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Ante Bellum Studies in Slavery, Politics, and the Railroads

by

Robert R. Russel

Faculty Contributions

School of Graduate Studies

Western Michigan University

Series V, No. 1

June 1960

Faculty Contributions

**ANTE BELLUM STUDIES
IN SLAVERY, POLITICS,
AND THE RAILROADS**

by

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School of Graduate Studies
Western Michigan University Kalamazoo, Michigan

Series V, No. 1

June 1960

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Foreword

This *Faculty Contribution* is ample evidence of the universal truth, "a prophet is without honor in his own home." Dr. Robert R. Russel is recognized among the world of historians as a scholar with vast personal integrity and holds the admiring recognition of his peers. His various studies of the ante bellum period have almost the stature of primary data. As is true with all men of such stature, the true worth is never completely recognized in the immediate environment. Only to those who view the man from a more distant vantage point, is the true caliber known.

It is with sincere pleasure that the School of Graduate Studies of Western Michigan University reprints, with permission, six of Dr. Russel's milestone studies of the ante bellum period under the title, *Ante Bellum Studies in Slavery, Politics, and the Railroads*. The quality of the publication is a signal criterion of the regard in which he is held.

The School of Graduate Studies extends to Dr. Russel the most sincere appreciation for the contributions he has made to Western Michigan University, and dedicates this publication to him as a merited tribute.

George G. Mallinson, Dean
School of Graduate Studies

Introduction

Robert R. Russel joined the staff of the History Department of Western Michigan University in 1922. Now, on the occasion of his retirement after thirty-eight years of service, his colleagues in the department he has administered so well for the past four years and the School of Graduate Studies present this collection of six of his essays. They deal with certain aspects of the Old South that have long intrigued him.

Dr. Russel attended the graduate schools of the University of Kansas and the University of Illinois, after earning his A.B. degree at McPherson College, in Kansas. At the University of Kansas he had the good fortune to work under Professor Frank Hodder, who, in lieu of a course in historical method, advised him to "jump into the middle of a problem and work in all directions." This rough-and-ready procedure would undoubtedly produce some type of result. But, without the direction of a precise, persistent, and judicial mind, these scholarly studies would not have emerged.

These studies are but a sample of Dr. Russel's scholarly production, as the bibliography on page 98 indicates. They do, however, illustrate well the characteristics of his work, namely, the refusal to be satisfied with convenient generalizations, the concern for the precise phrase, the reliance on primary materials, the effort for clear, sharp presentation. They have been reprinted by permission of the journal officers as they were published originally, without an attempt to reconcile differences in editorial styles. Since they speak so well for themselves, there is no interpretive comment. They are presented as a token of the affectionate respect in which Robert Russel is held by those who know him well—his colleagues at Western Michigan University.

What Was the Compromise of 1850?

(Received the first Charles W. Ramsdall Award, 1957)

By ROBERT R. RUSSEL

Reprinted from *The Journal of Southern History*,
XXII (August 1956), 292-309.

THIS PAPER IS concerned only with those provisions of the Compromise of 1850 which related to slavery in the territories, that is, the slavery provisions of the acts organizing the territories of New Mexico and Utah. Nothing is ventured here about the admission of California as a state, the fixing of the Texas-New Mexico boundary, the Fugitive Slave Law, or the law on slave trading in the District of Columbia. The slavery provisions of the territorial acts are the ones most frequently misunderstood. They were the hardest to frame and, with the possible exception of the Texas boundary, the hardest to reach agreement upon in Congress. They are the part most necessary to understand if one is to follow intelligently later phases of the sectional struggle over slavery. They represented, it is believed, the heart of the compromise.

Books treating the compromise do not agree or even approximately agree as to what were the actual provisions of the New Mexico and Utah acts relating to slavery. They agree still less as to wherein those provisions represented compromise, that is, as to who conceded what. They do not even agree in their definition of the much used term "squatter sovereignty." Take a brief look at the college textbooks; we are entitled to expect to find in them the closest approach to accuracy.

