious of a change of setting after Pauline’s death.

As the election crisis simmered in the cloakrooms and offices in Washington D.C., Mosby gave another interview about politics in December, again with the New York Herald. Here the subject turned to political favors, a central feature of Mosby’s private plan to reconstruct Virginia, though not an idea well received by other Southerners. The main premise underlying Southern politics, Mosby explained, was “revenge.” No Southern man could accept any favor from a Republican without betraying the philosophy of their politics. “The greatest offense Gen. Grant can in their eyes commit is to give a Southern gentleman an office, because it deprives them of all ground of complaint.”95

State offices, he concluded, were inhabited not by the “best men,” but by corrupt,

unworthy, and unwhite men because of the intransigence of Southerners.

In March, a commission announced that Hayes would be the next President of the United States. Republicans had bought the White House with concessions essentially ending military occupation in the South. With Reconstruction ended, Republican hegemony lost, and the South apparently redeemed without the need for further political accommodation, Mosby decided for the first time to ask for a job with the administration. Financial pressure may have pushed him to this, as caring for his six children without Pauline had taken a toll. He contacted both Hayes and another leading Republican, James Garfield, about possible positions. Hayes had received further recommendations of his qualifications from Grant, but he also perceived that Mosby had become more of a liability than an asset. Nothing arose until a consular position in Hong Kong opened in the summer of 1878. Mosby, to Hayes’s relief, was amenable.

**Mosby in Exile**

Mosby’s immersion in Southern identity politics did not end when he traveled to the other side of the world. Considering the level of antipathy that Mosby had engendered in Virginia and Washington, Democrats and Republicans alike could not have been more pleased than to see the outspoken ex-partisan removed to Hong Kong. To their chagrin, they enjoyed just a few months of silence before Mosby reappeared in the news. As it turns out, his determination to replace the corrupt state politicians of the South with men of integrity found new and fertile ground in Asia, where for years a wide

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network of corrupt consular officials had used their positions to embezzle money. Mosby set out to expose them. To his mind, reinventing himself as an anti-corruption crusader would silence all the critics, North and South, who had questioned his political motives and integrity.

Britain had won control of Hong Kong from China as a concession after the Opium Wars. By 1879, the bustling outpost formed the nexus of Britain’s commercial network in the Far East and its naturally protected harbor serviced ships from every trading nation in the Pacific. The American consul stationed there had two major responsibilities: facilitating American commerce and overseeing Chinese emigration to America. As he analyzed budgets of previous years, Mosby quickly discovered that his predecessor, David H. Bailey, had routinely abused his authority to illegally funnel a river of official fees and unofficial bribes into private accounts. The crime itself was not difficult to carry out. When disputes arose between American sailors and captains, or when sailors were simply discharged in Hong Kong, the consul arranged on their behalf either another shipping job or passage home. To do so, he collected the sailor’s advance wages, giving some directly to the sailor and putting the rest aside to pay for the voyage back to the United States. Bailey simply pocketed the money. Likewise, Chinese emigrants required a certificate from the consul, available for a standard fee, before they could embark to the United States. In theory, consuls collected the fees and forwarded them to the Treasury Department. Bailey kept this money too, close to $40,000.97

The problem went deeper than one former dishonest consul. The ambit of corruption extended across China. In June of 1879, Mosby wrote Stilson Hutchins, editor of the Washington Post (which Hutchins had founded just two years prior), “The secret of the thing is this. There has been for several years a Consular Ring in China just as infamous as the Whiskey Ring. Seward, the Consul-General at Shanghai, and now Minister to Peking, being the head of it.” He was referring to George F. Seward, nephew of William H. Seward, Lincoln’s esteemed Secretary of State, and cousin of Frederick W. Seward, the current Assistant Secretary of State, who, awkwardly enough, was Mosby’s superior. To make matters worse, no one in the Seward family thought well of Mosby ever since Lewis Payne, a former guerrilla soldier in Mosby’s battalion, had attacked William Seward on the same day that John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln. Now the Swards had more reason to dislike Mosby, because he undauntedly began a whistle-blowing campaign with George Seward his primary target. Just four months after stepping off the boat, Mosby had embroiled himself in a political scandal that stretched around the American consulships in Asia and into the corridors of power in Washington. “My advent on the China coast,” he foretold in typically grandiose language, “will be remembered with as great a horror by some of the American consuls as some of the

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99 For his role in the conspiracy to kill Lincoln and members of his cabinet, Payne and three others were hanged. His connection to the Rangers was one of the reasons why Mosby was suspected of involvement in the conspiracy. Mosby cleared his name because he was in the midst of negotiations with Union General Winfield Scott Hancock at the time of the assassination. Nevertheless some claimed that Mosby had sent Payne on that mission, but this theory and other variations of it remain unproved. See Wert, Rangers, 282-283.
typhoons that have strewn its coasts with wrecks.”

Mosby had limited means with which to expose an influential Republican like Seward. Hayes had run on a reform platform, but the Republican Party establishment did not expect, nor welcome, implications of venality from one of their own sinecures. The reports of corruption he sent on to Washington languished in the files of the State Department. In his letter to Hutchins, he vented: “I sent the President a message several months ago that if he does not reform things out here that a Democratic Committee of Congress would investigate these Consulates, that I intended to give information about them.” He used the press, his only ally in this quest, to maintain pressure on the administration. In 1879, he wrote Alexander K. McClure, editor of the Philadelphia Times, “I write to thank you for coming to my aid in the battle I am waging with the Corsairs that our government has sent out here in the Consular service.” He worried, though, “I have no hope of any remedy except in Congress. All the power of the State Department is against me and in all probability the next mail will bring my recall.”

Hayes finally relieved Frederick Seward and shortly after George Seward in early 1880. Mosby had survived, but the victory came at a cost. Despite the support of some journalists, others had denounced him throughout the affair. “I have had the world, the flesh, and the devil to fight,” he told one of his few remaining friends in Warrenton.

“First all the Consular Ring out here, then the State Department, then the Americans in

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100 John S. Mosby to James D. Blackwell, September 6, 1879, Siepel, Rebel, 203.

101 Mosby to Stilson Hutchins, June 29, 1879, U. S. Consulate, Hong Kong, in Letters, Mitchell, 54.

102 Mosby to Alexander K. McClure, October 18, 1879, U. S. Consulate, Hong Kong, in Letters, Mitchell, 56.
China are all Yankees and may prefer to see a thief from the North in office to any man from Virginia.” But if the Republican Party had let him down, so had the South.

“While the Democratic orators in Virginia have been talking reform I have been *acting* it,” he boasted to an old friend. When he arranged a vice-consulship for another Virginian and a former Ranger too, it marked yet another favor for the South gone unappreciated. “That is the way I have “gone back” on the Southern people, getting Government offices for them. All those that I don’t put in office call me a traitor because I like the man better who saved me from outlawing than the ones who condemned me.”

When Cleveland won the White House for the Democrats in 1884, Mosby knew his days as a consul were over and he would have to secure employment outside of the government. An unexpected proposition reached him that December, when a Chinese viceroy of the Qing Empire, Li Hung Chang, requested his services. China had become embroiled in a war with France over territory in Indochina and they offered Mosby full command of its forces. The old soldier considered the rather stunning invitation for one night before politely refusing. In an interview he later explained, “I never had any respect for mere military adventurers. I could not be a soldier of fortune. I could not fight for gold. It is true that I had been a soldier in a great war and had gathered some of the Olympic dust in that grand struggle, but then I was not prompted by any feeling of self-elevation. I was sustained by a strong conviction of duty.”

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104 William T. Brooke was in Company D of Mosby’s Rangers. See Mosby to Dr. Aristides Monteiro, June 28, 1879, U. S. Consulate, Hong Kong, in *Letters*, Mitchell, ed., 53.

against the French because of the “traditional tie of sympathy between Virginians and the people of France.” By turning down the offer he felt he had “discharged a portion of the debt that Americans owe to Lafayette.” Invoking these two relationships with France, one as a Virginian and one as an American, reflected Mosby’s own sense of his dual identity. He still thought of himself as a Southerner, even as he served overseas in a national capacity exiled from the South itself. If few others knew of the opportunity passed, at least the French consul in Hong Kong was appreciative. “The political changes which have taken place in the United States presage your speedy recall from Consulship at Hong Kong,” he told Mosby. “Nevertheless you refused an offer so flattering that it would have tempted anyone but yourself to be the champion of China in the contest then against France.”

With Cleveland’s replacement on the way in the late spring of 1885, Mosby hurriedly sent a request to Grant to find him a job. The letter reached the ex-president in late July. Stricken by cancer of the throat, unable even to eat, Grant sent a telegram to his friend Leland Stanford, president of the Southern Pacific Railroad, asking him to hire Mosby. (Grant died the following day.) After landing in San Francisco at age fifty-one, Mosby was installed in the legal division of Southern Pacific Railroad, a post he would fill for sixteen years. Grateful as he was to have a job, the work was tedious and he remained separated from his family. He was also anxious to obtain more money for his family. Soon after he had started, Mosby hit upon another means of income, something

106 Ibid.

that other veterans had discovered long before him. He could write about the Civil War.

The man who stood on the San Francisco pier in 1885 had changed a great deal from the man who had sailed for Hong Kong six years earlier. Before he lived abroad, Mosby had little respect for the writings of veterans. He associated Southern reminiscences with Lost Causers like Early, who used the memory of the war to pick at the scabs of the nation’s wounds. “You speak of the bitter hostility of the North toward the South,” he had scolded other Southerners in 1876, “Well, four years of hard fighting is not calculated to make men love each other; neither is an everlasting rehearsal of the wrongs which each side imagines it has suffered going to bring us any nearer to a better understanding. Peace can only come with oblivion of the past. I know as well as you what the Southern people have had to endure; but this has been the experience of every conquered people.”

A decade later, Mosby had changed his views. With his political record tarnished, Grant dead, and a Democrat in the White House, all that was left for him was his war record. He began writing articles about his experiences as a guerrilla, usually brief anecdotes or vignettes for local newspapers. Eventually he produced two books, though only one was published during his lifetime: *Mosby’s War Reminiscences and Stuart’s Cavalry Campaigns*.

Published in 1887, Mosby intended *Reminiscences* for a narrow audience, one familiar with military terminology and tactics, but the book held an undeniable popular appeal. Each chapter related a series of adventures shared by Mosby and his Rangers. Though loosely chronological, no dominant narrative connected the chapters. The

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episodic form allowed Mosby to retell his most daring escapades without encumbering the writing with historical exposition. Nor was the text dry or overly concise. Instead, classical references and stylized imagery litter the text (much as they do his letters). The result is not really history, but storytelling. Said one reader of the pre-published manuscript, “Colonel Mosby must have material in his own experiences for a dozen thrilling romances, abounding in incident, where mirth and pathos, gallant deeds and hairbreadth escapes were daily occurrences. I hope that some day we may have from his pen such a book....”\textsuperscript{109} The warm reception \textit{Reminiscences} received encouraged Mosby to begin work on \textit{Memoirs}. 

Like many compositions and histories of the Civil War in the postwar era, Mosby’s writing was an exercise in personal rehabilitation, a reminder to an unforgiving South of what he had accomplished and sacrificed for Confederate nationalism. \textit{Reminiscences} revealed a man cognizant of the romantic turn in Civil War remembrance. He indulged the temptation to romanticize his exploits without much restraint. His anecdotes are replete with flourishes that Sir Walter Scott, his favorite childhood author, might have penned. As one example, Mosby remarked of his men rescuing a Virginia woman: “To avenge the wrongs of distressed damsels is one of the vows of knighthood; so we spurred on to overtake the Federal cavalry, in hopes that by some accident of war we might be able to liberate the prisoners.”\textsuperscript{110} In less florid moments, however, the romantic veil lifted and the practical, often ruthless commander spoke. “I fought for


\textsuperscript{110} Mosby, \textit{Reminiscences}, 49.
success and not for display,” he wrote. “There was no man in the Confederate army who had less of the spirit of knight-errantry in him, or took a more practical view of war than I did.”¹¹¹ “War,” he mused later, “loses a great deal of its romance after a soldier has seen his first battle.”¹¹²

Chivalric nostalgia sold books, but it also fed the discourse of sympathetic Confederate memory broadcast by Jubal Early and other Lost Causers. Questions of Confederate history dogged the movement, because mythologizing the Confederacy’s generals sooner or later raised the question of their wartime mistakes. Put another way, if Robert E. Lee was perfect, why did the Confederates lose at Gettysburg? To give Southerners a different culprit, Lost Cause dogma held that Longstreet, not Lee, lost the battle. Longstreet, in an article in Century Magazine, accused cavalry general Jeb Stuart for the loss, Mosby’s wartime idol. He charged that Stuart failed to keep Lee and the rest of the army properly informed about the enemy’s position, because he took off on “another wild ride around the Federal army.”¹¹³ The attack on Stuart elicited a passionate rejoinder from Mosby—“The charge of disobedience of orders against Stuart I regard as one of the greatest crimes of history.”¹¹⁴ In Reminiscences, he authored an exhausting essay delineating the movements of the Confederate forces into Union territory in order to prove that Stuart had followed orders properly. In 1891, Mosby composed another

¹¹¹ Ibid., 80.

¹¹² Ibid., 211.

¹¹³ James Longstreet, Century Magazine, quoted in Mosby, Reminiscences, 184 (n.). Mosby did not include the date for Longstreet’s article.

defense of Stuart in *Belford’s Magazine*, which he knew would “provoke some controversy.”

He argued, in defiance of Lost Cause tenets, that Robert E. Lee mistakenly ordered Pickett’s Charge on the third day of the battle. So the postwar battle of Gettysburg came full circle. Lee was to blame, not Stuart. Satisfied with his explanation, Mosby confided to a friend “Of course I am gratified that... I have cleared away the cloud that rested over Stuart. He made me all that I was in the war. But for his friendship I would never have been heard of.”

The Gettysburg debate underscored the tenuous grasp with which Mosby clung to a Southern identity. Twenty-five years after the war ended, the vestiges of the code of honor within Mosby had withered into unyielding loyalty to two people, Grant and Stuart. He considered defending their reputation a personal responsibility and did so at the expense of Lee, the untouchable icon of Lost Cause mythology. “The whole trouble I have is butting up against the popular belief in the infallibility of General Lee,” he complained. Likewise, he detested reunion culture, which he felt was a breeding ground for Lost Cause devotees. “No man excels me in pride for the military glory of the South, or is more sensitive about all that concerns the honor of the Southern soldier” remarked Mosby in one correspondence, “yet I do not attend reunions because I am not in sympathy with their spirit.”

Mosby even avoided reunions of his own battalion. He could not bear reentering his home state to attend. Reunions, he explained to another former

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115 Mosby to Dr. Aristides Monteiro, September 30, 1891, San Francisco, Mosby Papers, MOC.


Ranger, “are political conventions in the guise of social gatherings.... Nobody enjoys a talk over the old days more than I do; but I can’t stand the speeches and the prayers that are made at these conventions. I prefer healing the wounds of the war; I do not enjoy making them bleed afresh. Let those who take pleasure in such things listen to them; but excuse me.”

In 1890, he refused an invitation to a reunion because Early would be present. In his correspondence, he delivered a stinging indictment of Early’s notion of loyalty to the South and recast Southern nationalism on his own terms. Calling Early “an old fraud” who “assumes to be a sort of administrator on the Confederate army,” he predicted that Early would receive him with “insulting allusions to ‘men who have deserted since the war.’” Then Mosby gave his own definition of disloyalty to the South: “The fact is old Early himself was the first man after the war who deserted our people. As soon as he heard of Lee’s surrender he took to his heels and ran away to Canada, instead of doing as I did—staying with our people—taking all the chances—and helping them to recover self-government.”

The Lost Cause, to his mind, was a cult of pretenders, which had done as much to divide as unite Southerners.

As Mosby grew older, his opinion of reunions softened, and the attraction to talk over the old times was difficult to resist. Reunions of both the Blue and the Gray offered the chance of true reconciliation, an understanding between Northerners and Southerners that he had pursued for so long in politics. Like all living veterans, he was invited to go


free of charge to the fiftieth anniversary of Gettysburg in 1913. Over fifty thousand veterans accepted the invitation. The reunion, a four day affair ending on the Fourth of July, was a remarkable indicator of popular sentiment in support of reconciliation in the postwar era. As historian David Blight has written, the reunion was “an event in which race, black participation in the war, indeed the very idea of slavery as cause and emancipation as result of the war might be said to be thunderously conspicuous by their absence.” Mosby, in refusing to attend, anticipated the reunion would be larger in scope but similar in substance to the other reunions he had grown frustrated with over the years. Stubborn to the end, he declined. But if he remained steadfast in his objection to the Lost Cause as a political movement, he did yearn for old friends and talk of old times. He asked a former comrade, “I believe they are giving a free trip to old Confederates to Gettysburg.... You might go free to Gettysburg and return direct on the N & W to Elkton and you could bring me a great deal of news and learn a great deal. I wish you would go.”

Lifelong reprobation of the Lost Cause kept him from indulging the impulse of old age, to revel in past glories. So, too, did his loyalty to Grant and Stuart. This dissociation between himself and the Confederate culture of remembrance pulled him in two directions: Honor—the refusal to succumb to what he had always dismissed as an impractical preoccupation with the memory of the war—tugged him one way. Myth—the

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121 Mosby to Sam Chapman, June 12, 1913, Washington D. C., Mosby Collection, GLC, letter #39.
temptation to relive the period in his life that had catapulted him into the public spotlight and made him an ineffaceable legend—beckoned him the opposite way. A reporter described him in as “never so happy as when going over the thrilling scenes of the bloody drama in which he was so prominent and so active a figure.”122 In Reminiscences, he relished the idea that “it was for a long time maintained that I was a pure myth, and my personal identity was as stoutly denied as that of Homer or the Devil. All historic doubts about my own existence have, I believe, been settled; but the fables published by the Bohemians who followed the army made an impression that still lives in popular recollection.”123

Mosby’s concessions to myth rarely extended beyond his own exploits. When it came to the larger history of the war, and the centrality of slavery to the conflict, he hewed to facts rather than accepting the Lost Cause misinterpretations of the cause and the conflict. “In reviewing the past,” Mosby wrote in Leslie’s Weekly, “slavery now seems so repulsive that many ascribe secession to another cause; but nobody can tell what the other cause was.”124 He was even more blunt in a letter to a friend in 1907: “Now while I think as badly of slavery as Horace Greeley did I am not ashamed that my family were slaveholders. It was our inheritance. Neither am I ashamed that my ancestors were pirates and cattle thieves. People must be judged by the standard of their own age. If it was right to own slaves as property it was right to fight for it. The South went to war on

123 Mosby, Reminiscences, 117.
account of Slavery.” Mosby could speak to the significance of slavery as well as anyone. He had taken Aaron Burton, one of his family’s slaves, with him to war and let him go afterwards.

Mosby’s writing in the final two decades of his life did not distract him from politics. In an attempt to reinsert himself into the mainstream of the Republican party, he initiated correspondences with Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley. During campaigns he gave interviews when he had the chance, preaching the old dream of a Republican turn in the South and reiterating that the good of the Southern nation did not rely on a philosophy of unified regional isolation. “You know, the term “Republican” in the South is associated with ‘defeat,’ with ‘subjugation,’ with ‘humiliation,’” he told a St. Louis newspaper in 1896, “and it was hardly to be expected that the Republican party could win there. But I have been hoping and praying for years for a break-up of the Solid South, and I believe it has come.” A political cartoonist highlighted Mosby as a reconciliationist for his endorsement of McKinley in 1896 by drawing him with McKinley on the same ground, labeled “National Integrity” and “Honest Money.” Behind the pair, a crevice in the ground separates them from the divisive past, marked 1861-1865. In the upper corners are depictions of the two men as veterans, one in Confederate dress, the other in Yankee. Underneath the caption reads: “If I had a million votes I would give them to McKinley.”

125 Mosby to Sam Chapman, June 4, 1907, Washington D. C., Mosby Collection, GLC, letter #21.
126 Article in unnamed St. Louis newspaper, n. d. (probably 1894), Mosby Scrapbooks, Vol. 1, UVAL, 16.
Mosby’s premonition about the break-up of the Solid South proved incorrect. McKinley demolished William Jennings Bryan, but the Democratic South only conceded Kentucky. When Mosby returned east in 1897 after the death of his mother, he met briefly with McKinley to parlay his public support into an administration job, but McKinley had nothing for him.

California was wearing on him, as was U.S. foreign policy. For a brief time in 1898, Mosby entertained recruiting a regiment of soldiers to fight in the Spanish-American War. He began training, but at sixty-four years old he was deemed too old, and the commander of U. S. forces publically refused his services. Embarrassed by what he perceived as snubs from the McKinley administration, his anger grew when he learned of the imperialist ventures the government launched. Imperialism resembled Reconstruction so much that Mosby described the intervention in the Philippines as the “disgrace of an American carpet-bag government.”