Four college textbooks blandly state that New Mexico and Utah territories were organized "without mention" of slavery or "without provisions" regarding slavery.¹ A fifth textbook states that the

¹ Leland D. Baldwin, *The Stream of American History* (2 vols., New York, 1952), I, 724; Asa E. Martin, *History of the United States* (2 vols., rev. ed., Boston, 1946), I, 715; Avery Craven and Walter Johnson, *The United States: Experiment in Democracy* (Boston, 1947), 358, 360; Robert E. Riegel and David F. Long, *The American Story* (2 vols., New York, 1955), I, 302.

territories were organized "with no provision for slavery during the territorial period" but adds that the states which might be made from the territories were to be admitted with or without slavery as their constitutions might prescribe at the time of their admission.² Six other textbooks tell of the organization of the two territories without mentioning any other provision as to slavery than the statehood provision and, so, imply that there was no other.³ Three of the six say that the territories were organized "without the Wilmot Proviso" and then give the statehood provision; they do not explain what the status of slavery would be in a territory organized "without the Wilmot Proviso."⁴ Six other college textbooks state that the territorial acts provided the "popular sovereignty" or "squatter sovereignty" as to slavery during the territorial period. They mention no other slavery provision and, so, imply that there was no other.⁵ These six give three substantially different definitions of popular sovereignty. Five additional textbooks, in addition to stating one, or the other, or both of the provisions heretofore mentioned, state a third slavery provision of the territorial acts, namely, one for the submission of the question of the status of slavery in the territories to the Supreme Court of the United States.⁶ No two of the five in this class agree very closely, though, as to how, and when, and in what form the question might be submitted to the Supreme Court or what the

² Oliver P. Chitwood, Frank L. Owsley, and H. C. Nixon, *A Short History of the American People* (2 vols., New York, 1945-1952), I, 638-39.

³ Arthur C. Bining and Philip S. Klein, *A History of the United States* (2 vols., New York, 1950-1951), I, 540; Harry J. Carman and Harold C. Syrett, *A History of the American People* (2 vols., New York, 1952), I, 571-73; Samuel E. Morison and Henry S. Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic* (2 vols., 4th ed., New York, 1950), I, 604, 606; James G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1937), 124; Merle Curti and others, *An American History* (2 vols., New York, 1950) I, 518; Ralph V. Harlow, *The Growth of the United States* (2 vols., New York, 1943), I, 458-59.

⁴ The last three textbooks mentioned in the preceding footnote. But, Randall, in a flash back on page 129, says the "principle of popular sovereignty" had been applied.

⁵ Clement Eaton, *A History of the Old South* (New York, 1949), 544; John D. Hicks, *The Federal Union* (New York, 1952), 498, 525; Homer C. Hockett, *The Constitutional History of the United States* (2 vols., New York, 1939), II, 226-228; F. L. Paxson, *History of the American Frontier, 1763-1893* (Boston, 1924), 379-80; George M. Stephenson, *American History to 1865* (New York, 1940), 498; Carl B. Swisher, *American Constitutional Development* (Boston, 1943), 239, 240.

⁶ Dwight L. Dumond, *A History of the United States* (New York, 1942), 390-94; A. H. Kelly and W. A. Harbison, *The American Constitution: Its Origin and Development* (New York, 1948), 374; A. C. McLaughlin, *A Constitutional History of the United States* (New York, 1935), 531-34; Jeannette P. Nichols and Roy F. Nichols, *The Republic of the United States: A History*

status of slavery was to be until the Supreme Court should have handed down its decision. In summary, twenty-two college textbooks give at least twelve substantially different descriptions of the slavery provisions of the New Mexico and Utah territorial acts of 1850.

If we turn from the textbooks to longer general accounts, we still find indefiniteness or lack of agreement. Take, for one, James Ford Rhodes's *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*. Surprising as it may seem, although Rhodes devotes one hundred pages to the enactment of the compromise measures, he nowhere clearly states what the slavery provisions of the territorial bills were. In one place he says the Omnibus Bill provided for territorial governments "without the Wilmot proviso" and in another says the Utah bill was "without the interdiction of slavery."⁷ These glimpses are manifestly inadequate. In the good, substantial *American Nation: A History*, the appropriate volume is George P. Garrison's *Westward Extension*. It says: "The crux of the compromise was the territorial clause of the New Mexico and Utah acts, which read as follows: 'Provided that, when ready for statehood, 'the said Territory . . . shall be admitted into the Union, with or without slavery, as their Constitution may prescribe at the time of admission.' "⁸ Since other books state other provisions, Garrison's statement does not satisfy. Allan Nevins's account of the Compromise of 1850 is even longer than Rhodes's. Yet Nevins nowhere states clearly what provisions the compromise measures contained relative to slavery in the territories. In one place he implies that "the people of the Territories should be allowed to decide for themselves whether they should have slavery." In another place he indicates that the territorial acts were "without any stipulations for or against slavery." In the next paragraph he implies that the principle adopted was for Congress to refrain from all legislation on the subject while the territories remained in the territorial stage, "leaving it to the people of such Territory, when they have attained to a condition which entitles them to admission

(2 vols., New York, 1942), I, 500; Fred W. Welborn, *The Growth of American Nationality, 1492-1865* (New York, 1943), 751. I have no quarrel with the account by Kelly and Harbison or that by Wellborn on any consequential matter.