“I am utterly opposed,” he said, “to pay twenty million for the privilege of governing a people who don’t want us and when it can’t benefit us but entail an enormous burden.” As the 1900 election cycle approached, he refused to take his usual active role in the campaign; he knew what awaited him. “I want to go East next winter and spend some months. I won’t go now because I would as soon be in Dante’s Inferno as in Virginia during a Presidential Canvass.”

Embittered as he was—“I have no political influence,” he complained—Mosby

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still cast his vote for McKinley in November.\textsuperscript{131} His long faith finally paid off in 1901. After losing his job with the Southern Pacific Transportation Co., Mosby was granted a position by McKinley in the Department of the Interior as a special agent in the General Land Office. After McKinley’s assassination, Theodore Roosevelt sent Mosby to Colorado and Nebraska to break up corrupt cattle rancher trusts. Mosby succeeded admirably in Colorado; he failed in Nebraska, resulting in his near banishment from the state. Roosevelt transferred him for a brief time to the Land Office in Alabama, but he could not bear returning to the South, confessing that “my position is so humiliating that I don’t like to be with Southern people.”\textsuperscript{132} In 1904, Roosevelt recalled him to the Justice Department in Washington, Mosby’s last job in a political career characterized by resentment, frustration, and alienation.

Most of his private correspondence during this period expressed animosity pent up after years of exile always aimed at the Democratic Party. “Public affairs virtue must be its own reward,” he reflected. “I did in China what I did in Colorado and Nebraska. I found the Consular service out there an Augean stable. I cleaned it out. Yet I was the first Virginian and the first Consul in Asia that President Cleveland dismissed. But he did it on demand of the Virginia people. A word spoken to him by one of several men who owe to me all they are would have saved me. I was too proud to ask them or to remind them of the obligation they owed me. Such is life.”\textsuperscript{133} On other occasions, he

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] Mosby to Sam Chapman, July 25, 1901, Alexandria, Virginia, Mosby Collection, GLC, letter #5.
\end{footnotes}
authored remarkably optimistic visions of the South, a testament to his resilient faith in the South even as he rebuked Virginians. “The Southern people were not lost with their causes for in their ashes lived their wonted fires,” he wrote in one article. “From the wreck and the ruin of war they have risen, and today there is a stronger sentiment of nationality among them than ever existed before the conflict of arms.”

In an article entitled “The Dawn of the Real South,” Mosby predicted the economic ascension of the region, claiming it would grow into the “commercial headquarters” of the nation. “The real South is just at its birth. The growth of this child of the nation may be gradual, but in the end the South will be far richer and more powerful than the North. In the days to come the South will become the dominant section of the country.”

But a personal reconciliation with the South only occurred after his death. Mosby lived out the rest of his years in Washington D.C., safely north of his former home. Friends sometimes lured him across the Potomac. In 1915 the University of Virginia presented him with a medal—amends, perhaps, for his expulsion long ago. By then Mosby was no longer the acidic dissenter and political apostate of the 1870s, but an ancient living relic of the Civil War. He died in 1916, the day after Memorial Day. Soon after, the powerful currents of the Lost Cause washed away the memory of Mosby’s dissent. Stories eulogizing the “Gray Ghost” of the Confederacy turned him into yet another hero of the Old South, effortlessly incorporating his memory into the Lost Cause


as if he had never opposed it his entire life. Armistead Gordon published a poem entitled “Mosby’s Men” that ran counter to everything Mosby said about slavery and the war. Its stanzas were filled with Lost Cause shibboleths like the following:

It is His will for swords to rust
That battle for the right;
For banners to be trailed in dust
That lead the holiest fight;
For Wrong to wear the victor’s name,
Where one may strive with ten;—
But fate can never take from fame
The deeds of Mosby’s Men.\textsuperscript{136}

In 1957 CBS produced a television program based on the Mosby myth called The Gray Ghost. It ran thirty-nine episodes, mostly in syndication as CBS subsequently dropped the show when it found that running a Civil War program during the rise of the Civil Rights movement sparked controversy. The Gray Ghost was essentially a western adventure in the guise of a Civil War setting. The protagonist, John Singleton Mosby, rescued Southern women and performed various other knightly deeds behind Union lines while attempting to further Confederate victory. In its brief running time, The Gray Ghost had a wide audience below the Mason-Dixon line.\textsuperscript{137}

Today, signs along the roads in northern Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley, and near the University of Virginia at Charlottesville demarcate “Gray Ghost country” with a featureless illustration, a silhouette of a gray man astride a gray horse. The graphic is a

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.

fine symbol of how the myth has consumed the man. “He Was Never Captured,” read the
New York Times obituary the day following Mosby’s death.\textsuperscript{138} Of course, he was
captured. For most of his life, the proponents of the Lost Cause emasculated and exiled
him to rid the South of his unwelcome protests, and then they bided their time. Only after
his death did they scour the Southern memory of him clean of the taint of political
apostasy and put it in the display case with the other Confederate heroes.

CHAPTER 3: MARTIN ROBINSON DELANY

Place no impediment in the way of the freedman; let his right be equally protected and his chances be equally regarded, and... he will stand and thrive, as firmly rooted, not only on the soil of Hilton Head, but in all the South,—though a black,—as any white, or “Live Oak,” as ever was grown in South Carolina, or transplanted to Columbia.
—Martin Robinson Delany, “Prospects of the Freedmen of Hilton Head,” 1865

For African American leaders, the Civil War ushered in an epoch in which, for the first time, blacks stood to be included within the scope of American nationalism as free men. They understood the dual legacy of the war, the triumph of union and emancipation, as the glorious convergence of an American heritage with an African American heritage. The challenge before them was how to secure the newfound freedoms of their emancipated brethren and how best to encourage the progress of the race. Frederick Douglass, the tireless abolitionist and civil rights activist, believed that a rightful claim upon an American identity went hand in hand with equal protection of the nation’s laws. In that vein, he saw the great task of Reconstruction as the defense of the elective franchise for freedmen. Suffrage, he felt, was the only adequate shield for African American liberties.¹ With the vote in their pockets, African Americans could make for themselves an independent space to pursue better education, better economic

standing, and stronger communities, all under the protection of the representatives they elected to power.

As historian David Blight has written, Douglass coupled his exuberant postwar embrace of American nationalism with an acceptance of the liberal individualism that characterized Yankee culture. In many of his speeches and articles, Douglass balanced his desire for land and schools for his people with urgent directives that blacks improve their own economic and educational standings. The weekly journal he began editing in 1870, whose title, *New National Era*, reflected his rejuvenated belief in America’s postwar identity, emphasized personal responsibility to its audience. “The time has come,” he wrote in a September issue, “for the colored men of the country to assume the duties and responsibilities of their own existence.”

Other African American leaders emerged from the war with the same paradoxical instincts: to seek aid from the national government that until 1865 had sanctioned their oppression, and at the same time to adopt the spirit of self-reliance that lay at the heart of the American character. Martin Delany, a onetime colleague and longtime rival of Frederick Douglass, had contributed his own endorsement of African American self-reliance to the *New National Era* months earlier. He submitted a four-part series of articles called “University Pamphlets,” to be published concurrent with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in February of 1870, which prohibited the use of racial discrimination as a means of preventing the right to vote. Noting that “every member of a

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body politic has duties and obligations to perform,” Delany argued that the introduction of African Americans into the national polity carried with it a social contract that demanded the education and improvement of the race. Blacks had inherited “all the responsibilities belonging to society” by requesting and receiving civil rights and voting rights. “Hence, the necessity of possessing such information and having such qualifications as to fit us for the high, responsible, and arduous duties of the new life into which we have entered.”

Delany was speaking of more than an abstract reciprocity between the individual and the nation. Because civil rights, which he defined as “all the privileges and enjoyments known to the body politic,” extended through every part of the social fabric, an individual bore responsibilities to several communities at once. Loyalty to one’s race figured just as heavily in Delany’s estimation as devotion to country. A citizen’s “general obligations are to the nation, particular obligations to the province, district, or state, and special obligations to those with whom he is identified or classified.... Here, in America, the special obligation of the black man are to his own people.”

Like Douglass, Delany believed that African American leaders could best protect their communities by ensuring their political rights. But he contended that the interests of blacks, like all citizen-groups, could only be served if they were part of the “ruling element” of a society. Voting was not always enough. African Americans needed more substantial political leverage. They

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4 Ibid., 419.

required representatives of their own race in office.

The theories on citizenship Delany articulated in the broad sweeps of “University Pamphlets” did not cause a stir at the height of Radical Reconstruction in 1870. Republicans controlled the national government. They oversaw the administration of formerly Confederate states. They mandated that those states returning to the Union ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, which defined citizenship and guaranteed all citizens equal protection before the law. From the perspective of African American leaders, there was a triangulation of the national interest, the state interest, and the welfare of blacks. But as white Southern Democrats took back control of their state legislatures and governors’ offices between 1870 and 1876, a process they referred to as “Redemption,” loyalties to nation, region, and race became more complicated, less compatible concepts. Frederick Douglass responded to the resurgence of the Democrats and the growing violence directed against blacks with continued faith in the Republican Party. Republicanism, after all, was responsible for making American nationalism accessible to African Americans during the war. Delany advocated a different course. From his South Carolina home in 1876, Delany recommended to freedmen that they break their allegiance to the Republican Party and support the Democratic gubernatorial candidate Wade Hampton, a former slaveholder and Confederate general.

A major in the Union army during the Civil War, Delany came to South Carolina in 1865 to remake the South into a proper homeland for the formerly enslaved. His devotion to the region stemmed from a deep, lifelong commitment to the elevation of the black community. For Delany, as with so many black intellectuals, emancipation
breathed life into the idea of an African America, but particularly for him an African American South. From his vantage point, by the mid-1870s regional politics and the state government had a more direct bearing on the lives of African Americans than the national edifice. Progress for blacks and for the region relied on a reciprocal relationship between former slaves and former slaveholders—it was the only way blacks could determine their own “political destiny.” This collaboration comprised the new obligation of citizenship in a Democratic South. To rigidly support the Republicans, a party in retreat all across the nation, would abrogate any chance for African Americans to remain part of the political “ruling element.” in the region. Their only hope was through cooperation with their former masters, starting with Wade Hampton. It was unexpected advice coming from a staunch defender of black equality and independence, and, in retrospect, it was bad advice. Hampton won the 1876 election using voter suppression and fraud, turning South Carolina into an emblem of the violent restoration of white supremacy.

In return for his public endorsement, Hampton appointed Delany a trial-justice in Charleston. He lasted only two years. By then, Hampton had openly espoused an anti-black agenda that forced Delany from his post. After more than a decade in South Carolina working to implement his vision of a South inclusive of African Americans, Delany found himself an Apostate, alienated from both the Southern black and Southern white communities. He eventually left for Ohio, having reached the conclusion that a bright future for his race required a different space, a different land, even a different continent. For much of his remaining life, he nourished an old dream of an African American exodus to the shores of West Africa. His hopes for the South had vanished.
Delany’s experiences during Reconstruction illuminate how the politics of race—in this case not only white-black relations but also the fissures between Delany and local freedmen— informed postwar Southern identity. Delany’s travails in South Carolina indicated that the most significant component of Southern identity at stake in the “war of ideas,” that of whiteness ascendent, had endured the razing of the South, the destruction of its economy, and the emancipation of its slaves. The re-articulation of white supremacy into the South’s regional identity was less surprising, however, than Delany’s earnest attempt to offer a competing regional vision within the same political discourse. In the simplest terms, Delany envisioned black freedman and white Democrats working together to construct a better South. But he found few people in South Carolina genuinely receptive to his ideas for elevating the race or the region. While happy to avail themselves of his services, his white allies did not really believe in uplifting blacks, while his black audience had little interest in making common cause with their erstwhile masters. The former concentrated on reestablishing white hegemony; the latter turned inward to protect their families and local communities. Delany tried to maintain a middle ground until it eventually disappeared under his feet.

The Schooling of a Reformer

Delany’s postwar struggle to make a Southern homeland for African Americans had its origins in his antebellum life and education. He was born in western Virginia (what is now West Virginia) in 1812, a free black child in a slave state. His freeborn mother made a living as a seamstress; his father was a slave. When local white
authorities demanded his mother stop teaching her children to read and write, she moved their family to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where she could educate them without fear of reprisal. Delany’s father joined them the following year after purchasing his own freedom. In 1831, Delany, now age nineteen, moved to Pittsburgh, this time without his family, to continue his education with local black intellectuals. Chief among them was Lewis Woodson, a minister at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal church and an early advocate of linking the concept of race elevation with black emigration from the United States.  

The year 1831 was an auspicious moment for Delany to enter the arena of abolitionism and race politics. Nat Turner’s rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia brought unprecedented national attention to the problem of slavery. Many Southerners, in shock at the deaths of over sixty white men, women and children at the hands of slaves, blamed the insurrection on the burgeoning abolitionist movement in the North. Virginia governor John Floyd wrote the governor of South Carolina that he was “fully persuaded the spirit of insubordination which has, and still manifests itself in Virginia, had its origin among, and emanated from, the Yankee population.”

Abolitionism was on the rise in the North and there were several people at whom Floyd could point an accusing finger. In 1829 in Boston, black abolitionist David Walker wrote and distributed an inflammatory pamphlet, called the “Appeal in Four Parts to the

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Colored Citizens of the World,” which condoned, even praised, the use of violence by slaves against their masters.\(^8\) A year later, William Lloyd Garrison, a white abolitionist and another Bostonian, began publishing an uncompromising antislavery newspaper titled *The Liberator*. But the most dangerous abolitionist instigators, in Floyd’s opinion, were black preachers, who used scripture to spread the gospel of violent revolution under the guise of religious revivals. In order to curb these antislavery influences, Floyd wanted to expel free blacks from Virginia and enact tighter social control over slaves through laws further restricting movement, communication, literacy, and preaching.

While Virginia and many other slave states responded by adopting these measures, Floyd admitted they were only short-term solutions. No matter how controlled the environment, blacks would remain a threat to whites as long as they lived among them. Ultimately, Southerners had to extricate blacks from their communities completely. Gradual emancipation and compulsory black emigration were the only ways to ensure the safety of Virginia’s white population. The Virginia legislature spent two months that winter debating whether to emancipate its slaves and send them abroad, an indication of the fear Turner’s rebellion had sowed across the state. But in the end the legislators rejected any form of emancipation. Even in the face of future bloody uprisings, slavery was too lucrative to give up.\(^9\)


\(^9\) Thomas Dew, a professor at William & Mary, dismissed the various plans for emancipation suggested in the debates as an impractical waste of capital. Without the “$100,000,000 of slave property,” he estimated, “Virginia will be a desert.” Thomas R. Dew, “Abolition of Negro Slavery,” *The American Quarterly Review* 12 (September and December, 1832).
At the same time that Virginia debated colonizing its slaves, Delany’s mentor, Lewis Woodson, an early advocate of black nationalism and one of those dangerous black preachers Floyd worried about, began preaching to his congregation in Pittsburgh.

Woodson envisioned a Jeffersonian destiny for blacks. He told his community in Pittsburgh that their future prosperity would come by leaving the city for the rural countryside in the Midwest, where they could make their living by farming and gain some measure of independence. But as he refined that idea over the course of the next ten years, he began to second-guess the choice of destination. Under the pseudonym “Augustine,” he voiced his concerns in The Colored American, an African American newspaper in Pittsburgh. Questioning “whether it is prudent to commence such settlements within the jurisdiction of the United States,” he went on to wonder, “May we safely suppose that a government which has shown such decided hostility towards us as individuals, would regard us with a more indulgent eye, when formed into communities acquiring intelligence, wealth and power?” By 1839, Woodson was arguing that black emigration outside the United States warranted serious consideration. Moreover, to avoid the “evil of forming too many societies,” he advocated a collective exodus of African Americans to a single homeland. “Objects of this nature should be considered national,” he wrote. “If we emigrate at all, it should either be on one plan, or to one place.”

Just as John Floyd’s proposal to rid Virginia of blacks ran counter to the

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11 *The Colored American*, February 17, 1838, 3.

12 Ibid., January 19, 1839, 2.
conventional wisdom of most pro-slavery Southerners, Woodson’s suggestion that blacks voluntarily emigrate flew in the face of most abolitionist sentiment. Abolitionists, especially black abolitionists, had considered emigration repugnant ever since a nearly all-white organization had formed in 1816 to promote the idea of emancipation conditioned on permanently removing African Americans to West Africa. The colonizing philosophy of the American Colonization Society (ACS) had the same historical source that fed Floyd’s desire to rid Virginia of blacks: a terror among whites stretching back to Thomas Jefferson and beyond of their own black slaves.\(^{13}\) The ACS argued that free blacks constituted too great a danger to remain in America and, more broadly, that blacks had suffered too much degradation to belong in an enlightened society.\(^ {14}\) African Americans, naturally, took exception. David Walker devoted much of his “Appeal” to a rebuke of the ACS, unabashedly claiming that “America is more our country than it is the whites,” and denying the right of whites to “drive us from our property and homes, which we have earned with our blood.”\(^ {15}\) Inspired by the number of blacks speaking out against colonization, William Lloyd Garrison published a collection of their objections called *Thoughts on African Colonization* in 1831. Frederick Douglass would continue to make the case against the ACS with even greater eloquence from the 1840s onward. Anti-colonization came to define the distinctive identity of the antebellum


\(^{15}\) Walker, “An Appeal in Four Parts,” in *Documenting the American South*, 71.
abolitionist movement.

Woodson was an exception. He, too, rejected the philosophy of the ACS, but he also distinguished between forced colonization and “voluntary and free” emigration. “The mode, time, and place, of emigration must be left wholly to their choice,” he explained. “The emigrants must be men of intelligence and judgment; capable of devising, and executing whatever is necessary to their own and their posterity’s welfare. To aid and encourage such men to emigrate, when circumstances require it, is perfectly just and right.”

Woodson’s pursuit of an agenda for black independence unfettered by any abiding loyalty to the nation had a tremendous influence on Delany. His provocative ideas infused in Delany the spark of black nationalism that would ignite his call for emigration in the 1850s and again in the 1870s. Though at the time Delany did not yet believe as his mentor did that African Americans could more readily secure their legal equality outside the United States, Woodson’s tutelage impressed upon him the injustices of the northern antebellum community whose celebrated freedoms were only enjoyed in full by its white citizens. The North in which Delany came of age, a world of quasi-independence for people of color, resembled in many respects the South he lived in during the waning years of Reconstruction. He would justify his unpopular position supporting the Democrats in the 1870s in the same fashion that Woodson justified urging African Americans to emigrate in the 1830s: by arguing that it was in the best interest of the race.

As Delany cut his teeth as a reformer under Woodson’s tutelage in the 1830s, he

\[16 \textit{The Colored American}, \text{May 3, 1838.}\]
worked as a barber and apprentice doctor. While establishing reform societies, organizing African American conventions, and attending antislavery protests, he worked as a bleeder and leecher, first as an apprentice and then independently. He also wrote on occasion. In 1843 began publishing an abolitionist newspaper called the *Mystery*, the first African American-run paper in Pennsylvania. The *Mystery* was a four-page paper that interspersed articles on local events and advertisements for local businesses (including Delany’s) with editorials spotlighting the need for black moral and civic elevation. “Our object is the mental, by literary acquirement,” he proclaimed in its “Prospectus.”¹⁷

Within the *Mystery*’s essays, Delany delved into the themes that would come to characterize much of his later politics: unequivocal rejection of oppression, unwavering faith in the equality of the black race with the white, and a commitment to the advancement of African Americans through education and good citizenship.

The *Mystery*’s central message emphasized the importance of black progress as a crucial component of the nation’s historical destiny. Promoted through study of the “Literary Sciences,” the progress of the race would serve the “elevation of all classes.” Delany, in essence, used the newspaper to promote two correlated nationalisms at the same time: the advancement of the race and the advancement of the nation. This strategy allowed him to imbue his calls for black elevation with the discursive power of a broader communal vision “pertaining to the universal benefit of man.”¹⁸ Thus, as an assurance of

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¹⁷ Delany, “Prospectus of the Mystery,” *Mystery*, December 16, 1846 in Levine, *Delany: A Documentary Reader*, 30. This copy of the “Prospectus” was probably taken from an article in the first issue of the *Mystery* in 1843.

its objectivity, Delany could also offer the disclaimer that his newspaper, although aimed at a black audience, would “support no distinctive principles of race.”¹⁹

An astute reader of the Mystery (precisely the sort Delany imagined), would have quickly ascertained that the editor’s views on race and nationalism were far more complex than he implied, based in dual part on Delany’s faith in the greatness of the black race and on his scientific education. Delany’s concept of race destiny contained within it a biological imperative that reflected the scientific debate taking place within the contemporary fields of evolutionary biology, natural history, and race theory. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, the academy had been immersed in the theories of French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. In his landmark 1809 text, Philosophie Zoologique, Lamarck argued that members of a species acquired essential characteristics which they then passed on to their offspring. Giraffes, for example, had in generations past stretched their necks to eat the leaves off branches just out of reach, subsequently producing children with slightly longer necks, who followed the same pattern until the result was the long-necked giraffe we know today. Strictly speaking, in the case of blacks Lamarckian evolution was a double-edged sword. It seemed to promise that elevation, the professed aim of the Mystery, would have a hereditary impact uplifting the race. Unfortunately the same logic led to the conclusion that centuries of slavery had left African Americans with inferiority encoded in their blood. Race theorists tended to employ the latter formula in scientific defenses of slavery, arguing that climate and other environmental factors had

caused blacks to degenerate steadily over time relative to whites.

Delany tended to hopscotch over Lamarck’s theory, absorbing much of it while avoiding the most distressing parts. In his own expositions on race, he applied Lamarckist concepts, if rather loosely, to the need for black elevation. He worried that former slaves would never truly be free of degradation. “A child born under oppression,” he would later write, “has all the elements of servility in its constitution.” His solution for reversing the biological effects of slavery underscored his desire for a black homeland. “These minds must become ‘unfettered,’ and have ‘space to rise.’ This cannot be in their present positions.... it begets an adaptation, and reconciliation of mind to such condition. It changes the physiological condition of the system.” The Germans and the Irish provided models to prove the theory. “Depressed and downcast” in their own nations, they had flourished in the United States. The “instant they set their foot upon unrestricted soil; free to act and untrammeled to move; their physical condition undergoes a change, which in time becomes physiological, which is transmitted to the offspring, who when born under such circumstances, is a decidedly different being to what it would have been.” Like giraffes stretching their necks to the high branches, blacks required the right environment in which to unlearn slavery. Contrary to Lamarckism, however, Delany believed that African Americans born free—himself the prime example—did not suffer from any intrinsic biological dependence on whites. As he saw it, adaptations of a species over centuries could be erased in one generation.

In the 1840s, Larmarckism came under fire from polygenists, a small but important group of scientists promulgating a new theory on the origins of the races. Polygenists argued against the conventional wisdom that all humans of all races could trace their ancestry back to a single pair. Different traits that characterized the different races indicated separate points of origin, not distinctiveness based on evolution from a common origin. Such theorists contended that the different races in fact constituted separate species. Though it did not square with the standard Biblical account of creation (a major roadblock to its widespread acceptance), polygenesis offered an attractive justification to whites of their belief in their racial superiority.

Delany rejected the central thesis of polygenesis his entire career, and understandably so, since it provided scientific fodder to theories of white supremacy and contradicted Larmarckism. In response to polygenist publications like ethnographer Samuel Morton’s *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844), Delany delivered a lecture refuting their findings. Morton had sought to demonstrate through the study of skull sizes that every distinct race maintained unchanging characteristics throughout history, and that Egyptians (classified by Morton as white) had enslaved blacks in yet another historical illustration of the immutable hierarchy of the races. Delany countered by arguing before a group of Freemasons that the common heritage of black and white Masonry in east Africa indicated that Western culture had its roots in

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African soil.  

Though perhaps Delany did not realize it, elements of polygenist theory infused his outlook on black elevation and race destiny. Drawing from polygenist theory, for example, could allow blacks to claim a separate identity from whites, even a superiority to them. From his editorial desk at the *Mystery*, Delany often said as much, trumpeting the singular gifts of the black race and spinning racial slurs into badges of honor. When asked why blacks had produced so few great men of letters, he responded that, after considering the trials the black race had suffered, to expect the same artistic output as that of whites was “a tacit acknowledgment, that we are naturally superior to the rest of mankind.”

But the great attraction of polygenesis was the implication that the world operated within a divine order. Monogenism, the theory of a single human origin—even Biblical monogenism, Delany’s own professed belief that humans descended from Noah, and Adam before him—still relied on environmental conditions as the determinant for racial differences. The theory went that races changed, evolved, or degenerated over generations because of the climates they inhabited. How else might one reasonably explain the presence of varied races that descending from one couple? Polygenesis, as Louis Menand has written, contended that “all differences are attributable to the intentions of a thoughtful Creator. The races differ because they were created different. They don’t just form a hierarchy; they form an *intelligible* hierarchy. They instantiate a

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This idea of race destiny took a powerful hold on Delany. Though he never suggested that blacks and whites were of separate species, he consistently wrote that African Americans had their own storied past to celebrate and a unique destiny they could anticipate. Such rhetoric formed the backbone of his black nationalism.

The eloquent appeals for emancipation and black elevation in the *Mystery* eventually won Delany the admiration of two giants in the abolition movement, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. Garrison had been an abolitionist leader since the *Liberator* first appeared in 1831. Douglass, who had escaped from slavery in 1838, had stepped to the forefront of the movement upon the publication of his memoir *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* in 1845. The three met for the first time in 1847, when Garrison and Douglass passed through Pittsburgh on an antislavery speaking tour. Shortly thereafter, Delany decided to leave the *Mystery* and co-edit a new abolitionist paper with Douglass in Rochester, New York called the *North Star*. “Duty calls and we must obey,” he explained as a way of goodbye to his Pittsburgh readership. “We leave the Mystery for a union with the far famed and world renowned Frederick Douglass.”

Delany entered into the collaboration with Douglass well aware of his status as the junior partner, but he would leave the *North Star* a year and a half later convinced he alone had the authority to lead African Americans. The seeds of the rivalry between

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Delany and Douglass were planted partly because of Delany’s personal ambitions, but they also grew out of his philosophies on racial destiny and evolution. Within the amalgam of Delany’s scientific theories, Douglass was biologically hamstrung in two ways: he was a former slave and he was a mulatto. Douglass would never rid himself completely of the instincts of servility, and worse, his accomplishments, however prodigious, would always be attributed to his white heritage, not his black. African Americans needed a leader of pure black blood, an “unadulterated black man,” unencumbered by any vestiges of slavery’s influence, to guide it—a leader, in a word, like Delany himself. Propounding these ideas came to define his legacy for other African American thinkers. Anna Julia Cooper, a black writer of the late nineteenth, century, remembered that Delany “used to say when honors of state fell upon him, that when he entered the council of kings the black race entered with him.”

Contemplating the need for authenticity in black leadership—specifically the value of his “unadulterated” black heritage measured against Douglass’s experience as a slave—gave rise to larger questions about the direction the abolitionist movement was taking. Delany’s frustrations with the narrow, non-violent prescriptions of Garrisonian abolitionism hastened the evolution of his thought. Gradually Delany blended Garrison’s language of moral suasion with his own calls for violence—if necessary—in the fight for freedom. He felt that many abolitionists, especially members of the Liberty Party, the political arm of the abolitionist movement, focused solely on the challenge of legislative

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emancipation at the expense of addressing “the condition of the free colored people.”  

In 1848, when the Liberty Party convened to nominate Martin Van Buren for President, Delany wrote openly in the paper that the black race ought to “lift up the battle-axe in vindictive warfare,” if the interests of slaves and free blacks were continually ignored.

Delany aimed his words at a trans-national black audience. He urged all people of African descent in the slave societies of Central and South America to take note of their common cause. Cuba, in particular, attracted his attention, just as it had long tempted slaveholders intent on expanding America’s slave empire southward. “Whenever you are ready,” he told the black people of Cuba in the summer of 1849, “hoist the flag and draw the sword of revolution.” His growing certainty that blacks had a grand destiny ahead of them was matched with greater and greater confidence in the strategy of violent uprisings. He began to see triumph as a foregone conclusion. In a letter to the *North Star*, a moment when he was at his rhetorical best, he warned whites that “tortured and aggravated to desperation, the slave will rise in the majesty of manhood and the grandeur of his nature, when a terrible day it will be to the evil-doer and despoiler of his rights!”

While his co-editor Douglass was doggedly pursuing a place for African Americans in the American cultural landscape, Delany used the *North Star* to articulate a pan-African vision, a unifying ideology that all blacks, slave and free, could access.


28 Ibid.


For all his talk of unity and common cause, Delany could not keep his differences with Douglass out of the pages of the *North Star*. After Delany resigned his editorship in June 1849, the two continued to exchange jabs with one another in printed letters and editorial commentaries on the state of the abolition movement. Delany reproached Douglass for acting out of personal ambition; Douglass replied, “One must be struck, on reading his letter, with the appropriateness of his advice if applied to himself.” The ugly details of the public dispute obscured the true cause of the rift: they each took fundamentally different approaches to the problem of slavery. Emphasizing shared humanity, Douglass sought to erase the perception of difference between whites and blacks; Delany embraced racial difference, taking it as an indication of the untapped potential of blacks and a sign that emancipation would surely come.

Following his departure from the *North Star*, Delany returned to his home in Pittsburgh determined to reestablish his medical practice. Instead, two events in 1850, one of national significance, one of personal significance, kept him an abolitionist first and a doctor second. In September, the new Fugitive Slave Act became law, part of a series of measures collectively known as the Compromise of 1850 passed by Congress to resolve the sectional tension caused by the Mexican War. The law compelled citizens, even in free states, to return fugitive slaves to their owners. Abolitionists cried out against the Act, condemning it a method of implicating them in the slave system—by law and force. For Delany, the Act wiped away any remaining doubts about violent

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revolution against slaveholders or the politicians who protected their interests.

The second event involved Delany’s matriculation at Harvard Medical School. With outstanding references in hand, Delany had sought entry to a number of medical schools after his departure from the *North Star*. Harvard’s dean, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., saw fit to accept an African American into the incoming class. In fact, he accepted three African Americans. Besides Delany, two other men sponsored by the American Colonization Society matriculated. The inclusion of black students in the medical classrooms divided the student body. While some accepted a mixed-race class, a majority submitted a petition to the faculty demanding their expulsion. The presence of blacks, they complained, would “lessen the value” of their degree and they predicted that if these three black men were allowed to stay, it would commence “the beginning of an Evil, which, if not checked will increase, and the number of respectable white students will, in future, be an inverse ratio, to that of blacks.”  

In December, after consulting with the faculty, Holmes complied with the protestors. Delany was outraged and remained in Boston, waiting for allies of the abolition movement to take up his cause against Harvard. No protests materialized; no help was forthcoming. In March 1851, he returned, angry and defeated, to Pittsburgh.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Delany’s experience in Boston. By entering Harvard, Delany was putting into practice the philosophy of self-elevation,

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which he had advocated since the first day he published an issue of the *Mystery*. Taking his place at the nation’s oldest university embodied the dream that he and Douglass had shared at the *North Star*, that through emancipation and uplift African Americans could successfully integrate themselves into American society. His expulsion for no other reason but his race poisoned that dream. Worse still, the people of Boston, the high seat of abolitionist ferment in America, did not seem to care. As one scholar has written of the event, “Delany concluded that the antislavery activists were more offended by the notion of Southerners presuming to send their agents into Northern cities to retrieve their ‘property’ than they were by discrimination against any particular black man already in their midst.”

The entire ugly affair brought home to Delany the teachings of his former mentor Lewis Woodson. Over the next year, he flirted with more radical forms of abolitionism. By 1852, he became a full-fledged crusader, supporting violent revolution, black nationalism, and separation from America. “Shall we fly, or shall we resist?” he asked other African Americans in his most famous emigrationist text. Staying in the country non-violently was not an option. To fulfill their obligations to the race, blacks had to cut their ties to the nation.

**A Decade of Emigrationism:**

Throughout the 1850s, Delany lived a peripatetic existence. For much of the time, he was on the move across the American North and Canada, giving addresses to reform

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34 Ibid., 9.

35 Martin Delany, *Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny*, 172.
societies and presiding over emigration conventions. In 1856, he removed his family to Chatham, Canada West where he helped edit the *Provincial Freemen*, an African American newspaper in Toronto, though he rarely remained home for long stretches. In 1858, the militant abolitionist John Brown visited him in Canada requesting his help for the raid he was planning on Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. Delany refused him. The increasing sectional strife that enthralled most Americans, black and white, did not seem to absorb him. His attention was not focused on America, but outside its borders, where he imagined a home for African Americans might exist.

For Delany, emigrationism represented a major departure from the integrationist message of the *Mystery* and the *North Star*. Like Lewis Woodson before him, he was a black nationalist seeking an appropriate place for his people. The main currents of the anti-colonization abolitionist movement as well as the realities of sectional antebellum politics pointed to the American North as the only possible landscape in which African American communities could enjoy the autonomy and liberty that American identity promised. But Delany’s bitter experiences at *The North Star*, in the Midwest, and at Harvard University, had disillusioned him to life in the American North—one of the reasons he took his family to Canada. The enduring lesson he had learned about the North, particularly from the students and faculty at Harvard, was that he could never become part of its “ruling element.”

Yet, even as he stepped into the role as emigration’s preeminent black spokesman, he was not ready to wholly reject an American identity. Doubt about the meaning of America gnawed at him. As a result, the vicissitudes in his career during this period tend
to overshadow the consistencies. He wavered on the ultimate destination for African Americans—first Central America, then Cuba, then the Niger Valley in Africa—and those he listed as political allies and enemies in 1850 did not match those of the 1860s. But the foundation of his politics, his faith in the destiny of the race and his desire for racial purity among its leaders, remained firm and shown through in the two books he wrote this decade: *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* and *Blake; or, the Huts of America.*

Delany was not the only political reformer changing tack in the 1850s. Northerners and Southerners alike openly questioned the methods by which politicians had kept North and South together, and the wisdom of continuing to maintain a bifurcated republic. The Compromise of 1850 had the curious effect of soothing the anxieties of unionists, while exacerbating the fears of pro-slavery and anti-slavery activists. On the abolitionist side, the Fugitive Slave Act had thrown doubt on William Lloyd Garrison’s moral advocacy of reform without violence. Frederick Douglass himself began to defend the use of violence against slaveholders and slave catchers. Other African Americans, among them Henry Highland Garnet, wondered whether freedom for blacks might come more swiftly overseas in the newly independent state of Liberia.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Compromise was just as unsettling. Diehard pro-slavery Southerners, like the aging John Calhoun, apprehensively viewed the entrance of a free California into the Union as a political body blow to their interests. Though slaveholders had won the Fugitive Slave Act in all the legislative wrangling, the far-seeing among them recognized that the Senate controlled the destiny of the Slave
South. Conceding a majority of Senate seats to free states signified, sooner or later, the
death of slavery in the United States. Slaveholders, too, looked outside their borders for
lands they might use to expand their cotton empire and perpetuate the Southern way of
life.

While slaveholders worried that the cultural identity of the South was in peril,
Delany saw the influence of slavery corroding the North. In 1852, he published *The
Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United
States*, his first serious investigation of emigration as a possibility for blacks, and
arguably his most eloquent. He admitted that recommending a voluntary exodus “from
their native homes, is a new feature in our history,” but the audacity of the proposal made
it all the more attractive to Delany. His impatience with the intransigent methods of
Garrison and Douglass, whom he referred to in *The Condition* as the “zealous orthodox,”
turned to intolerance. The abolitionism of the 1830s and 1840s had gotten African
Americans nowhere. Emigration offered blacks a chance to throw off the pervasive
oppression of whites, escape the burden of “consummate poverty,” work toward their
own elevation, and in doing so demonstrate to America and the world the utter falseness
of black inferiority. “A new country, and new beginning,” he concluded, “is the only
true, rational, politic remedy for our disadvantageous position.”

In order to justify black emigration, Delany constructed the image of a cohesive

36 Ibid., 175.

37 Ibid. James Campbell notes that Delany used “language suffused with the contemporary rhetoric of
Manifest Destiny.” See Campbell, “Redeeming the Race: Martin Delany and the Niger Valley Exploring
American identity built upon white superiority. Blurring the differences between South and North, slave and free, helped him paint a picture of ubiquitous oppression. In the wake of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, he continually pressed home the point that all blacks, not just slaves in the South, were under the thumb of whites. “We are slaves in the midst of freedom,” he said of free blacks, “waiting patiently and unconcernedly—indifferently and stupidly, for masters to come and lay claim to us.” The anti-slavery laws in the North were of no help, certainly not after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Freedmen were at the mercy of the “General Government” and economically dependent on white society.38

Yet he coupled his condemnation of the United States with wistful, sometimes tragic descriptions of a true homeland for African Americans. “Our common country is the United States,” he wrote. “Here were we born, here raised and educated; here are the scenes of childhood;... and the sacred graves of our departed fathers and mothers, and from here will we not be driven by any policy that may be schemed against us.”39 The rhetorical strategy allowed Delany to paint emigration as a choice, not a forced retreat. Equally, he wanted to provide African Americans with a sense of their American past and their ownership of that past, so he devoted chapters to subjects like the “Claims of Colored Men and Women as Citizen Members of the Community” and “Colored American Warriors.”

The byproduct of such language was the articulation of a subtle American

38 Delany, Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny, 171-173.

39 Ibid., 74.
nationalism, embedded though it was within the unprecedented vision *The Condition* offered of a new black nation. “We are Americans,” he declared, with “natural rights,” “natural claims upon the country—claims common to all others of our fellow citizens.”

By linking citizenship to the nation’s founding ideals, rather than its corrupted identity in the 1850s, Delany spun emigration as a nationalistic endeavor. If the white imposition of “unjust laws” prevented African Americans from exercising the rights guaranteed to all Americans, they would simply try to exercise them someplace else. Emigration represented the fulfillment of their citizenship, not a rejection of it. Under this philosophy, Delany dedicated *The Condition* to “the American People, North and South, By Their Most Devout and Patriotic Fellow Citizen.”

Delany’s chosen destination for African Americans was Central America. Despite his attraction to the “civilization and enlightenment of Africa,” he ruled out emigration to Liberia. The American Colonization Society’s “deep laid scheme” to colonize Africa had created a faux nation with a “mere dependence of Southern slaveholders, and American Colonizationists.” Central America, on the other hand, contained “precisely the same people as ourselves.” Whites of the “pure European race” were in the minority, and there had existed, according to Delany, no history of legislated racial oppression. Best of all, in Central America the “commercial prospects” for emigres, and subsequently their

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 33.
42 Ibid., 186.
43 Ibid., 195.
potential for self elevation, were “without a parallel on the coast of the new world.” In language startlingly similar to that used by the *confederados* more than a decade later, Delany extolled the richness of the land and the bounty of its resources—everything from “grains, fruits, and vegetables,” to “Merino sheep” to the “mineral productions” of the region. Linking the elevation of the race to economic advancement, he used *The Condition* to preach the gospel of agrarian capitalism and entrepreneurship. “Go not with an anxiety of political aspirations,” he told his readers. “Go with the fixed intention of cultivating the soil, entering into the mechanical operations, keeping of shops, carrying on merchandise, trading on land and water, improving property—in a word, to become the producers of the country, instead of the consumers.” He held faith in the power of economic uplift, a philosophy he would remain true to, even as his political views changed over the years.

Delany also clung to the view that only an African American of “pure and unmixed” black descent could effectively lead the emigration movement. “The elevation of the colored man,” he reiterated in *The Condition*, “can only be completed by the elevation of the pure descendants of Africa.” It was a longstanding belief amplified by his professional rivalry with Frederick Douglass, but one he had taken to repeating in particularly shrill tones ever since Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* earlier that same year. Stowe’s best-selling novel contained within its story everything

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*44* Ibid., 194.

*45* Ibid., 200.

*46* Ibid., 194.
about the abolitionist movement that irked Delany, including the story’s resolution, which
sent the book’s protagonists to a colony in Liberia. While other abolitionists, including
Douglass and Garrison, were praising Stowe, Delany refused to join the chorus. “In all
due respect and deference to Mrs. Stowe,” he protested, “I beg leave to say that she knows
nothing about us, ‘the Free Colored people of the United States,’ neither does any other
white person.”

Delany channeled this energy into his own novel, entitled *Blake; or, the Huts of
America*. *Blake* was a fictional response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which he wrote over the
course of the 1850s. *Blake*, which appeared in serialized format in 1859, told a story in
two parts of Henrico Blacus (also known as Henry Blake), a Cuban-born black man who
worked in Mississippi with his enslaved wife. Blake’s adventures began when, without
his knowledge, his wife was sold to another master relocating to Cuba. Enraged, Blake
embarked upon an epic journey through the American South, instructing the slaves he
encountered to prepare for a hemisphere-wide coordinated rebellion against their white
oppressors. In the second half of the book, Blake took passage to Cuba, tracked down his
wife, and arranged her freedom. Still bent on eradicating slavery, he traveled the Atlantic
world orchestrating the union of black people from Africa to the Caribbean.

Modeled after the author, the character Blake represented everything Uncle Tom
did not—he was educated, righteous, militant, and empowered by his suffering. Blake’s
actions, even his physical description, reflected the language of Delany’s 1850s racial

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48 The final six chapters, among others, have been lost, so the conclusion of Blake’s story is unknown.
discourse. “Henry was a black—a pure Negro—handsome, manly, and intelligent,” the book explained. With Blake operating in the story as the author’s fictional stand-in, the novel functioned as a political soap box atop which Delany shouted his prescriptions for black America. First and foremost, he wanted revolution. *Blake* cut its sharpest difference with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with its unabashed embrace of violence, in this case a unified, trans-national slave revolt. “You know my errand among you,” Blake reminded his compatriots in Cuba as the story culminates, “I am for war—war upon the whites.” Armed rebellion was the ultimate expression of black agency and illustrated just how far Delany had come from his *Mystery* and *North Star* days advocating moral suasion.