⁷ James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* (7 vols., New York, 1893-1906), I, 99-198. The quotations are from pages 172 and 181.

⁸ George P. Garrison, *Westward Extension, 1841-1850* (New York, 1906), 331.

as a State, to decide for themselves the question of the allowance or prohibition of domestic slavery.”⁹

If there is a published monograph devoted to the Compromise of 1850 and including its territorial aspects, the present writer has been unable to find it. There is, however, one good scholarly article. It was by the late Frank Heywood Hodder and is entitled “The Authorship of the Compromise of 1850.”¹⁰ As the title suggests, Professor Hodder was principally concerned with determining the authorship of various parts of the compromise; but incidentally he outlined the main features of the compromise and, it is believed, in a generally satisfactory manner. This article has been insufficiently noticed by those who have written on the subject.

There is no sufficient justification for the failure of our historians to agree substantially as to what were the slavery provisions of the New Mexico and Utah acts. A careful reading of the acts themselves and their legislative history seems to make them entirely clear. The legislative history of a law does not determine its meaning; but it helps us to locate the germane parts, and it usually is our best available supporting evidence as to the intent of the framers.

The New Mexico act contained eighteen sections exclusive of the one about the Texas boundary; the Utah act contained seventeen sections. Except for names and boundaries the two acts were practically identical. Most of the sections were stock; that is, they were identical, or nearly so, with the corresponding sections of earlier territorial acts, of which there had been a large number. Only those few sections which contained references to slavery need detain us here.¹¹

One section (number 5 of the New Mexico act, 4 of the Utah) vested the legislative power and authority of the territory in “the governor and a legislative assembly.” This was a stock clause. It gave the governor the veto power.

Another section (number 7 in the New Mexico act, 6 in the Utah) read as follows: “. . . the legislative power of the Territory shall ex-

⁹ Allan Nevins, *The Ordeal of the Union* (2 vols., New York, 1947), I, 229-345. The quotations are from pages 273 and 311-12.

¹⁰ Frank H. Hodder, “The Authorship of the Compromise of 1850,” in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids, 1914-), XXII (March 1936), 525-36.

¹¹ The texts are conveniently found in Francis Newton Thorpe (comp.), *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws . . .* (7 vols., Washington, 1909), V, 2615-22 (New Mexico), VI, 3687-93 (Utah).

tend to *all rightful subjects of legislation*,¹² consistent with the Constitution of the United States and the provisions of this act; but no law shall be passed interfering with the primary disposal of the soil; no tax shall be imposed upon the property of the United States; nor shall the lands or other property of nonresidents be taxed higher than the lands or other property of residents. All the laws passed by the legislative assembly and governor shall be submitted to the Congress of the United States and, if disapproved, shall be null and of no effect."

These were innocent-looking clauses, but they were the ones that packed the dynamite. They meant and were intended to mean that the territorial legislatures might legislate on the subject of slavery either to prohibit it, or to establish it, or to regulate it. The legislative history of the bills makes this so clear that he who runs may read.

In the Senate Henry Clay's famous eight resolutions outlining a proposed general settlement of all the matters then in dispute were referred along with sundry other resolutions and bills to a select committee of thirteen. The committee of thirteen reported two bills and an amendment to another. One bill was the so-called Omnibus Bill. It covered the matters of California, the territories of New Mexico and Utah, and the Texas-New Mexico boundary. As to the territories, the Omnibus Bill contained the stock sections just quoted, but with the insertion of six words that altered their whole character in so far as slavery was concerned. The six words were "nor in respect to African slavery," and they were so inserted as to make the bill read: ". . . the legislative power . . . shall extend to all rightful subjects of legislation . . . but no law shall be passed interfering with the primary disposal of the soil, nor in respect to African slavery."¹³ This wording recognized that slavery was a "rightful" subject of legislation but forbade the territorial legislatures to touch it.