*Blake* suffered from many flaws: Delany was no great writer of fiction, and the book was more a policy statement than art. Nonetheless, the book revealed the trajectory of Delany’s thinking as the sectional crisis began to boil. He saw all the signs pointing to the continued dominance of white over black. Because he conceived of the story in 1853 but took six years to produce it, *Blake* commented on all of the turbulent events of the 1850s, from the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 to the *Dred Scott* decision three years later. The Supreme Court’s decision in *Dred Scott* allowed slaveholders to legally take their slaves anywhere in the United States. For Delany, it accelerated the erosion of sectional differences, just as the Fugitive Slave Act had done eight years prior. He worried, too, that the Southern dream of annexing Cuba was close to being realized. One of the reasons he set the second half of *Blake* in Cuba was to present the image of an


50 Ibid., 290.
independent, black-run Cuba to counter the specter of a slaveholding Cuba entering the Union. The implication, as Robert Levine has pointed out, is that Blake can justifiably “fight off white annexation though black ‘annexation,’ and oppose white filibusterism through black filibusterism.” Any sense of hypocrisy, however, was lost on Delany. He associated none of the artifice or injustice of white imperialism with his own plans for the emigration of African Americans, because he imagined a shared political bond between all people of African descent. His racial nationalism had taken on imperial shades of a black manifest destiny.

As he wrote Blake, what remained consistent in Delany’s mind, in spite of the political changes taking place, was his unshakeable belief in the destiny of the race. As one character pontificated, “The foundation of all great nationalities depends as a basis upon three elementary principles: first, territorial domain; second, population; third, staple commodities as a source of national wealth.” Blake was an instruction manual in the form of a serial novel, designed to give blacks a “great nationality” in the Western Hemisphere. Rebellion or emigration would provide African Americans with a homeland in which thrift, hard work, and improving the land would result in the elevation of the race. By the time the Anglo-African Magazine started publishing Blake in 1859, Delany had given up on political reform in the United States, but he recited the antebellum American economic creed religiously.

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52 Delany, Blake, 262.
In the end of the 1850s, Delany’s thinking on Africa had shifted, perhaps because his dreams of emigration to Central America had come to naught, perhaps because raising money for an African venture looked more promising. Recent travelogs published by missionaries hinted at the potential for cotton production in West Africa, which in turn had opened the coffers of the American Colonization Society and the federal government to fund a colony in the Niger Valley.\textsuperscript{53} Driven by the need to get some sort of emigration program off the ground, as well as his own scientific curiosity, Delany set out on an exploratory journey to Yorubaland with the financial support of colonization societies, including his old nemesis, the ACS. (No abolitionists gave him any money.) In December 1859, Delany signed a treaty with local chiefs of the Abeokuta paving the way for a settlement of African Americans in the Niger Valley. In the early months of the following year, Delany composed the \textit{Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party} detailing his observations of the land and the future of black emigres in West Africa.

Like \textit{Condition} and \textit{Blake} before it, the \textit{Official Report} spoke of the elevation of the race in prophetic language, conditioned only on the essential step of improving the land and sustaining an industry. He reiterated, nearly verbatim, the formula for nation building that Blake’s companion defined in the novel, citing the three components of land, people, and “a great staple production.”\textsuperscript{54} He would advertise the same formula again in South Carolina during Reconstruction. Cotton, he promised, “the great commodity of the world,” was the answer. Delany, like the \textit{confederados}, became

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\textit{James Campbell}, “Representing the Race,” \textit{Middle Passages}, 76-78. \\
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\textsuperscript{53} James Campbell, “Representing the Race,” \textit{Middle Passages}, 76-78.

enchanted with the notion of expanding cotton production to the tropics. The *Official Report* lists all the reasons why the African cotton industry would replace American cotton—cheaper land, cheaper labor, a frost-free climate, multiple harvests per year—foreshadowing the very logic the *confederado* advance agents used in their travel diaries to sell Southerners on Brazil after the war. But if Delany worshiped at the same commercial altar as white Southern planters, he did so with the purpose of realizing a dream of black nationalism, or as he famously put it “*Africa for the African race, and black men to rule them.*”  

Only abroad could African Americans become part of the “ruling element.” When the eyes of the world turned to America after the guns at Fort Sumter fired, Delany’s gaze remained fixed on Africa.

The Making of a Southerner:

In 1861, Delany told James Holly, a fellow black abolitionist, “My duty and destiny are in Africa. I cannot, I *will not* desert her.” With the outbreak of the war, though, his African emigration scheme faced a nearly insurmountable challenge. Most of Delany’s patrons, sympathetic to the plight of African Americans, saw the conflict between North and South as a war for emancipation. Many of his British backers, whom he had attracted because of their interest in securing a source of cotton outside the

55 Ibid., 351-352, 358.


American South, soured on the colony in the Niger Valley when they learned war had 
broken out in Yorubaland. With the Confederacy embargoing its own cotton exports, the 
British needed alternative cotton markets that were stable and readily developed. As late 
as 1862, Delany defended his planned settlement in Africa, but when Lincoln’s 
Emancipation Proclamation took effect on New Year’s Day, 1863 and the United States 
government recognized the liberty of African Americans, support for colonization died 
out.

Events had conspired to show Delany that the destiny of his race, whether he liked 
it or not, lay within America’s borders. In fact, that destiny appeared to be unfolding 
without him. After collapse of his Niger Valley venture, he returned to the United States 
in 1863 and quickly joined the Union cause. He began actively recruiting black men for 
Rhode Island and Connecticut heavy artillery as well as for the 54th Massachusetts, one of 
the first all-black regiments in the Union army and the unit his son had joined in March. 
In December, he penned a letter to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton advising him that 
further recruitment of black troops relied on “the Agency of intelligent competent black 
men,” and recommended himself for the job. He felt invested enough in the Union cause 
that in 1864 he moved his family back to the United States, from Canada to Wilberforce, 
Ohio. In February 1865, Delany met with President Lincoln at the White House and 
urged him to authorize mustering a black army commanded by black officers to march 
into the heart of the Confederacy. With the Confederacy already on its knees, it is 
doubtful Lincoln endorsed Delany’s plan wholesale. He did arrange a meeting between 
Delany and Stanton. Stanton, in turn, made Delany a major and the highest ranking black
officer in the Union Army.

In August 1865, the Union Army gave Delany a chance to work with freedmen on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. The offer, a position in the local Freedman’s Bureau as “assistant subassistant commissioner” was not flattering, but he accepted. He remained in the South for the next twenty years. His tenure in South Carolina revealed the scope of the revolution transforming Southern society, and illuminated the complicated impact of the war on his philosophies. In one sense, the war was a philosophical watershed for Delany, a great divide between his commitment to emigration before the war and his determination to rebuild the South after the peace. Taking a more expansive view, though, the result of the Union victory that brought Delany to the South represented the logical culmination of a lifetime spent searching for a proper home for his people. The South, for the eminently practical reason that blacks already lived there, had eclipsed Africa in Delany’s mind as the future home of African Americans. And unlike the North, the prodigious numbers of freedman in the South meant their political clout would be undeniable. All the Southern black population lacked was solid economic footing.

Once on Hilton Head, Delany wasted little time in implementing his vision for the Black South. He published seven articles for the Sea Islands paper *New South* delineating the economic needs of the region and imploring whites and blacks to work together. Further progress for his race and for the economy as a whole relied on continued government facilitation of an integrated labor force. In his final essay, “Prospects of the Freedmen of Hilton Head,” he argued that political economy represented “the leading
feature of this great question of the elevation of the negro.”58 Land would crucially enhance the fortunes of the South. He estimated that freedmen ought to receive small lots, between 20 and 40 acres, from among the ample amounts of uncultivated state land. With this redistribution, freedmen farmers would constitute an entirely new market, “a new source of consumption of every commodity in demand in free civilized communities.” In other words, the economic opportunity of the postwar South lay in the massive demand for goods that would arise overnight if freedmen were made farmers. “Blacks,” he promised, “are great consumers.”59

Political events in the state were outpacing him, however. Determined to maintain white rule, white South Carolinians enacted a new state constitution that called for the direct election of a governor by white male voters. Blacks were not granted suffrage. In October James Lawrence Orr, a former member of the Confederate Congress, won the gubernatorial election. He took office November 29. With the state government in his hands, African Americans had few places to turn for help other than the Freedman’s Bureau and Delany quickly became a leader in community. His focus continued to be economic elevation. Setting aside the call for civil rights—“great principles will take care of themselves,” he breezed—he repeatedly cited the benefits of giving freedmen landed property.60 “There are too many political economists among the old leading slaveholders,” he predicted, to imagine they would not see the wisdom in his

58 Delany, “Prospects of the Freedmen of Hilton Head,” originally published in the local newspaper but reprinted in Delany, _A Documentary Reader_, 396.

59 Ibid., 399.

60 Ibid.
economic prescriptions.

Federal politics foiled Delany’s plan. President Johnson assured Southern whites that the government would return all confiscated land and property to its original owners, a reversal of Union General William Tecumseh Sherman’s field order in January 1865 awarding land in forty acre plots to former slaves. Ever adaptable, Delany revamped his vision for the postwar South and plied his ideas, now dressed in new clothes, to his fellow South Carolinians. The key to economic resuscitation, he argued, was a relationship he termed the “triple alliance.” “The restoration of the industrial property of the South is certain,” he predicted, as long as an efficient, amicable relationship existed between capital, land, and labor.61 Southern whites had the land, Northern whites could supply the capital, and blacks were the perfect source of labor—that, after all, had been their role in the economy as slaves. He had touted this formula before, in The Condition and other emigrationist speeches on colony formation, though always within an exclusively black framework. The postwar South resembled a colony; it was an opportunity for African Americans to build a new economy and society, but he envisioned the future of the region hinging on racial cooperation. The “triple alliance” was the simple and logical recipe for Southern recovery, and a plan that, however accommodating to whites, would provide freedmen with a means to gain status and leverage as a class.

Delany did not ignore the political inequities of freedmen completely. He wrote Andrew Johnson in July 1866 to lobby for black suffrage, arguing that enfranchisement

was essential “to secure and perpetuate the integrity of the Union.” But curiously when it came to electing blacks to political office, he took an inconsistent position. In 1867, when members of the Republican Party contemplated nominating a black man for vice president, Delany wrote a letter addressed to Henry Highland Garnet and published in the New York Tribune, protesting the suggestion. Blacks should not seek public office, he explained, “till we at least should be ready and qualified.” He continued, “Our enemies would desire no heavier nor stronger club with which to break the heads of our friends and knock out our brains than this.” Delany wanted freedmen devoted to elevation through economic improvement; he considered agitation for political rights a secondary priority. When Andrew Johnson repeatedly objected to Republican legislation, including bills funding the Freedmen’s Bureau, most civil rights activists decried the President. Delany admonished them not to “misjudge the president, but believe, as I do, that he means to do right. He is interested, among those of others of his fellow-citizens, in the welfare of the black man.” This attitude was a dramatic turn for a man who, seven years earlier, was so certain that white prejudice would perpetuate the oppression of blacks interminably that he had purchased land in Africa in order to lead his race out of the United States. But, having determined the promised land for blacks was the South, he fell back on his longstanding belief that salvation for his race lay in economic uplift, and that

62 Delany to Andrew Johnson, July 25, 1866, in Delany, A Documentary Reader, 407.


64 Ibid.

meant racial cooperation. Delany decided that the price he, and by proxy all African Americans, would pay for the revival of his faith in the American South was an unquestioning will to work with the Southern white establishment.

Delany had reason to be optimistic. In 1870, four years after Radical Republicans has wrested control of Reconstruction from Johnson, the states ratified the 15th Amendment which gave the franchise to African American males. With this constitutional guarantee of their political rights, Delany turned his attention to the civic education of the freedman. The government had carried out its obligation; freedmen now had to learn theirs. “The new era upon us, requires new duties among a new political element,” he advised.\(^66\) Slaves owed nothing to the state, for they received nothing from it, but once emancipated and with his rights acknowledged, freedmen had to “make themselves masters of political science.” “University Pamphlets,” his articles for the New National Era, delineated these responsibilities. Delany anchored the concept of citizenship in its classical Roman heritage, tracing the historical evolution of concepts like civil rights and constitution from antiquity to their American incarnations. In all cases, political engagement was crucial. “No people can be free,” he cautioned, “who do not themselves constitute as essential part of the ruling element of the country in which they live.”\(^67\) But with their right to vote inked on the Constitution itself, Delany believed they had won the hardest battle.

As Radical Reconstruction waned after 1872, Delany’s patience with the party of

\(^{66}\) Delany, “University Pamphlets,” in Levine, ed., A Documentary Reader, 423

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 418.
Lincoln wore thin. Bad government and the mismanagement of Reconstruction were imped ing the progress of the race. True, the Republicans had won some significant victories for the party and for freedmen. They effectively seized control of the government in 1866 and overrode Johnson’s frequent vetoes, subsequently passing important civil rights legislation. When Grant won the White House in 1868, Republican dominance was assured for four more years. Still, even before Grant’s election African Americans had suffered setbacks in national and state politics that belied the legislative triumphs. White Southern conservatives had regained control of states like Georgia and Virginia. In December 1868, the Freedmen’s Bureau shut down, ending Delany’s political connection to the Republicans. Despite the passage of the three major Reconstruction Amendments, the Republican focus on black civil liberties eroded during the second Grant administration and widespread corruption tainted their control of the former Confederacy.

At first, Delany grew disenchanted with the Republicans. Then he grew to despise them and their corrupt allies, a hatred that encompassed the full scope of his identity as a Southern black. He called them “gamblers, and even pick-pockets, ‘hangers on’ and ‘bummers. I am particularly speaking of the whites.... a large part of those most active were of the lowest grade of Northern society, negro-haters at home, who could not have been elected to any position of honor or trust.”  

Delany’s acrimony may have also stemmed from his longstanding professional rivalry with Douglass. The black

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68 Delany to Frederick Douglass, August 14, 1871, printed in the New National Era, August 31, 1871, in Delany, A Documentary Reader, 432.
community, and the white community when they cared, still looked to Douglass as the ultimate authority in matters of race and African American rights. Delany launched his diatribe against Northern white politicians in an open letter written to Douglass, who remained a staunch Republican. In taking on Douglass, he fell back on the same chestnut of racial purity that littered his 1850s discourse. “In no appointment requiring qualification by culture, in and out of Washington, is there a pure black man or woman to be found, while many such applications have been made, but always rejected,” he complained. And then, delivering a thinly veiled shot at Douglass himself, he excoriated the favoritism shown to mulattoes: “Their more favored brethren of mixed blood have received all the places of honor, profit, and trust, intended to represent the race.”

In demonizing the Republicans and their allies, Delany found himself in the curious company of white redeemers and Democratic conservatives. Their aim was the removal of invasive federal control of the South and the reestablishment of white rule. Delany, on the other hand, had convinced himself that Republican government and Northern interference was hampering the elevation of the freedmen. Regardless of motive, Delany became, like Southern Democrats, like pro-secessionists, like the confederados, an advocate for regional autonomy.

In 1874, Delany split with the Republicans in South Carolina for good, throwing his support behind a coalition of whites and blacks fed up with the widespread corruption of the past four years. Calling themselves the Independent Republicans, part of the same political movement as the national Liberal Republican Party, which had put forth Horace

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69 Ibid., 438.
Greeley to challenge Grant two years prior, they rewarded Delany’s endorsement by nominating him for lieutenant governor. Delany accepted, joining John Thompson Green on the ticket, a white judge on South Carolina’s third circuit. (It is possible he had forgotten the 1867 letter he wrote to Henry Highland Garnet opposing black office seekers, but more likely he felt uniquely qualified among his race to run.) The Independent Republicans advertised a platform of racial cooperation, and Delany toed the party line. In his speech at the nominating convention, he pledged “all of the intelligence, all of the powers of intellect that I possess, all of the integrity of character, to bring about between the two peoples in this State, black and white, those relations that shall tend to the promotion of each other’s mutual welfare.”

Two days later Delany criticized the Republican Party for sustaining a “constant hostility between whites and blacks.”

Green and Delany lost the election the to Republican Daniel Chamberlain, but the roughly forty-six percent of the vote the mixed-race ticket garnered, especially among the white population, heartened Delany. Two subsequent years of racial strife and corruption under Chamberlain’s government, convinced him that only black-white political cooperation could free South Carolina from the tyranny of Republican rule. On a trip to New York City in March 1875, Delany delivered an address in Irving Hall entitled “The South and Its Foes,” offering a sunny forecast for race relations in the South so long as Northerners kept out of the way. The New-York Daily Tribune reported on the speech the

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70 Delany, Speech to the Independent Republican Nominating Convention, printed in the News and Courier, October 5, 1874, in Delany, A Documentary Reader, 443.

71 “Green and Delany,” News and Courier, October 7, 1874, in Delany, A Documentary Reader, 445.
next day, succinctly delivering Delany’s thesis that “the political elements of the South were not understood at the North.” Most Northern states had disfranchised their minority black populations. In the South, however, African Americans were populous enough to constitute a viable economic and political demographic; in South Carolina they outnumbered whites more than four to three. Cooperation between Southern whites and Southern blacks had to occur. “The two races must dwell together. They were labor and capital, each necessary to the other, each useless without the other.”

Over the previous decade Delany had inexorably adopted a Southern identity, one he consummated in the election of 1876 by endorsing the former Confederate General Wade Hampton for governor of South Carolina. In spite of his family history of slaveholding, Hampton promised to respect the rights of African Americans in order to lure at least a few black voters into the Democratic camp. He also vowed to rid the state of corruption. Delany chose to believe him on both counts. Noting that white voters had trusted him enough to vote for his ticket in 1874, now “for the good of all the people of both races,” Delany felt he ought to “take them at their word, and aid them in a similar effort in 1876.” The allure was unmistakable; if Hampton kept his word, the message of racial cooperation and economic uplift that fueled Delany’s faith in the South would have a proponent in the governor’s office. All that summer leading up to the election, Delany

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73 Ibid.

74 Delany, “Delany for Hampton,” printed in the News and Courier, September 26, 1876, in Delany, A Documentary Reader, 455.
publically campaigned for Hampton and the Democrats.

Wade Hampton III was the picture of Southern gentility. On the eve of the Civil War, he owned prosperous cotton plantations in South Carolina’s Low Country and sugar plantations in Louisiana, as well as 3000 slaves to work them. He had argued against secession in then 1850s, but fought for the Confederacy anyway, rising to the rank of Lieutenant General. He was one of only two cavalry officers in the entire Confederacy to rise that high, and the highest ranking officer in the state. He returned after the war to find his home destroyed, his slaves freed, and his finances in dire straits. Yet his record won him admirers. By 1865 he had become so popular that white South Carolineans attempted to elect him governor over his own protests. Hampton instructed his supporters not to vote for him.

After witnessing a succession of purportedly corrupt Republican administrations, Hampton decided South Carolina’s government had to be redeemed by white Democrats. Former slaves and Republican carpetbaggers could not be trusted to lead the state responsibly. Like the other men of his station, Hampton wanted South Carolina back in the care of the planters, since, with or without their antebellum wealth, the Southern gentry were best capable of caring for the people of South Carolina. To defeat Chamberlain and the Republicans, he entered into a fragile political alliance with the state’s poor white population, led by a former Confederate from the state’s Piedmont region named Martin Gary. Maintaining the support of both Delany and Gary was a balancing act for Hampton, since Gary was a virulent racist. He claimed that the “irrepressible conflict between free labor and slave labor,” had morphed into “a conflict
between the Caucasian and African races.”75 Blaming their woes on the Republican government under Daniel Chamberlain, Gary and other white men turned to Hampton. Besides his war record, Hampton had made a name for himself among members and sympathizers of South Carolina’s Ku Klux Klan, the vigilante organization that terrorized blacks to maintain white supremacy. With the limited means available to him in the early 1870s, Hampton had set up a fund to defend the rights of an accused Klansman. Delany turned a blind eye to the Hampton-Gary coalition.

The gubernatorial campaign of 1876 was one of the dirtiest in South Carolina’s history—made all the more ironic because the paternalistic Hampton insisted he would restore honor to South Carolina. He ran as a moderate. Knowing he had to win at least a portion of the majority black vote, he told freedmen he would uphold black voting rights and their rights to education. While Hampton made extravagant promises, Martin Gary and other upcountry whites were leading local bands of white men and Democratic rifle clubs, called “red shirts,” in an effort to intimidate or coerce black voters. Taking his cue from Mississippi’s violent 1874 election, which brought Democrats back to power in that state, Gary calculated that Hampton would win if each white voter took responsibility for ‘controlling’ one black voter. That term translated into intimidation, coercion, or violence in order to ensure one less Republican vote was cast. Local papers urged him on: the Greenville Enterprise and Mountaineer produced the same arithmetic. “Every [black] who is induced to vote for Hampton reduces the formidable Republican majority,

and adds one to the cause of Redemption. Thus it acts with double force."

In response to the violent Democratic red shirts, Republican rifle clubs sprung up in opposition, and altercations between the two factions were common, often bloody, and revealed the deep political and racial rifts that split the state despite Delany’s entreaties for racial harmony. One incident occurred on July 4 in the township of Hamburg, an altercation between black militiamen, parading in celebration of Independence Day, and a couple white farmers seeking to pass through the parade route. Once safely away, the farmers filed a legal complaint against the black militia. Four days later a court ordered the black militia to surrender their arms while white vigilante bands gathered to enforce the decision. When the black militia refused, a battle ensued. Two men, one from each side, were killed and a number of black militiamen were taken captive. Of these men, the red shirts summarily executed five.

In the midst of the violence and seemingly oblivious to it, Delany campaigned on Hampton’s behalf. In an article printed in the Charleston News and Courier entitled “Delany for Hampton,” he explained to the public, “I have then but one line of duty left me, and that is, to aid that effort which in my judgment best tends to bring about a union of the two races, white and black, (by black I mean all colored people,) in one common interest in the State.” He won over few black voters with this pitch. On October 14, 1876, he delivered a speech to a largely black audience on Edisto Island off South

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77 Delany, “Delany for Hampton,” News and Courier, September 26, 1876, in Levine, A Documentary Reader, 453. (italics his.)
Carolina’s coast that was swiftly met with derision and anger from the crowd. For a time, hecklers drummed him off the stage. Catcalls from some members of the audience referred to Delany as “the dam nigger democrat.” When quiet was restored, he put aside his prepared remarks and admonished the crowd for its discourtesy. As an educated, sophisticated black man who had traveled through a white man’s world, Delany had faced his share of rebukes, but none, he claimed, more insulting than what the residents of Edisto had delivered to him that day. He reminded them of his credentials, that he had been an abolitionist and a major in the Union Army, the highest ranking black officer in the nation. Then he warned them that Reconstruction as everyone knew it was coming to an end. The political winds had shifted over the past decade. Fatigue with Republican politics had set in among voters North and South. Former slaves could no longer look to the federal government or the Republican Party for aid. They would have to be realists. Their hope, Delany counseled, was through cooperation with their former masters, starting with the Democrats and Wade Hampton.

The members of the audience that heckled Delany off the stage represented the balance of African American opinion of the Democratic Party. Those freedmen that did defect to the Democratic fold faced social ostracism from within the black community or worse. In some cases, wives left their husbands if they contemplated voting for Hampton. Other black Democrats were beaten. At the polls, black women assaulted black men who had joined Hampton’s red shirts, striking them and tearing the red shirts from their

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78 “Politics on Edisto Island,” News and Courier (Charleston), 16 October 1876.

79 Ibid.
One freedman testified that black women “whipped my little girl at the school, and threatened to whip my wife at church.” Delany himself was specifically targeted. Two days after the Edisto Island debacle, someone mistook a black schoolteacher for Delany and fired gunshots at him.

Rampant voter fraud on both sides marred election day. In two counties, Edgefield and Laurens, the votes counted far exceeded the number of registered voters. In vain, Governor Chamberlain called in federal troops to enforce fair ballot box procedures, but there were too few troops to effectively oversee all the voting sites. The Republicans succeeding in turning out a large vote, but Martin Gary’s brutal tactics counteracted the Chamberlain supporters. Hampton took much of the Piedmont region; Chamberlain won the Low Country. In a statistical dead heat at the end of the day, both sides declared victory.

The confusion in South Carolina matched the scene in national politics, where Rutherford Hayes and Samuel Tilden disputed the Presidential election returns from three Southern states, including South Carolina. When rumor reached Hampton that President Grant might send troops into South Carolina, in part to determine the status of the electoral votes and in part to clean up the gubernatorial mess, he wired his old friend John Mosby, a confidant of Grant, to urge the President to reconsider. Mosby relayed the message, but the communication became public, embroiling Hampton in a press story

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80 See “Testimonies as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Election of 1876,” in Drago, *Hurrah for Hampton!*, 57-94.

81 Edward Henderson, Abbeville County, “Testimonies,” in *Hurrah for Hampton!*, 68.
which took him to task for consorting with a scalawag. Hampton beat a hasty retreat, claiming if he had known Mosby’s reputation he never would have contacted him. The incident, while minor, illustrates the uncompromising nature of the electorate, as well as the lack of control Hampton maintained over his own constituency.  

Delany discovered the emptiness in the Democratic campaign promises the hard way. As part of the Compromise of 1877, which gave Hayes the White House in exchange for home rule in the South, Hampton was awarded the governorship of South Carolina. Delany’s payoff for his aid during the campaign was a trial judgship. Two years later, as the election of 1878 approached—the same period when Hampton advised black voters, “the best friends of the colored men are the old slaveholders...”—the Democratic administration forced out Delany. With Reconstruction ended and government for white men reinstated, Delany had outlived his usefulness to Hampton, the Democrats, and the white South.  

Delany wagered everything on Hampton and the Democrats, and lost. His vision of a multi-racial Southern society bound harmoniously together by the economic relationship of land, labor, and capital had shattered on the political reality of white supremacy. In lending his name to the cause of men like Hampton and Gary, he bargained away the political capital he had spent a lifetime accruing. He had become an Apostate to South Carolina’s freedmen and a liability to white Southerners, the two groups he had tried to reconcile. After 1878, he spent the final few years of his life

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advocating emigration to Africa yet again. In 1879, he published his final book, *Principia of Ethnology*, which implied his failures in South Carolina were an inevitable setback, an unfortunate chapter in the Creator’s grand design for the races. African Americans, he charged, would only realize their true destiny in Africa, where “untrammeled in its native purity, the race is a noble one.” With his ambitions in the South thwarted, he reverted to the race-based nationalism that he originally articulated in the 1850s. Cooperation between the races was no longer advisable or even possible if the black race were to progress. “The regeneration of the African race can only be effected by it’s own efforts,” he wrote, “the efforts of its own self, whatever aid may come from other sources; and it must in this venture succeed.”\(^{83}\) Though few people paid attention, he spent his final five years seeking fruitlessly the means and the money to get back to Africa. He died in Xenia, Ohio in 1885, not yet an African and no longer a Southerner.

CHAPTER 4: GEORGE WASHINGTON CABLE

The only way to make the South a good place for white men to come to is to make it a good place for black men to stay in.
—George Washington Cable, “Southern Struggle for Pure Government,” 1890

In 1881, the work of New Orleans author George Washington Cable had begun to attract national attention. A good portion of it was negative. Cable had garnered some notoriety, particularly among the Creole population of the South, because of the progressive themes within in his first novel, The Grandissimes (1879), and his history of New Orleans (1881). That he held a deep love for the South was apparent in the novel and the historical study, but his critics frowned on his ideas about race relations, the future of the South, the memory of the Civil War, and Creole culture.

His controversial ideas had won him friends as well. Of his admirers, none was more influential than Mark Twain. Cable first crossed paths with Twain in New Orleans in 1881, serving as a host and tour guide to the older author, who was in Louisiana completing Life on the Mississippi. Twain thought Cable the perfect companion in New Orleans and had high regard for his writing. In his memoir, he named Cable “the South’s finest literary genius” and a “masterly delineator of its interior life and history.”1 In 1884, Twain formed another connection with Cable. He hired the same publicizing agent that

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1 Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 251.
Cable used to book lecture engagements, Major J. B. Pond, in order to help him market his latest novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He then asked Cable to join him on a speaking circuit across the northern states, modeled after the kind of tour Charles Dickens inaugurated in the late 1860s. They billed it as the “Twins of Genius Tour.”

Pond booked the two authors at 103 engagements from November 5, 1884 through February 28, 1885. Taking turns on stage, the “twins of genius” read bits from their various works. Cable almost exclusively selected episodes from *Dr. Sevier*. Twain, far the superior showman (he performed rather than read, having committed the text to memory), excerpted a couple humorous moments between Huck and Jim from *Huck Finn*, followed by some of his older stories like “The Jumping Frog” and “The Golden Arm.” While many of the reviews were favorable, audiences had lukewarm reactions to the first half of the tour. Twain described the first few weeks as “ghastly.”² The two authors reconvened after the Christmas holiday ready to make some alterations to the show, and subsequently the tour began to attract more people and greater interest. Two things had changed. Twain had replaced the previous excerpts from *Huck Finn* with a reading from the book’s conclusion, in which Tom Sawyer and Huck plot to free Jim (who was, in fact, already free). Audiences loved the story. Second, Cable had drawn more attention to himself when, in January, the *Century*, a periodical run out of New York City, published an article by Cable titled “The Freedmen’s Case in Equity.” The article argued that the South had to eradicate the racist assumptions with which it had

reconstructed its society and give blacks the civil liberties they deserved.

The response to Cable’s article ranged from esteem to outrage. The Southern press decried it. Newspapers from his home city disowned him. A flurry of angry letters from Southern readers caused the Century to publish a response in a subsequent issue: an essay called “In Plain Black and White,” by Henry Grady, journalist and editor of the Atlanta Constitution, and a preeminent advocate for New South policies. Grady flatly refuted Cable’s call for equal rights. In the Northern newspapers, the reaction to Cable’s piece was mixed. Some editorialized for and against Cable, and still more reported on the Southern reaction. The immediate outcome of all the coverage provided the tour with a much needed bump in publicity. Intrigued by such an unlikely source speaking out on behalf of African Americans, audiences turned out in greater numbers to hear a bona fide Southern intellectual. The “Twins of Genius” tour became overnight a traveling exhibition on the centrality of race relations to the relationship between North and South in the 1880s.

The long term ramifications of Cable’s essay and the “Twins of Genius” tour are harder to measure. If “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” sparked a dialogue in the print media, the show itself may have desensitized the audience to the issue. Twain’s newly chosen selection from Huck Finn, the staging of Jim’s “emancipation” by Huck and Tom, put a comic face on the problem of free blacks in American society and allowed Northern white audiences to applaud and walk away without much reflection.\(^3\)

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the same way, writing to his wife how successful the tour had become. Only once did his
mask of confidence in the Jim-Huck episode drop, when he told Cable after a
performance that “I am demeaning myself. I am allowing myself to be a mere buffoon. I
can’t endure it any longer.” For Cable, the freedman issue never subsided, in part
because the South never let him forget it. Former friends and neighbors ostracized him
when he returned home. City officials manipulated his property assessment in order to
raise his taxes, on top of which his bank called in the loans on his house. Cable moved
his family to Northampton, Massachusetts in 1885.

At first glance, Cable’s leaving the South resembles John Mosby’s departure from
Virginia. Unpopular politics and social exile in the wake of his controversial 1885 essay
were significant factors that drove him from New Orleans. But unlike Mosby, Cable had
contemplated moving north in the years preceding his unexpected debut in the politics of
race. In the 1860s, he had been a true believer in the South, serving in the Confederate
Army and defending the Southern cause. His disenchantment with traditional Southern
culture began to fester after the war ended, when his turn to a more intellectual life during
Reconstruction caused him to question many of the dogmas Southerners clung to
regarding secession, the Civil War, and slavery. He evolved into a champion of civil
liberties by the 1880s, not because of political expediency, as with Mosby, or racial
compromise, as with Delany, but out of a purely reasoned examination of the building
blocks of Southern culture. The justifications for slavery and secession did not stand up

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to his scrutiny. The post-Reconstruction push for segregation did not make sense either. Over time Southern vacillations between tired racial cliches and rhetoric empty of logic offended him. The South he dreamt of, that he imagined in his fiction and more explicitly in his non-fiction, blended moderate racial progressivism with an intellectual renaissance. He saw the two ideas as interdependent. “Where might not our beloved South be today,” he asked in 1885, if only Southerners had voluntarily let go of slavery. Where might it go hence, if it could rid itself of discriminatory laws? But when the South chose not to heed his advice, he deserted it for New England.

Birth of a Writer

Although New Orleans emerged from the Civil War in relatively better shape than many other Southern cities, most of its residents had never seen such desperate times as the immediate postwar period. High unemployment coupled with the rising costs of food and rent caught many New Orleans’ natives in a financial vice. The city was awash in a flood of impoverished veterans seeking work. One among them was George Washington Cable, recently a cavalry officer and former aide to Confederate generals, now an aspiring writer interested in social reform.

Where Cable’s penchant for reform came from is difficult to pinpoint, but his mother’s influence was undeniable. Rebecca Cable was not a Southerner by birth. She first met Cable’s father in Indiana, but her family came from Protestant New England

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stock and her Puritan instincts remained sharp throughout her life. She donated much of her time to the church. She frowned on the rakish habits that characterized the Creole lifestyle, including her husband’s periodic indulgence in drinking and smoking.⁶ As a mother, she balanced a light-hearted temperament with a firm emphasis on education and work. Judging by the sentiment and sheer volume of his correspondence with his mother, Cable adored her. “All I am, in mind, in morals, in social position, in attainments, or in any good thing, I owe mainly to my noble mother,” he wrote to her as a young man.⁷

For all her Puritan virtues, Rebecca was no abolitionist. She married Cable’s father (also named George Washington Cable), knowing full well she was joining an old Cavalier family originally from Virginia. When the economic crisis of 1837 ruined George Washington Cable Sr.’s business in Indiana, he and Rebecca took their family south to New Orleans, where they reacquired their fortune in the steamboat trade, purchased several slaves, and comfortably settled themselves into the rapidly gentrifying Garden District. Here, in 1844, in the South’s most diverse city, George Washington Cable, Jr. was born.

The competition between newly settled American families like the Cables, and families of French Louisianian descent who identified themselves as Creoles, complicated the race and class hierarchies in New Orleans society. In many ways, antebellum New Orleans resembled the Spanish and French colonies in the Caribbean and South America more than the cities of the American South. As in Cuba or Brazil, people of mixed racial

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⁶ Ibid.

heritage could become members of the middle or upper classes. Creoles commonly had some combination of European, Native American, and African blood in their ancestry and, what is more, admitted no hypocrisy in perpetuating a system of racial slavery in a mixed-race society. Culture and class trumped race in the Creole mind. When an influx of Americans followed the United States purchase of Louisiana in 1803, Creoles reacted with predictable hostility. As Protestant English-speaking immigrants sought to Americanize the city, French and Spanish Catholic Creoles tried to defend their cultural identity. New Orleans neighborhoods forming in the antebellum period reflected this cultural division. The Garden District where the Cables first moved was one of the Americain neighborhoods (as the Creoles called them), just southwest of the old French Quarter. The lines drawn between Creole and Americain figured as much in Cable’s later writings as his dual inheritance of Puritan and Cavalier traditions.

The wonder of childhood amid the exotic sights and sounds of mid-nineteenth century New Orleans came to a premature end with the death of Cable’s father in 1859 and the crisis of the Union in 1860. At age fifteen, he left school to support his family, finding employment first at the New Orleans customhouse and then as a clerk for various merchants. He followed the political events leading to Louisiana’s secession on January 26, 1861 from behind his desk. At the time, Cable’s feelings about the Union matched those of John Mosby. He believed secession a bad idea yet he supported the right to own slaves. Like Mosby, when faced with the choice of supporting the Union or the Confederacy, Cable chose the South. His family shared his loyalties. After New Orleans fell in 1862 and Union General Benjamin Butler ordered all residents to swear an oath of
loyalty to the United States, Cable’s mother and sisters refused. His sisters were expelled into the Confederacy. (His mother was granted a stay from banishment because she was too ill to travel.)

Cable himself enlisted in the 4th Mississippi cavalry in 1863. He was wounded the very next day, and again, quite seriously, in 1864. He recovered well enough to return to service, though not immediately to horseback. With his work experience and education, Cable was reassigned as a clerk to General Wirt Adams. Eventually, he made his way to the staff of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate cavalry commander famous for his military acumen and his brutal tactics.

The company of a lettered officer corps, “men of choice intelligence,” proved to be the perfect environment for Cable to stretch his intellectual wings. He had brought books with him to war, studying mathematics and Latin literally in the saddle. For the first time, Cable had a chance to take part in learned discourse with the other officers. “Always fond of debate,” he recalled, “I now began, at last, at nineteen, nearly twenty, to have thoughts and convictions of my own.” In an astonishing irony, Cable began to question the intellectual underpinnings of the Southern cause and the defense of slavery as he sat across the campfire from Nathan Bedford Forrest, the man who would found the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War. His early conclusions no doubt startled his comrades.

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8 Ibid., 16-17.


10 Bikle, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters, 20.

When word reached Forrest’s officers that Georgia was considering leaving the Confederacy late in the war, they asked Cable for his opinion on the rumor. “This shows me,” he told them, “that we are fighting to establish a scheme of government that will work our destruction as sure as we succeed. We shall go to pieces as soon as we are safe from our enemies.” When pressed further—“Then why do you fight for it?”—Cable’s reply was, perhaps inadvertently, more revealing: “Because I am a citizen of this government, a soldier by its laws, sworn into service and ordered, not to think, but to fight.” But he was thinking. The Confederacy was dying; slavery was dying with it; and there was no telling how the Reconstruction of the South would proceed.

Musing on the logic of secession did not shake Cable’s loyalty to the South. He reacted to the fall of the Confederacy with resignation, sadness, but also with characteristic resolve. “These are the ‘times that try men’s souls,’ and my constant prayer is that when ours are tried they may go through the ordeal as gold through the refiner’s fire.” he wrote his mother after Lee surrendered. Inevitably, the bile rose once or twice when defeat was still fresh. In his first few days back in New Orleans, Cable encountered a former Confederate general now dressed in the blues of the United States. He confronted him “boiling mad inside.” “Imagine my feelings!” he wrote later. “For three years I had been supposed to shoot when I saw that uniform.” The emotion was a rare break from equanimity. He escaped the temptation to sink into bitterness that afflicted

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12 Ibid.

13 Cable to Rebecca Cable, April 16, 1865 in Bikle, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters, 23.

14 Ibid., 24.
other Confederate veterans. In the summer of 1865, he set his mind on relieving the more immediate burdens of defeat, reuniting his family and, with only a pocketful of worthless Confederate scrip, finding money to support them.

Cable found work as a clerk in a cotton business through the patronage of an old family friend. He enjoyed it for a time, appreciating what he called “the beauties of the Science of trade,” but informed his mother of his intent on “striking higher, and trying for an honorable profession.” For a brief stint in 1866, he gave up his clerkship for a job as an engineer and surveyor for a railroad company, then joining an expedition into the swamps to chart a possible route along a tributary of the Red River. A bout of malaria foiled this career path, sending Cable back to New Orleans and, eventually, back to the cotton industry. The long convalescence and the desk job he occupied afterwards presented Cable with the time and opportunity to write, a hobby he had nurtured since childhood.

Cable’s early forays into writing were creative and wide-ranging. He composed poems, essays, sketches, and stories for a literary club he had joined. In 1870, he began submitting his work to the New Orleans Daily Picayune, published pseudonymously under the name “Drop Shot.” He was a true liberal artist, interested in everything around him. His columns touched on every aspect of New Orleans life, from the mundane to the controversial. Comments on tourism in the city or the natural history of New Orleans and the bayou did not raise any eyebrows. Dealing with hot button issues like segregation on the streetcars or the rights of women in Southern society required a more deft touch, and

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15 G. W. Cable to Rebecca Cable, January 26, 1866 in Bikle, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters, 31.
Cable was equal to the task. “Drop Shot” rarely, if ever, took firm moral positions. Cable employed humor and light irony in small doses. He developed recurring characters, like the fictional Felix Lazerus, who was the close companion of Drop Shot himself, and thus a perfect foil for satirical dialogue. His intent seemed less to engage issues than to poke at reform good naturedly now and then. “Drop Shot,” as Cable’s literary biographer John Cleman has argued, allowed him to “explore modes of satire” as he developed his “self-assured literary voice.” It was Cable’s training ground as a writer and thinker about the South.

Employment in the cotton firm was a decent living by postwar standards. Writing “Drop Shot” could not pay the bills, especially since his family had expanded when he married in 1869. Still, Cable loathed his bean-counting desk job so much that he quit and took up reporting with the New Orleans Picayune. Dispatched to cover a meeting of the Teacher’s Institute in New Orleans, Cable discovered to his dismay that the Republican organizers had seated black and white teachers together. Once his knee-jerk reaction to integration subsided, he witnessed over several days of observation, to his “great and rapid edification,” the evidence of functioning integration: “white ladies teaching Negro boys; colored women showing the graces and dignity of mental and moral refinement;... children and youth of both races standing in the same classes and giving each other peaceable, friendly, effective competition; and black classes, with black teachers, pushing intelligently up into the intricacies of high school mathematics.”


his assumptions about politics and race to the core. Integrated classrooms and, more
generally, education for all freedman was a signature plank in the Republican platform,
and the albatross Democrats hung around the necks of Reconstruction governments to
rally opposition. After reporting on the Teacher’s Institute, Cable started to ask more
questions of the party of the South and fewer of its conquerors.  

Cable kept at journalism, though as it turned out, the profession did not always
mix well with his Protestant reform ethic. Strict religious habits, what he described in
himself as “vexatious scrupulosity,” kept him from reviewing the local theater despite the
newspaper’s demands that he do so. Other pitfalls in his reporting career frustrated him.
Articles he wrote exposing the corruption behind the Louisiana lottery system resulted not
in the lottery’s downfall (as Cable hoped) but in the firing of the Picayune editor. In
truth, Cable was never that interested in journalism. “I had neither the faculty for getting
mere news, nor the relish for blurting out news for news’ sake after it was got,” he
complained. He resigned and returned to accounting in 1871.

While working at the cotton firm of William C. Black, a position he would fill for
the rest of the decade, Cable composed short stories and labored over his writing in his
spare time. Inspiration came from many places. Sometimes a story grew out of a “Drop
Shot” column. Often discussion among the clientele at the cotton firm pointed Cable’s

20 Cable to Rebecca Cable, August 20, 1872 in Bkle, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters, 44; Wilson,
Patriotic Gore, 551.
writing in new directions. Reconstruction politics and the hoped-for resuscitation of the cotton market were the hot topics among the businessmen who paid visits to Black & Co. Like the campsites of General Forrest, Cable “daily heard, in favor of pro-Southern principles and policies, the best that could be said by the best men who could say it.”

Through these dialogues, his opinions on the legacy of the war, emancipation, white-black relations, the need for labor, and the yoke of corrupt government began to coalesce into a reformist, anti-conservative vision for the South.

The problems inherent in the Reconstruction South struck Cable as more complicated than Southern white orthodoxy rendered them. His longstanding interest in Creole culture coupled with his growing curiosity about the history of race relations in Louisiana layered his opinions of Reconstruction politics and his hopes for a reinvented South. He grew increasingly convinced that “the Negro must share and enjoy in common with the white race the whole scale of public rights.” Those that impeded this “revolution” were “the South’s worst enemy.” In political terms, this belief soured Cable on the Democratic Party. “I saw more plainly than ever before,” he later recalled, “that the so-called Democratic party of the South was really bent on preserving the old order—minus slavery only.”

Cable’s dissatisfaction with the faulty, inconsistent reasoning of Southern whites and the moral ambiguity of Creole culture crept into the stories he wrote in the 1870s. Two compositions, “Sieur George” and “Bibi,” caught the attention of Edward King, a

22 Ibid., 11.
23 Ibid., 9-10.
journalist and literary talent scout for the New York magazine *Scribner’s Monthly*. King met Cable in New Orleans, where he was searching for material for an upcoming *Scribner’s* series on “The Great South.” Over dinner, Cable read King selections of his yet unpublished stories. “Sieur George” told of an *Americain* in New Orleans walking a path towards self-destruction as he falls prey to the indulgences of drinking, gambling, and Creole luxury. “Bibi” struck a more controversial note. Cable composed it out of “sheer indignation” after researching Louisiana’s old “Code Noir,” or slave code.24 In “Bibi,” the title character, an African prince sold into slavery, refuses to fully accept his subaltern position in Creole society. His haughtiness results in his tragic death. The stories thrilled King, who wholeheartedly endorsed them to his publisher. *Scribner’s* subsequently published “Sieur George.” By 1876, seven of his short stories were in print. In 1879, they were anthologized in his first book, *Old Creole Days*. Gilder rejected “Bibi” though. Upon its re-submission the following year, he rejected it again. So did William Dean Howells, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Howell’s office explained that the “unmitigatedly distressful effect of the story” forced them to refuse it.25 Cable was a full-fledged profession writer at last, but his most powerful work, the story that delved into the problem he perceived at the heart of Southern identity, had yet to reach an audience.

**Fiction & Dissent**

Local color fiction—the style of literature with which Cable is

24 Ibid., 12.

associated—became popular after the Civil War. Fundamentally it was a tribute to regional culture. In the highest examples of the form, the exactness of environmental detail brought to life local customs and dialects, art and architecture, even local flora and fauna. The sparkling backdrops to these stories often overshadowed the plot itself, which in many instances, especially in Southern local color, involved hackneyed romantic melodrama. (Much of Cable’s writing was guilty of this crime.) In the 1870s and 1880s American readers, North and South, adored local color, and magazines like Harpers, the Atlantic Monthly, Century, and Scribner’s catered to their taste. When the well ran dry, the editors searched for more writers. Scribner’s had expressly sent King to New Orleans to unearth more Southern local color. What they discovered in Cable was an author who turned the genre on its head as often as he followed its precepts.

The rise in the popularity of local color had much to do with the end of the Civil War. With secession quelled and slavery eradicated, the differences between the nation’s regions, which had caused so much bloodshed, were recast as benign curiosities. Swept up in the postwar culture of national reunion, some editors believed that local color stories could facilitate the friendship between North and South by, in a sense, re-introducing one region to the other. As one scholar has observed that, “Local-color fiction, therefore, involves a paradox or twofold project: to celebrate regional diversity while reassuring the reading public ‘that this need not mean division,’ that the differences were contained in a unified whole.”

In its dichotomous aim, local color—at least, the Southern variety—dovetailed perfectly with the mythology of the Lost Cause. Lost

26 Cleman, George Washington Cable Revisited, 21.
Causers offered their own paradox to the nation, arguing that the South had to fight for its independence, but with equal certainty claimed the South could never have won the war. The compelling drama within the mythology sprang from the competing notions of national triumph and regional sacrifice. Southern local color compounded the tragedy at the heart of the Lost Cause by immortalizing in fiction the agrarian glory of the Old South that the war had destroyed.

Other critics have read local color as a reaction to the modernization of America, another monumental change accelerated in by the war. The stories frequently portrayed bucolic, pre-industrial, rural settings through a comforting mist of nostalgia. The tension that existed in the stories often related to a simpler, small-town way of life beset by the perils of a coldly modernizing world. Local color was, as Eric Sundquist has noted, “a literature of memory.”27 Places where authentic pieces of the romanticized past still clung to existence were like anthropological treasure troves.

No writer of local color explored these settings with greater ease than Mark Twain. Consider his description, from Life on the Mississippi, of wandering the streets of New Orleans listening to the language of the locals: “I found the half-forgotten Southern intonations and elisions as pleasing to my ear as they had formerly been. A Southerner talks music.... And they have the pleasant custom—long ago fallen into decay in the North—of frequently employing the respectful ‘Sir.’ Instead of the curt Yes, and the

abrupt No, they say ‘Yes Suh’; ‘No Suh.’” Such observations, in which authors linked modernization with “decay” and charm with custom, were boilerplate in local color writing.

In Cable’s stories, reverence for the beautifully archaic mingled with an acknowledgment of a sinful past. He did not intend to distinguish between the pastoral beauty of antebellum days and the soulless machinery of modern society. Often his imagery produced the opposite effect. For example, the opening of “Madame Delphine,” a novella he wrote in 1881 and was later included in editions of *Old Creole Days*, described what a visitor to New Orleans might see walking down a little used, old-city lane off Canal Street. According to Cable, natives of the city, whom he called “lovers of Creole antiquity, in fondness for a romantic past,” know the street as Rue Royale. The visitor, however, does not, and soon finds the spell cast by the revitalized city center broken by the dismal record of a past civilization gone to seed. “You will pass a few restaurants, a few auction-rooms, a few furniture warehouses, and will hardly realize that you have left behind you the activity and clatter of a city of merchants before you find yourself in a region of architectural decrepitude, where an ancient and foreign-seeming domestic life, in second stories, overhangs the ruins of a former commercial prosperity, and upon everything has settled down a long sabbath of decay.” Here, as elsewhere, Cable regarded the bustling trade of the modern city with a healthy respect. Likewise, he

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28 Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 254-255.


30 Ibid., 1-2.
mourned the decline of industry down Rue Royale. His attitude reflected the Puritan economic values he had inherited from his mother as well as his cautious embrace of the “New South” ideology, which emphasized greater alignment with the commercial culture of the North.

One of Cable’s favored techniques involved the use of crumbling architecture to symbolize a bygone past lingering unhappily in the present. He began “Sieur George” with this description of the main characters’ residence, an apartment in a brick building in New Orleans: “With its gray stucco peeling off in broad patches, it has a solemn look of gentility in rags, and stands, or, as it were, hangs, about the corner of two ancient streets, like a faded fop who pretends to be looking for employment.”

The appearance of the house paralleled the plight of the protagonist. George could not escape the temptations of his Creole surroundings (including an orphaned girl entrusted to his care). As the narrator observed, “The city changed like a growing boy; gentility and fashion went uptown, but Sieur George still retained his rooms.”

Mired in his rather pathetic obsessions, he fell into ruin, just like the house. The story offered a glimpse of how Cable’s writing would break with other Southern writers of local color. The tragedy did not lie in the cosmic, irreversible injustice of a civilization’s passing but in George’s own failings. The loss of gentility—“gentility in rags”—stemmed from Sieur George’s unwholesome fixation with the Creole lifestyle. He chose to reject change, as he chose

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32 Ibid., 250.

to remain in his dingy apartment.

Representing dilapidation in the city was one thing, representing a decadent countryside was quite another. The heart of the romanticized Old South lay in the countryside, in the nostalgic tradition of plantation stories from authors like Thomas Nelson Page and Harry Stillwell Edwards. Their writing painted pictures of happy slaves, kindly masters, women of lily white purity, and young men of indisputable honor. Cable, by contrast, brought complexity and ambiguity to his descriptions of the plantation. His aim was not outright subversion, for he, too, felt attracted to the romance of the myth. Nevertheless, he viewed the social implications of the plantation system as subtle, varied, and often unpleasant.

Cable first explored this perspective in “Belles Demoiselles Plantation,” another story from *Old Creole Days* that traced the fortunes of Colonel De Charleau-Marot and his seven daughters. Their home, the story’s eponymous plantation setting, was a picturesque riverside mansion of special magnificence. At the behest of his daughters, the Colonel tried to secure real estate in New Orleans proper from Injin Charlie, a long distant, somewhat disreputable relation. Initially Charlie refused, but the Colonel pursued a bargain with greater urgency after he discovered that his own plantation home was no longer structurally safe. After a series of deceptions, the Colonel nearly got the better of Charlie, but too late. The mansion collapsed into the river, the seven daughters drown, and the Colonel realized that, ironically, Charlie’s poorly maintained property in the city far exceeded in value the deceptively beautiful manor. Once again, architecture provided the symbolism.
The literary force of “Belles Demoiselles Plantation,” and indeed all of Cable’s best works, came from the relationships between characters of white descent and those of mixed descent. Injin Charlie was part Choctaw, the last descendant of the family founder’s first union with an Indian wife. This darker line of the family had inherited the city property, the pure-blood whites the mansion on the river. The Colonel set the course of events in motion because of his desire “to engross the whole estate under one title.”

So the dealings between the Colonel and Charlie involved not only the ownership of land, but the claim to a family legacy, something the pure-blood line felt was theirs by right, but that the mixed-blood line refused to concede. The story functioned as an allegory for the South, in which white and non-white peoples by all appearances lived separate existences, but were intimately bound together by blood, money, and honor.

To write so explicitly about miscegenation was unprecedented for a Southern man of letters. In part the conspicuous silence on the subject could be attributed to the immediate political climate of the 1870s. The historian George Frederickson has shown that whites in the postwar period had to reconsider precisely how blacks would operate within their society, because for the first time in centuries government legislated slave codes did not do this for them. As Martin Delany’s experience illustrated, sharing power with the black race was confusing enough a dilemma without introducing people of mixed race into the debate. Since redeemed Southern states commonly pursued some

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form of a *herrenvolk* democracy, a government with access limited exclusively to whites, acknowledging a distinct space for people of mixed race in Southern society was unnecessarily counterproductive to the agenda of white supremacy. Simply from a literary standpoint, the presence of mulattoes undermined the charming myth of the Old South that conventional local-color authors had labored to construct. Celebrating the honor of the cavalier tradition was less successful when characters embodying the living evidence of sexual misconduct between masters and slaves graced the pages.

The Southern taboo on the subject of miscegenation had less force and effect in Cable’s home town. His canvas was New Orleans, a city where American, African, and Creole people had intermingled for centuries and where some degree of tolerance for people of mixed heritage existed (provided they did not overstep their social boundaries). Moreover, Cable had yet to explore with any determined specificity the oppression of blacks by whites, the dominant feature of plantation culture. In *Old Creole Days*, subsuming the ancient Creole culture to the growing American influence in Louisiana forms the leitmotif running through the collection. It is equally likely that exposing a darker, sinful history of his city appealed to the devout side of Cable, for the pattern of transgression and redemption in the stories suggests how seriously he took the notion of personal salvation and social reform.

But more than any other reason, Cable’s longstanding love affair with Louisiana history accounts for his nuanced treatment of race in *Old Creole Days*. The merging of races in New Orleans and the indiscretions of its master class were impossible to ignore for a student of the region’s past. Judging from his writing and his letters in the 1870s,
Cable believed that acknowledging interracial unions (“Belles Demoiselles Plantation”), quadroon balls (“Tite Poulette”), the African slave trade (“Jean-ah Poquelin”), and other rich and tragic details enhanced the mythologized history of the region. Like other Southern authors, he felt the tug of bittersweet nostalgia for an irretrievable past. In fact, he wanted to title *Old Creole Days* “Jadis,” which, he told his publisher Scribner, “signifies, as near as I can give it in English, once, in the fairy-tale sense.” But he embroidered the romance with historical truths that his contemporaries in local color found unpalatable.

The favorable reaction of the critics to *Old Creole Days* boded well for Cable’s next literary effort, a novel he had produced in his spare time called *The Grandissimes*, which first appeared as a serial in *Scribner’s Monthly* the same year. While *Old Creole Days* had offered his readers a view of Creole culture that was sentimental even in its more sordid moments, *The Grandissimes* cut into the history of the South with a keener edge. Ostensibly *The Grandissimes* returned Cable’s readers deep into Creole history, to 1803 when the United States purchased Louisiana. During that time Native Creoles of French and Spanish descent felt besieged by an uncouth, irreverent American culture. The objects of their scorn, the American migrants, believed they brought enterprise and commerce to a backwater civilization. The context bore a striking resemblance to Reconstruction, and Cable played on this parallel throughout the book. He described it as a “truly political work,” one his family and friends warned him would “wantonly offend

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thousands of your own people.” He submitted it anyway, compelled, he said, to chronicle “the fierce struggle going on around me” and to write about “questions that I saw must be settled by calm debate and cannot be settled by force or silence.”

In the late 1870s, the most confounding question, and the source of the “fierce struggles” Cable referred to, concerned the status of African Americans in the South. A character in The Grandissimes, a Creole patriarch who represented the old master class of the South, articulated the dilemma to a newcomer to New Orleans thusly: “You are here to establish a free government; and how can you make it freer than the people wish it? There is your riddle!... You will fall the victim of what you may call our mutinous patriotism.” Harnessing that sentiment, the Democratic Party relentlessly reimposed white hegemonic state governments, which threatened all the freedoms African Americans had won during Reconstruction. Even when legal protection for black civil liberties survived on the books, white paramilitary groups like Martin Gary’s Red Shirts, the Ku Klux Klan, or the White League of Louisiana used intimidation and violence to maintain de facto white rule. In The Grandissimes, Cable’s critique addressed the corruption of white Southern culture that rationalized oppression and violence, and mocked authors of the Lost Cause and the plantation tradition for promoting an artificial history of the South. In the process, he abandoned fully the politics of his boyhood that led him to fight for the Confederacy and took a giant step toward apostasy.

The Grandissimes followed what Edmund Wilson called “a certain machinery of

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37 Cable, “My Politics” The Negro Question, 16.

the conventional Victorian plot.” The story hinged on a bitter family feud and a maudlin love story witnessed through the eyes of Joseph Frowenfeld, a German immigrant to New Orleans. As in *Old Creole Days*, Cable surrounded the rather predictable plot with a multi-textured panorama of New Orleans society, in which Frowenfeld became introduced to the anti-democratic traditions and outmoded etiquette that characterized Creole society. Among the book’s cast of characters, the embodiment of Creole gentility was Agricola Fusilier, “the aged high priest of a doomed civilization” and Cable’s chief device for critiquing Cavalier values. Agricola committed all the acts of a hyper-masculine Southern elite: he postured, he boasted, he dueled. He clung to his Creole identity with such force that any suggestion of a change or reform elicited a stern reprimand from him—“ Tradition is much more authentic than history!” While initially his inflexibility came off as charming if irascible, as the story reached its denouement, Agricola’s reactions to the liberalizing events around him became dangerously rash. When his nephew, Honore Grandissime, put the family fortunes into a business partnership with his mulatto half-brother (here Cable created a similar convergence of race, family, and economy as in “Belles Demoiselles Plantation”), Agricola incited a lynch mob. His obsessive vendetta against the innocent mulatto led to his own death, and as a result the feud ended and the love story concluded happily. Agricola’s character was Cable’s quintessential Southern straw man, an ideologue who proclaimed his devotion to

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39 Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*, 564.

40 Cable, *The Grandissimes*, 324.

41 Ibid., 19.
a more civilized era, yet operated in an irrational and violent manner. His demise, an allegory for the death of conservative racist Southern values, benefited the entire community.

At every turn in *The Grandissimes*, racial prejudices provided the impetus for anti-progressive action. As the mob scene indicates, Agricola would stop at nothing to maintain racial purity and white control of a segregated caste system. His rallying cry to the lynchers—“The smell of white blood comes on the south breeze”—cut to the heart of the self-defeating regionalism Cable observed during Reconstruction’s decline. *The Grandissimes* was Cable’s fictional exegesis of the Southern gospel of white supremacy, an investigation raising issues that “must be settled by calm debate and cannot be settled by force or silence; questions that will have to be settled thus by the Southern white man in his own conscience before ever the North and South can finally settle it between them.”

Intent on forcing a confrontation between the white South and its own hypocrisies, he designed the story to peel away the gilded myths about race relations that permeated Southern culture. He wanted to expose the unwholesome relationships between whites and non-whites that Southern society sanctioned without acknowledging. His favorite target was the quadroon balls thrown in New Orleans, where white men (including married white men) courted mulatto mistresses. These arenas, like slave markets dressed in formal attire, allowed the white male master class to reassert its hegemony on sexual terms, justifying interracial contact in a secretive, perverse, and gendered way. As one character explains, “Those balls are not given to quadroon

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males.”\textsuperscript{43} For Cable, they were an egregious reminder of an outdated, immoral social hierarchy which still defined Southern identity.

Cable’s crowning achievement in \textit{The Grandissimes} was integrating into the book his long unpublished story of slavery, “Bibi,” now renamed “The Story of Bras Coupe.” The tale begins with Bras Coupe in Africa, the son of African royalty. Captured and sold into slavery, he endured the Middle Passage and was resold in Louisiana to a wealthy Creole landowner. Believing it might allow him some measure of leverage over his proud, insubordinate slave, Bras Coupe’s master allowed him to marry Palmyre, a quadroon slave with whom the African prince had fallen in love. But the wedding scene turned into a fiasco when Bras Coupe became inebriated and hit his master, earning him “the death of a felon.”\textsuperscript{44} In the chaos that ensued, Bras Coupe called down a curse on his master and escaped into the bayou. He was captured the following year, after he unwisely returned to a slave bacchanalia in Congo Square to take part in the drunken revelry. The overseers flogged him, cut off his ears, and slit the tendons behind his knees. As Bras Coupe lay dying, he was moved by the final contrition of his master (who died moments earlier of the curse) to remove the “voudou malediction” that kept the land barren.

Critics have interpreted the significance of the story to the overall book in a variety of ways. Its placement is interesting, for Bras Coupe’s narrative sits directly in the novel’s center, anchoring the entire text in the problem of slavery and providing much needed ballast to the fluffy Victorian romance to either side. Cable meant it as a

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 180.
repudiation of the contented slave in the plantation tradition of Page and Harris. As he described one slave: “she belonged to what we used to call ‘the happiest people under the sun.’ We ought to stop saying that.” The story also fascinated as much for what it glossed over as for what it engaged. Cable made no effort to describe the actual plantation experience of a field hand or house slave. Bras Coupe did not resemble the conventional, fictionalized slave at all. He was exceptionally powerful, unyielding, stately, and indomitable, the same qualities of the Creole caste that had enslaved him. Admittedly, Cable qualified such virtues with latent racist assumptions about Africans: Bras Coupe’s strength was brute, his power mystical, his tastes primitive, and his majesty tribal. He was not Uncle Tom, but he was not Martin Delany’s Blake either. Nor was his master a poor-white-trash Simon Legree. Cable wanted to implicate the highest reaches of polite society for the brutality of slavery. Culture and class could not shield anyone from, what Cable called in the story, “the truth that all Slavery is maiming.”

Style as well as content distinguished “Bras Coupe” from the stories of Southern slavery apologists. Cable laced the story with gothic horror propelled by the device of the curse. The affliction the master feared after Bras Coupe escaped was borne out when he watched as “one night the worm came upon the indigo and between sunset and sunrise every green leaf had been eaten up, and there was nothing left for either insect or

46 Clemen, George Washington Cable Revisited, 63-67.
47 Cable, The Grandissimes, 143.
apprehension, to feed upon.”

As the encroaching corruption came for the master himself, the impending doom wrought by his slave hearkened to (though did not match) the anxiety provoked by Herman Melville’s tale of a slave insurrection, *Benito Cereno*.

Critics have also pointed to the influence of dissident Russian novelist and playwright, Ivan Turgenev. Cable had discovered his work in the 1870s and admired the his masterful insistence on social reform—in Turgenev’s case, ending serfdom—delivered through a medium of character and setting. Works like *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album* and *Smoke* demonstrated for Cable the techniques by which Turgenev tied the injustice of unfree labor to the paradoxical infertility of a rich landscape. This connection was surely a model for Bras Coupe’s curse, but also inspired many of Cable’s dense descriptions of Louisiana’s landscapes. Frowenfeld’s impression as he first saw New Orleans from a riverboat, like so many moments in *The Grandissimes*, read like a line from Turgenev: “A land hung in mourning, darkened by gigantic cypresses, submerged; a land of reptiles, silence, shadow, decay.”

The style impressed on his readers that the land itself was paying the wages of Southern sin.

*The Grandissimes* was Cable’s paean for progress. He had transformed from a parochial defender of slavery and white rule during the Civil War to an outspoken critic of Southern bigotry and injustice. He used Frowenfeld, the German immigrant and the novel’s main character, as a mouthpiece for advocating reform and condemning inaction.

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48 Ibid., 184.


“Human rights is, of all subjects, the one upon which this community is most violently determined to hear no discussion,” Frowenfeld exclaimed at one point. “It has pronounced that slavery and caste are right, and sealed up the whole subject. What, then, will they do with the world’s literature? They will coldly decline to look at it, and will become, more and more as the world moves on, a comparatively illiterate people.” The statement reflected as much Cable’s individual trajectory in 1879 as it did the South’s. Cable craved a literate people and an intellectual discourse as he launched himself into the career of a writer, and some reactions to The Grandissimes made it increasingly clear the South could not give him that sort of nourishment.

Reviews across New Orleans and the South praised Cable’s novel, but many took exception. One pamphlet, titled a Critical Dialogue between Aboo and Caboo on a New Book; or, A Grandissime Ascension, launched a criticism that would become familiar to Cable over the next decade. It claimed that Cable sold out his Southern loyalties at the expense of Creoles to pander to Northern sentiment. Cable was certainly no enemy of the North, where he knew the vast majority of publishers, and authors, and other men and women of letters seemed to reside, but he remained a devoted son of the South. He later said that what “impelled [me] to write as I did” at that time “was the trust that the South would read from a Southern man patiently what it would only resent from a Northerner.” Artistic aspirations motivated him as well, ambitions not for himself but

51 Ibid., 143.
for his native region. He was convinced that reforming the South’s racial injustices
would bring about a renaissance in the arts, an “emancipation of literature” the South
desperately needed. “We want, if there is to be no part of our nation that is not self-
governed, to write as well as read our share of the nation’s literature.”54 There was an
artistic imperative to Southern distinctiveness.

Nonfiction and Exile

In the autumn of 1879, the same time that *Old Creole Days* and the first
installment of *The Grandissimes* were published, Cable’s employer and friend William
Black died. Cable lingered two more years in the cotton industry, but gave up accounting
for good in 1881. His prospects to make a living as a full-time writer had been buoyed by
the critical acclaim of his two books, increased demand for his stories, and a contract for
a new novel.55 He also secured a contract to research and report social statistics on the
New Orleans region for the Tenth Census. With the encouragement of *Scribner’s
Monthly*, he expanded his findings into an illustrated history, printed as *The Creoles of
Louisiana* in 1884. To supplement his income in the midst of these writing projects,
Cable began to take speaking engagements whenever possible. He considered such
public addresses financial necessities, but these forums also marked a turning point in his
career as a writer and reformer. By the mid-1880s, his impact through nonfiction writing
outstripped all his artistic endeavors. The shift in genre accompanied a shift in tone: he

54 Ibid.

55 Cleman, *George Washington Cable Revisited*, 82.
no longer suggested new paths to regional reform through storytelling, but instead explicitly demanded progress in direct appeals to the South. In openly breaking with the “traditionalists,” as he called them, he became a full-fledged Southern Apostate.

Literary success opened up a new social world to Cable. He visited New York in 1880 and again the following year. On both occasions his publisher and friend, Charles Scribner, introduced him to the circle of Northern writers and artists that Cable had admired his entire life. Seated at the Century Club, he wrote ecstatically to his mother that he had met John Hay, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and Thomas Hovenden. John Hay was already well-known as Lincoln’s private secretary. The artists Saint-Gaudens and Hovenden were prominent too, but had yet to produce their greatest works. Saint-Gaudens would finish sculpting the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial in 1884. Hovenden would unveil the Last Moments of John Brown in the Metropolitan Museum of Art the same year. Cable befriended Charles Dudley Warner, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and the famed Harriet Beecher Stowe, with whom, he told his wife, he had a “long, and to me delightful, talk about the South.” The new contacts were exciting and bewildering. Cable sent Howells a copy of The Grandissimes and the two exchanged friendly criticisms in letters. (Howells praised the book, but did not care for Frowenfeld’s character.) Warner recruited Cable to write a biography of William Gilmore Simms for a series Warner was editing. Twain and Howells both arranged to visit New Orleans with

56 Cable to Rebecca Cable, June 4, 1881, Bikle, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters, 67-68.
57 Cable to Louise S. Cable, June 14, 1881, Bikle, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters, 70.
58 Cable to William D. Howells, October 8, 1881, Bikle, George W. Cable: His Life and Letters, 72.
Cable acting as their host and guide. In a short span of time, Cable had become the representative Southerner among a cadre of Northern intellectuals.

The sudden expanse of new social responsibilities, and a fresh interest in various reform causes and charities distracted Cable from his fiction. His second novel, *Dr. Sevier*, took him nearly three years to complete. In the meantime, serving on a grand jury brought him into contact with the “city’s horrid prison system,” after which he determined to “establish prison and asylum reform in New Orleans.” The scope of his ambition quickly grew to encompass the entire region. In 1883, Cable delivered an address in Louisville on the issue, and the *Century* published the essay a year later with the title “The Convict Lease System in the Southern States.” Supported with data from every Southern state, starting with Tennessee, “the system at its best,” to Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, “the system at its worst,” the report condemned the convict-lease system in the South as state-sanctioned slavery. The worst of it Cable left out.

The disproportionate injustice leveled against African Americans magnified the echoes of the South’s great antebellum sin. He made the subject of race and Southern society his next target.

In 1884 at the University of Alabama, Cable delivered a speech designed to “demand a trial of the Freedman’s case in the world’s court on its equities.” Like his piece on prisons, he turned the speech into an essay for *Century* to print in January of

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60 Cable, *The Silent South: Together with the Freedman’s Case in Equity and the Convict Lease System* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 126-171.

1885. Perhaps the most remarkable quality of “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” was its dispassion. He drained his argument of the sentimentality coursing through his fiction, and indeed through much of the pro-abolition, pro-civil rights literature of the previous past half century. Instead the essay augured the kind of diagnostic and prescriptive tones characteristic of progressive era reformers. “The greatest social problem before the American people to-day is, as it has been for a hundred years, the presence among us of the negro,” Cable began. And from that postulate, he proceeded to lay out evidence pointing to two conclusions: “Is the freedman a free man?” he asked? “No.”62 Who was responsible? The answer was, unequivocally, the South.

The key to the entire issue of race relations in the South, in Cable’s judgment, was the sacrifice of reason to ideology. The solution required an historical inquiry. “We need to go back to the roots of things,” he argued, “and study closely, analytically, the origin, the present foundation, the rationality, the rightness, of those sentiments surviving in us which prompt an attitude qualifying in any way peculiarly the black man’s liberty among us.” Cable decided that an honest reappraisal of the South’s past could not ignore the tremendous impact of slavery, which he described, in language borrowed from Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, as “the corner-stone of the whole social structure.” The South defended its institution of unfree labor “not by books,” but with an inborn conviction that whites ought to enslave blacks. Slavery was moored in a teleology, justified by “a God-given instinct, nobler than reason,” instead of “moral and

62 Cable, “The Freedman’s Case in Equity,” The Silent South, 36.

218
intellectual reasoning.” And it was slavery that “first brought war upon the land.”

As Cable’s essay described it, the end of Reconstruction set the problem in a
challenging new context. Civil rights legislation “forced into [the Southern states] the
recognition of certain human rights discordant with the sentiments of those who have
always called themselves the community.” After the federal government retreated from
its commitments to the freedmen, the laws that protected them became parodies of
justice, and the result was “a virtual suffocation of those principles of human equity
which the unwelcome decrees do little more than shadow forth.” Still, even hollow laws
purporting to establish the equality of all citizens undercut the white control of blacks.
To strengthen the South against a democratic insurgency of African Americans, the white
herrenvolk established a new standard for the social hierarchy, “a further axiom that there
was, by nature, a disqualifying moral taint in every drop of negro blood.”

To reassure his critics, Cable predicted that social integration of the races would
never occur, even if the white South granted blacks their civil rights. He called the idea
that poor blacks would sweep into white districts if the laws did not stop them “utter
nonsense.” The “huge bugbear of Social Equality” was pure fantasy, an outcome so
unlikely that to actively guard against it was ridiculous. In simple terms, blacks and
whites did not want to live with one another, so the laws and customs enforcing their
separation were both redundant and oppressive. Moreover, he argued that racial uplift
required political equality. He described blacks as “one of the most debased races on the

63 Ibid., 3-8.
64 Ibid., 5-10.
globe.” Securing their liberties would make it possible for blacks to be “elevated as quickly as possible from all the debasements of slavery and semi-slavery to the full stature and integrity of citizenship.”

In his memoir “My Politics,” Cable admitted that he operated under mistaken assumptions when he made his case to the South on behalf of freedmen. He calculated that by 1885 enough time had passed since the Civil War that a younger generation of Southerners was capable of embracing more progressive ideas about race relations. Communicating these ideas to the South was a stickier problem. Because “the nation had largely surrendered the Southern problem to the South,” the pressure for reform had to originate from within the region. Only a Southerner could reinvent the South. Secure in the knowledge that he could be that Southern agent of change, Cable felt confident that responses to his essay, even if critical, would not dismiss him as an agent of Northern interests. To make doubly certain, at the start of “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” he reminded his readers of his own Southern credentials: that he came from a slave-holding family, “a citizen of an extreme Southern State, a native of Louisiana, an ex-Confederate soldier, and a lover of my home, my city, and my State, as well as of my country.”

Cable’s attempts to inoculate himself from questions of his regional loyalty did not succeed as he hoped. In the wake of the essay’s circulation, the public roundly condemned Cable in a “storm of denunciation.” “For the first time in my experience,” he

65 Ibid., 3, 20, 34.
admitted, “the local press met my utterances entirely without commendation.” The acrimony stretched across the region. The Times-Democrat in New Orleans declared that Cable was no longer a “son of the South.” The New Mississippian predicted that “the sun of his popularity in the South would soon go down in darkness.” The Shreveport Times accused him of “transparent bitterness towards Southern people and Southern habits of thought.” The South had put Cable’s regional identity on trial.

In the midst of the Southern furor over his article, Cable himself was crisscrossing the Northern states with Mark Twain during the second half of the “Twins of Genius” tour. The near universal censure of his article in the South must have struck a discordant note compared with the favorable reactions of his audiences across the North. Letters he posted to his wife during the final six weeks of the tour revealed the pleasure and, at times, the embarrassment he felt when admirers praised his essay. The full measure of the significance of his appeal to the white South for racial moderation struck home when he spoke with African Americans. “I thought of the great dead,” he said after one such encounter, “Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips & the rest and felt ashamed to let them give such praise to me.”

Even employed as self-deprecation, the reference to famed northern abolitionists illustrated the role Cable saw himself playing. He was trying to forge a new white Southern identity, one that borrowed from the emancipationist legacy of the war.

68 Cable “My Politics,” The Negro Question, 22-23.

69 “Cable and the Negroes,” New Orleans Times-Democrat, January 22, 1885; New Mississippian, January 13, 1885; Shreveport Times, January 11, 1885.

and incorporated its ideals into a framework for Southern reform.

In the meantime, the *Century*, the New York magazine that published his essay in the first place, received “a number of more or less dissenting essays and ‘Open Letters’ from the South.” In a show of editorial restraint, it reserved a space for “a single representative essay” to offer a rebuttal to Cable. The essay, “In Plain Black and White” by Henry Grady of the *Atlanta Constitution*, appeared in April 1885, three months after “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” was published.

Grady, then just thirty-five years old, had risen to prominence as one of the South’s leading journalists. His career had taken him from Georgia’s *Rome Courier* to the *New York Herald* and then to the *Atlanta Constitution*, where he served as writer, editor, and part-owner. The nation celebrated him as the most eloquent spokesman for the New South yet produced. One newspaper described him as “intensely Southern, filled full of the traditions of his people, proud of them and their past, but he accepted the new order with the magnificent enthusiasm of his intense nature, and became the embodiment of the spirit of the New South.” Grady, in fact, had spent his career cultivating his image as the preeminent Southerner. “The germ of the best patriotism is in the love that a man has for the home he inhabits,” he said to an audience he addressed at the University of Virginia. “I teach my son to love Georgia—to love the soil that he stands on—the body of my old mother.”

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Under the auspices of a policy debate, the back-and-forth between Cable and Grady in the *Century* constituted a battle of Southern authenticity. Channeling the same regional nativism that characterized the response of other Southern newspapers, Grady attacked Cable’s identity directly—“Does he truly represent the South? We reply that he does not!” He proceeded to check off the pieces of evidence that challenged Cable’s Southernness: Cable was born of Northern parents; he had professed an admiration of New England; he sought to institute in the Southern people “a line of thought from which they must forever dissent.” Perhaps most damning, he cited a letter of Cable’s regarding Harriet Beecher Stowe’s birthday party revealing that Cable felt he had “never been home” until his first visit to New England. No longer a true Southerner, Cable, Grady concluded, could not “speak understandably of their views on so vital a subject.” After disavowing him on behalf of the South, Grady recast Cable’s arguments as if they were foreign influences: “The South must be allowed to settle the social relations of the races according to her views of what is right and best. There has never been a moment when she could have submitted to have the social status of her citizens fixed by an outside power.”

In fact, Cable had contemplated a move to the North for several years. The stimulation of his circle of friends on New York provided one impetus. His family gave him another. He had brought his family to Connecticut for the summer of 1881 because

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75 Cable quoted in Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*, 572.

the climate offered some relief to his mother’s ailing health. He was left with the impression that New England society was “the antipode of the Plantation.” The educational opportunities for his children impressed him as well, especially schools for women that his five daughters might attend. New England appeared singularly attractive right at the moment his opinion of the South was declining and his critique sharpening. When the Southern criticisms of “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” starting coming in, he told his wife, “The more carefully I study [the South] the less I expect of it; and though there is no reason why I should indulge ungracious feelings toward it I cannot admire it or want my children to be brought up under its influence.” In October of 1885, he moved his family to Northampton, Massachusetts, where his daughters could grow up within sight of the campus of Smith College.

Cable did not disclose in his letters how personally he took the assaults on his credibility as a Southerner made by Grady and others. He never accepted their premise that he had somehow betrayed his region. Nor did he conceive of his move to Massachusetts as an abdication of his Southernness. As he remembered, “I felt that I belonged, still, peculiarly to the South.” But clearly Cable was renegotiating what being Southern meant to him in the late 1880s. He had become aware that his days as the authorial voice of Southern culture, when his instincts for reform could manifest themselves in the subtle and verdant prose of local color, had passed. He was now a

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78 Cable to Louise Cable, January, 1885, quoted in Cleman, *George Washington Cable Revisited*, 114.

Southerner in exile. To remake the South, he had to directly engage the people of the region.

Convinced that the fraternity of Southern editors misrepresented the views of the majority of Southerners, Cable submitted another essay to the *Century*, a response to Grady, in September 1885. Entitled “The Silent South,” he entreated Southerners, who were not persuaded by the need for segregation laws or draconian enforcement of “racial justice,” to stand up for the progressive, rational ideas he had formulated in “The Freedman’s Case in Equity.” He opened the essay by associating these white Southerners—the silent majority, so he thought—with the highest emblem of Southern virtue he knew of: the statue of Robert E. Lee in Tivoli Circle. That statue, he wrote, “symbolizes our whole South’s better self; that finer part which the world not always sees; unaggressive, but brave, calm, thoughtful, broad-minded, dispassionate, sincere, and, in the din of boisterous error round about it, all too mute.”80 The description reflected his profound, reverent faith in the quality of the Southern people. The better South Cable had imagined since the end of the Civil War was there for the having, awaiting only “the Silent South” to speak up and make it real.

What puzzled him about the South’s defiance of civil rights legislation was the constant refrain, repeated by Grady and others, that “the white and black races in the South must walk apart,” because each race “resents intimate association with the other.”81 If this were true—and Cable believed it so—institutionalized separation was a legal


redundancy of a social phenomenon. The underlying problem, as he saw it, was the fallacious propaganda foisted on “the Silent South” that civil rights would bring about the social equality of the races. “Social equality is a fool’s dream,” he reassured his audience. “Social relations, one will say, are sacred. True, but civil rights are sacred too.”

When white Southerners overruled the implementation of civil rights with the claim that segregation legislation served the interests of both races, Cable delivered a devastating critique: “Why, that is the very same thing we used to say about slavery!”

Still smarting from Grady’s accusation that he could no longer could speak for the South, Cable wove a personal defense of his Southern integrity into his larger argument. He began “The Silent South” with a disclaimer that he composed it “in deprecation of all sectionalism; with an admiration and affection for the South that for justice and sincerity yield to none; in a spirit of faithful sonship to a Southern state.” He co-opted stock phrases of Southern traditionalists, like “our great Reconstruction agony.” Most of all, he painted a picture of reform-minded citizens across the South who shared his vision, “coming daily into convictions that condemn their own beliefs of yesterday as the antiquated artillery of an outgrown past.”

Sensitivity to the assaults on his Southern identity, however, did not stop him from picking apart the fabric of white supremacist, Lost Cause dogma. He described the

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82 Cable, “The Silent South,” The Negro Question, 92, 96.
83 Ibid., 99.
84 Ibid., 87-89.
85 Ibid., 131.
oppression of blacks as the consequence of the “green, rank stump” of slavery. Racial
determinism mattered in the relationships between blacks and whites, he conceded, but
ultimately slavery, “our earlier relation to the colored man as his master, results in our
view of him as naturally and irrevocably servile.” He rejected outright the notion that the
Civil Rights Bill of 1866 was an instance of the federal government overstepping its
bounds and intruding on the rights of the states. As in “The Freedman’s Case in Equity,”
he argued that the South’s treatment of former slaves directly impacted its progress as a
region. And he damned incrementalists as not so much “logical as geological. They
propose to wait the slow growth of civilization as if it were the growth of rocks, or as if
this were the twelfth or thirteenth century.”86 Most prophetic of all, Cable observed that
“‘equal accommodations, but separate’ means, generally, accommodations of a
conspicuously ignominious inferiority,”—language anticipating the Supreme Court’s
Brown v. Board of Education decision seventy years later.87

Cable elaborated on his ideas in “The Silent South” in speeches given over the
next few years, but none more forcefully than his address, “The Negro Question”
delivered in 1887 and widely published the following year. In it, Cable argued “The
Negro Question” defined Southern regional identity. Southern whites subordinated
blacks, he wrote, out of “a profound conviction that they are moved by an imminent,
unremitting, imperative necessity.”88 Cable felt the appeals to reason he had made in his

86 Ibid., 125-126.
87 Ibid., 99.
earlier essays had not gone unheard, but that Southerners, in spite of any uneasiness about the rational grounding of their politics, had entrenched themselves in an ideological position with such unflinching certitude that they could never admit any error. “How can the millions of intelligent and virtuous white people of the South make such a political, not to say such a moral mistake?” he asked.\textsuperscript{89} To ascertain the answer, he pointed to the origins of the Civil War. Southerners did not fight in defense of an abstract principle like secession, but out of a social urgency to maintain white control over blacks. The slaveholder “believed personal enslavement essential to subjugation. Emancipation at one stroke proved it was not. But it proved no more.” For those critics who would claim blacks had been given their chance at freedom during Reconstruction, Cable corrected their mistake: “Both in the North and the South, a widespread impression prevails that this is the experiment which was made and did in fact fail. Whereas it is just that the Old South never allowed it to be tried.”\textsuperscript{90} His argument inverted every crucial component of traditional Southern collective memory. The South fought the Civil War for slavery, not states’ rights. Remembered now as an unfortunate but well-intentioned mistake, slavery in fact was a sin of transcendent proportion. The Old South was not a bastion of virtue; the plantation society was founded on the institutionalization of human subjugation. Reconstruction was not a period of Northern injustices foisted on a victimized South, but an exercise in Southern stonewalling until those with “Redeemer” labels could

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 149.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 153-156.
reestablish white rule and “readapt the old plantation idea.”

Throughout, Cable’s unfailingly civilized tone never wavered, but the essay gave rise to his most searing arguments.

In “The Negro Question” Cable maintained his contention that the Southern white public was growing more amenable to change. But such declarations were growing more difficult to defend. By 1888, when “The Negro Question” circulated in print in America, Cable knew that most Southerners considered his ideas heretical. He believed in a memory of the Civil War that betrayed the gospel of the Lost Cause. He espoused an agenda of social reform that mirrored most closely the ideas of Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois. Booker T. Washington, the black head of the Tuskegee Institute and a staunch supporter of African American industrial education, communicated with Cable from time to time, but kept the correspondence secret to protect his reputation among his Southern whites benefactors. Even Washington did not call for the kind of immediate action that Cable demanded.

In 1889, Cable published “My Politics,” a new forward to “The Silent South” that he hoped would restore his integrity as a Southerner. He intended to enact a “peaceable renaissance of the Southern states upon the political foundations of the nation’s fathers,” he wrote in an attempt to place regional identity within a nationalist framework. The essay, however, had little effect on Cable’s reputation. The same year, he traveled to Nashville, the headquarters of the “Open Letter Club” he had helped found a year prior.

91 Ibid., 165.

The aim of the club was to promote among Southerners the discussion of a reform agenda for the South, an intellectual grassroots effort to push the “The Silent South” into action. In Nashville, a local paper printed an editorial slandering Cable for dining with J. C. Napier, a local black attorney. They described Cable as a man with a “preference for the negro race over his own,” and a “Southern man who has turned renegade with an eye to Yankee taste and Yankee money.”¹⁹³ Furious, Cable sent a series of angry replies to the paper to little effect. The “Open Letter Club” fell apart soon after the incident. In the next few years, Southern states passed Jim Crow laws with impunity and re-codified racial subordination. By the mid-1890s, twenty-five years after the end of the war, Cable perceived that the South had no intention of turning away from the path of white supremacy it chose after Reconstruction.

Cable’s fiction from the mid-1880s onward reflected a less ambitious optimism for reform in the South. Dr. Sevier, his bland 1884 novel, almost completely avoided commentary on themes of Reconstruction or race. It contained just one scene of Union soldiers on parade, in which Cable’s narrator observed of the federals that their “cause is just,” and, a generation removed from the war, “we of the South can say it!”¹⁹⁴ But Cable’s experience in the previous ten years illustrated that the passage of time had effected little change in Southern attitudes toward the legacy of the war or its causes. By the time he wrote John March, Southerner, an 1894 serialized novel, he had tempered his optimism was a heathy dose of cynicism. Set during Reconstruction, the protagonist,

¹⁹³ Nashville American quoted in Wilson, Patriotic Gore, 577-578.

¹⁹⁴ George Washington Cable, Dr. Sevier (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1885), 377.
John March, attempted to increase his family’s estate through industrial enterprise rather than the old plantation model, only to discover that the New South was as corrupt as the Old South. Cable used the framework of the story to revisit the reform issues that had concerned him so deeply in the previous decade: the convict-lease system, segregated schools, and the Southern press. Unfortunately the impact of Cable’s message was handicapped by the artlessness of the writing. Gilder, Cable’s longtime publisher, rejected *John March, Southerner* three times before reluctantly printing it.

Cable continued to produce fiction in exile, although critical consensus found the stories he wrote after leaving the South less incisive. He would never again equal the literary accomplishment of *The Grandissimmes*, but he never ceased trying to write about the South, which indicated that he never stopped thinking of himself as a Southerner. His final book, *Lovers of Louisiana (To-day)* (1918), recounted the story of Philip Castleton, a progressive Southern intellectual Cable modeled after himself, who earned the enmity of his friends after writing an article in support of black civil rights called “The Southern Answer.” *Lovers of Louisiana* marked a return to familiar themes in his fiction and non-fiction, though he explored them within an updated milieu. Using Castleton as his mouthpiece, Cable argued that racial subjugation in the South had not only hindered the progress of the region, but also jeopardized the international standing of the country as global leaders tried to fashion a just peace after the Great War. He suggested that for America to secure its proper place “in the world’s council at the war’s end,” its democratic principles had to be “outwardly clean and inwardly pure.”

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95 George W. Cable, *Lovers of Louisiana (To-day)* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 101.
era, the need for Southern reform had taken on another dimension, as regional identity became implicated in the nation’s democratic image.

After *Lovers of Louisiana*, Cable did not produce another novel or story. He died in 1925. Forty years of advocating Southern reform had born little fruit. The “Code Noir” was inscribed in the laws as indelibly as ever. The awakening of a liberal Southerner movement had not occurred. He never witnessed the flowering of Southern literature and arts. But his legacy as a Southern Apostate survived him in his writing, in the clarion calls for racial justice that characterized his essays, and in the rich, gothic descriptions of Southern decay in his stories. He was buried in Northampton, his place of exile. As the mourners gathered in the cold New England cemetery, a thousand miles away, in Cable’s true home of New Orleans, a young writer named William Faulkner was laboring over his first novel, the tale of a romance gone horribly wrong.
EPILOGUE

All of us failed to match our dream of perfection. So I rate us on the basis of our splendid failure to do the impossible.


In his meditation on the cultural origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson observed that “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future.”96 Abraham Lincoln best understood this compulsion to gaze backward into myth and forward at destiny when he addressed a small crowd at Gettysburg at the dedication of the new national cemetery in 1863. In his famously brief speech, he cast the meaning of the war as a contest for the soul of the nation’s identity, “conceived in liberty” at the dawn of its creation and witness to a “new birth of freedom,” should it fulfill its destiny. The poet Walt Whitman had a sense of it too, that he was living not through a war, or even a civil war, so much as an American Iliad with profound implications for American identity: “Strange (is it not?) that battles, martyrs, agonies, blood, even assassination, should so condense, perhaps only really, lastingly condense, a Nationality.”1


1 Walt Whitman, “Death of Abraham Lincoln,”
Stranger still, defeat also made Southerness possible. The Confederacy did not gain its independence, but it did win for itself a history it could smother in myth. Robert Penn Warren observed that at war’s end, “The citizen of that region ‘of the Mississippi the bank sinister, of the Ohio the bank sinister,’ could now think of himself as a ‘Southerner’ in a way that would have defied the imagination of Barnwell Rhett—or Robert E. Lee, unionist-emancipationist Virginian. We may say that only at the moment when Lee handed Grant his sword was the Confederacy born; or to state matters another way, in the moment of death the Confederacy entered upon its immortality.” But Warren was only partially correct—Southern identity’s enduring character and quality had yet to be determined in 1865. The South had no Gettysburg Address to define its past, present, and future. Instead Southerners waged a “war of ideas” for three decades until the victors, sustained by an unshakeable conviction in white supremacy, tethered Southern identity to a chivalric past, promised their region a return to glory, and cast out the Southern Apostates.

Perhaps the most poignant signifier that the battle for Southern identity had subsided was W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In his collection of essays, Du Bois reflected on the peculiar distinctness of the African American experience, offering a counter narrative for black Americans whose past, in bondage, and whose future, in doubt, had been detached from both a national identity and a Southern identity by the culture of white reconciliation. And while mythologies had contributed to

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the marginalization of African Americans, *Souls* was Du Bois’s reminder that mythologies could also serve to enlighten. Old South devotees like Thomas Nelson Page and Lost Causers like Jubal Early had taught Southerners to indulge in the cavalier romanticism of paternal slaveholders and the Arthurian tragedy of dead Confederate generals, but the titles of Du Bois’s essays swept the reader further back to Ancient Greece and Biblical verse: “The Coming of John,” “Of the Passing of the First-Born,” “Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece,” and his address to the New South, “Of the Wings of Atalanta.”

As Du Bois explained, Atalanta was Greece’s “winged maiden” who swore to marry no one but the man who could outrun her. Answering her challenge, the “wily Hippomenes” distracted Atalanta with three golden apples thrown in her path. He won the race and took Atalanta as his lover. Their union, however, was cursed, because their passion unfolded out of greed. Du Bois read it as a cautionary tale: “If Atlanta be not named for Atalanta, she ought to have been,” he wrote, using the analogy as a warning against the “material prosperity” of the New South. The temptations of materialism were “replacing the finer type of Southerner with vulgar moneygetters; it is burying the sweeter beauties of Southern life beneath pretence and ostentation.” His antimodern impulse, a distrust of the machinations of naked capitalism at work in the New South, was so strong that he even voiced a minor sympathy for Old South sentimentalism that smacked of the

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4 Ibid., 84.
Lost Cause: “It is a hard thing to live haunted by the ghost of an untrue dream; to see the wide vision of empire fade into ashes and dirt; to feel the pang of the conquered, and yet know that with all the Bad that fell on one black day, something was vanquished that deserved to live.”

But above all Du Bois worried that the virulent mixture of free-market capitalism with the South’s long history of white supremacy would further shroud African Americans behind the “Veil of Race.” The New South, cursed by the marriage of racism and profit, threatened the uncertain future of black America. “Not only is this true in the world which Atlanta typifies, but it is threatening to be true of a world beneath and beyond that world,—the Black world beyond the Veil. To-day it makes little difference to Atlanta, to the South, what the Negro thinks or dreams or wills.”

His bent toward anti-capitalism notwithstanding, Du Bois would not have drawn the same lines between Old South, New South, and the “Veil of Race” in “Of the Wings of Atalanta” had the efforts of Southern Apostates like John Mosby, Martin Delany, or George Washington Cable been more successful.

Du Bois had not given up hope—the emotional undercurrent to all the essays in Souls was a mingling of hope and sorrow—but it was increasingly clear that Southern identity had calcified around the ideologies Edward Pollard had listed in The Lost Cause in 1867: white supremacy, black disenfranchisement, Democratic affiliation, and as much autonomy as the region could claim. By the time he published Souls, to imagine a progressive shift in Southern identity motivated by those who lived beneath its rubric was

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5 Ibid., 82-83, 205fn.
6 Ibid., 84.
far more difficult than it had been a generation earlier. Still, ever persevering, Du Bois had a prescription for improvement. “The need of the South,” he wrote, “is knowledge and culture.... The Wings of Atalanta are the coming universities of the South.”

Echoing the same desire for discourse and reform that motivated Cable to organize the short lived “Open Letter Club,” he argued that the South had suffocated their collegiate system since long before the Civil War, to the detriment of all Southerners: “Sadly did the Old South err in human education, despising the education of the masses, and niggardly in the support of colleges. Her ancient university foundations dwindled and withered under the foul breath of slavery; and even since the war they have fought a failing fight for life in the tainted air of social unrest and commercial selfishness, stunted by the death of criticism, and starving for lack of broadly cultured men.”

Du Bois cherished the intellectual life for many reasons, but perhaps in this case he perceived that only serious men of letters could comprehend what had happened to Southern identity since the war’s end: the peculiar cultural linking of Old South to New South that paradoxically combined liberal individualism, antimodern sentimentalism, and regional solidarity.

In 1935, three decades removed from Souls, Du Bois completed his extraordinary revisionist history, Black Reconstruction in America. By then his views on the South and the enlightenment of the people had become more despairing. A distorted view of the Civil War and Reconstruction, what he called “the Propaganda of History,” permeated the

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7 Ibid., 87.
8 Ibid., 88.
collective consciousness of the nation, and the academy itself was complicit in its dissemination. “A teacher,” he lamented, “looks into the upturned face of youth and in him youth sees the gowned shape of wisdom and hears the voice of God. Cynically he sneers at ‘chinks’ and ‘niggers’.... This is education in the Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-fifth year of the Christ; this is modern and exact social science; this is the university course in ‘History 12’ set down by the Senatus academicus.”

Bitterness and honest scholarship had led Du Bois to judge the South a monolithically conservative culture that exploited race at the expense of poor white and black alike. Old South and New South were two faces of the same static regionalism, stifling art, thought, democracy, and reform. He even laid the crimes of imperialism, all the atrocities of the Great War, at the feet of the American people, who condoned to the rest of the world the Southern culture of racial oppression. Souls, especially “Atalanta” had been a plea for the South to embrace its African American people. Black Reconstruction was an indictment of the South’s choice instead to adopt the practices of exclusion, segregation, disenfranchisement, and lynching. The dynamic postwar moment had passed, the window of opportunity had shut, and the Southern Apostates were gone. “In the South,” he wrote, “the iconoclast, the martyr, not only on the Negro question, but on other moral matters, have been conspicuously absent; and where they have arisen, they have soon either subsided into silence or retreated to the more tolerant atmosphere of the North, leaving the South all the poorer and all the more easily hammered into conformity with

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11 Ibid., 706.
the mob.”

Two novels published the following year, each in their own distinct way, reflected this hardening of Southern identity. Margaret Mitchell completed *Gone with the Wind*, the tremendously popular story of the life of Scarlett O’Hara, the daughter of a plantation owner who must struggle through the tribulations of the Civil War and Reconstruction. *Gone with the Wind* profited from and promoted further the romantic memory of the Old South. Using all the archetypes of Old Southern myths—the Southern belle, the loyal slave, the black mammy, the young cavalier, the corrupt Yankee, the honorable Klansman—Mitchell matched the chaos and hardship or the era (for whites) with the turbulent love affair between Scarlett and Rhett Butler, the dashing Confederate blockade-runner. For his part, Rhett was the literary embodiment of the Lost Cause, proclaiming early in the story that he did not believe the Confederacy could defeat the North, then shouldering a rifle and joining the fight after the fall of Atlanta has sealed the Confederacy’s fate. Scarlett’s feelings for Rhett and other men in her life fluctuated, but she always relied on her enduring devotion to her plantation home, Tara, a symbolic homonym for “terra” or “land.” In *Gone with the Wind* the South itself represented the true source of passion and strength.

Not so in William Faulkner’s masterpiece *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which the precepts of Southern identity pushed his characters down a slippery path to self-destruction. Replete with themes of memory, history, and legacy, Faulkner used several different narrators to tell the life story of Thomas Sutpen, a poor white farmer determined

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12 Ibid., 707.
to build a patriarchal dynasty in antebellum Mississippi. In his unbreakable desire to bend the land and its people to his “design,” Sutpen represents the history of the South in all its dark ambition. With a “band of wild niggers” and a French architect, he carved a hundred-mile plantation, “Sutpen’s Hundred,” out of a Mississippi wilderness taken from “a tribe of ignorant Indians.”¹³ But a plantation alone would not do; he also required a son, and the arc of Absalom, Absalom! traces the tragic and complicated events of Sutpen’s lifelong quest, spanning the war and Reconstruction, to find a wife who could provide him with a proper heir. By the end of his life, he sired five children, two of whom were sons. One son, he rejected; the second repudiated his father and his inheritance. After one generation the dynasty fell apart.

Faulkner wrote Absalom, Absalom! as a mystery, an investigation into Sutpen’s past—and analogously into the Southern past—to resolve how a man so obsessed with founding a dynasty could have squandered his sons and driven his family to ruin. Faulkner made Quentin Compson the expository receptacle for all this information. Sutpen’s story was first told to Quentin by his father and then by Rosa Coldfield, the sister of one of Sutpen’s wives. Later Quentin recounted the story with further details to his roommate, Shreve, in their dorm at Harvard University. Through the tellings and retellings, Quentin and Shreve uncovered the grim truths about Sutpen and his offspring: Sutpen disowned one son, Charles Bon, when he learned Charles and his mother were partly of black descent. Henry, the second son, killed Charles in 1865 at his father’s behest, upon learning Charles had black blood and was determined to marry his sister.

Henry then disappeared. In desperation to produce another son, Sutpen fathered a child in 1869 by Milly Jones, the fifteen-year-old daughter of a poor white squatter on his plantation, only to spurn the newborn when it turned out to be female. Milly’s father subsequently killed him.

Yet for all the gothic drama of the Sutpen saga, Faulkner’s narrator Quentin, the university student trying to make sense of his heritage, was equally compelling. Quentin, who appeared in several of Faulkner’s works, was the fictional counterpart to the Southern Apostates. Contemplative and intellectual, he was sent by his father to study at Harvard in fulfillment of a long tradition of the Compson family. In this setting, far from his home where the decay of the Southern landscape was masked by the fragrance of wisteria and honeysuckle, caught in the “iron New England dark” and in the streets of Cambridge, Quentin engaged in a near-pathological quest to understand and accept what it meant to be Southern. Like the other Apostates, he was both a Southerner and an exile.

Preoccupied with Southern ideals like honor and virtue, Quentin struggled to make sense of the South’s tainted past and, emblematic of that history, the dysfunction of his family, particularly his sister’s misdirected sexuality. “Why couldn’t it have been me and not her who is unvirgin,” he asked his father, to which the unflinching reply was “Because it means less to women... men invented virginity not women.”¹⁴ Brooding over such moments in which the artifice of Southern identity was revealed in its naked ugliness, he confronted the even uglier past of Thomas Sutpen. As he and his Canadian roommate Shreve (as “Northern” as one could be), reconstructed the mystery of Sutpen’s

dynasty, the uniquely contorted postures of Southern memory and racial injustice became more apparent. “We don’t live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves,” Shreve told Quentin towards the conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!*; “(or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget.”

But remembering had a price—at least, it did for Southern Apostates like Quentin—because he could not reconcile the immorality of Sutpen’s life with the mythical sanctity of Southern identity. The immemorial past so crucial to a cherished regional identity was, for Quentin, laced with hypocrisy, just as it was with Mosby, Delany, and Cable. All he could do was try to deny it: “Why do you hate the South?” Shreve asked Quentin. “I don’t hate it,” Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; ‘I don’t hate it,” he said. *I don’t hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I don’t. I don’t!* *I don’t hate it! I don’t hate it!*

Faulkner spun Quentin as a kind of Southern archetype in and of himself: he represented the young, educated Southern idealist, an echo of Southern men from the days of the early republic. In that era, a vibrant tradition existed among the upper class and would-be elites of educating their favored sons in the North in the Ivy League, or abroad at Oxford, Cambridge, or Inner Temple. The brilliant pro-slavery senator John C. Calhoun epitomized this custom, earning a degree from Yale in 1804 and then studying law in Litchfield, Connecticut before returning to South Carolina. As Southern identity

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16 Ibid., 303.
became more parochial and defensive in the antebellum period, however, fewer Southern men left their homeland, and those that did often chose a military school. Du Bois noted the decline of the erudite, cosmopolitan Southerner in *Black Reconstruction*. The planter, he wrote, “boasted of his education, but on the whole, these Southern leaders were men singularly ignorant of modern conditions and trends of their historical backgrounds,” and then he acrimoniously added that only “some few had a cultural education at Princeton and Yale, and to this day Princeton refuses to receive Negro students, and Yale has admitted a few with reluctance, as a curious legacy from slavery.”

By the time Quentin, a child of the 1890s, entered Harvard, he was living out a hollow, sickly tradition that Faulkner symbolized with the declining fortunes of the Compson family. His father had to sell off part of their family estate to a golf course to pay Quentin’s tuition.

The Civil War and Reconstruction was, at least for Faulkner, a kind of warped looking glass. Quentin resembled John Calhoun in the coarse outlines of their early lives, but his reflection of Calhoun’s devout Southernness was a subversion of the putative benefits of such regional loyalty. He never returned to the South to defend it, as Calhoun spent his life doing. He never accepted the hackneyed deceptions of Southern myths, as Scarlett and Rhett did unthinkingly. Crippled by his Southern ideals but unable to let them go, Quentin escaped the only way he knew how, by filling his pockets with flat irons and drowning himself in the Charles River. Like the other Southern Apostates, he deserted Dixie because the burden of its identity was too unyielding and too heavy. But if Southern identity resonates with the memory of the victors in the “war of ideas”—the

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myths of Jubal Early, the politics of Wade Hampton and Martin Gary, the promises of Henry Grady, the stories of Thomas Nelson Page, and the trysts of Scarlett and Rhett—there remain small traces of the dissenters and exiles, even the fictional ones. On the Larz Anderson Bridge spanning the Charles River, a small plaque near Harvard’s Weld Boathouse commemorates Quentin with an epitaph that might as well read for the entire postwar South: "Quentin Compson. Drowned in the odour of honeysuckle. 1891-1910."
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