This restriction on the legislatures had been put in by a bare majority of the committee over the opposition of Clay, Lewis Cass, and others.¹⁴ Efforts to get the restriction removed in the Senate were staunchly resisted. Strongly antislavery senators wanted the clause retained because they believed it would leave the Mexican laws in effect; those laws prohibited slavery. Strongly proslavery senators also favored the retention of the restriction. They believed that

¹² All italics are mine throughout this article except where they are conventional.

¹³ The text of the controversial portions of the Omnibus Bill as reported from the committee of thirteen is in *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., 947-48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 948-50, 955, 1003, 1829-30, App., 902, 1463

Mexican laws had ceased to have validity when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had gone into effect and that the courts would so hold. They believed that the territories were accordingly without valid laws prohibiting slavery at the time and the restrictive clause would prevent the legislatures from enacting any new laws inimical to the institution. Thus there was in the Senate for a time an unnatural combination of Northern and Southern extremists against moderates.

The clause forbidding the legislatures to legislate on the subject of slavery remained in the Omnibus Bill for many weary weeks. It was modified somewhat. On June 5 Stephen A. Douglas moved in the committee of the whole to strike it out. His motion was defeated 21 to 33.¹⁵ Eventually, though, the friends of compromise discovered that the retention of the restriction was likely to kill the bill. On July 30 Moses Norris, Democrat of New Hampshire, moved again, in the whole Senate, to strike it out, and this time the motion carried 32 to 19, after nearly two days of thorough debate.¹⁶ The restriction on the legislatures having been removed, it was understood by all concerned that the legislatures were left entirely free to legislate on slavery as well as on all other "rightful" subjects not expressly removed from their province by the bill. It is difficult to see how there ever could come to be any other understanding of the meaning of this provision and of the intent of the majority in Congress.

As for the veto power of the territorial governors and the provision that laws passed by the legislatures and approved by the governors might nevertheless be disallowed by Congress, little was said in the debates. A governor's veto or a congressional disallowance of a law on the matter of slavery was apparently considered a remote contingency.¹⁷ Furthermore, the veto and the disallowance had to be included to prevent Utah from legalizing polygamy.

Let us turn now to the provisions of the territorial laws that provided for or related to appeals to the Supreme Court of the United States in cases involving slaves or slavery in the territories. The provisions are rather long, but it is necessary to quote them. After the usual provisions for setting up territorial courts, prescribing their jurisdictions,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1134, 1135.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1482, 1490, App., 1463-73.

¹⁷ They were mentioned, however. *Ibid.*, App., 1469, remarks of John M. Berrien of Georgia and Solomon W. Downs of Louisiana. In order to make squatter sovereignty more nearly complete, the framers of the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) permitted the legislature to pass laws over the governor's veto by a two-thirds majority and omitted the requirement that laws be submitted to Congress for approval.

and regulating appeals from one to another and to the Supreme Court of the United States, the territorial acts continued:

... except only that in all cases involving title to *slaves*, the said writs of error or appeals shall be allowed and decided by the said Supreme Court [of the United States] *without regard to the value* of the matter, property, or title in controversy; and except also that a writ of error or appeal shall also be allowed to the Supreme Court of the United States from the decision of the said Supreme Court created by this act, or of any judge thereof, or of the District Courts created by this act, or of any judge thereof, upon any writ of habeas corpus involving the question of *personal freedom*; ... and the said Supreme and District Courts of the said Territory, and the respective judges thereof, shall and may grant writs of habeas corpus in all cases in which the same are grantable by the judges of the United States in the District of Columbia.¹⁸

Another provision that was closely related to the matter of judicial determination and appeals was, as stated in the Utah act: "... the Constitution and laws of the United States are hereby extended over and declared to be in force in said Territory of Utah, so far as the same, or any provision thereof, may be applicable." The corresponding provision of the New Mexico act was different in wording but identical in meaning.¹⁹

What did these detailed provisions mean, and why were they put in the New Mexico and Utah acts? It is again necessary to turn to their legislative history.

Southerners of the stricter states' rights school had lately espoused a view or doctrine with regard to slavery in the territories which may be labeled, in default of a better term, the property-rights doctrine. It was briefly this: Under the Constitution, the territories are the common property of the states that comprise the Union. The federal government is only the agent of the states in administering that property and must administer it for the benefit of all the states. The citizens of the several states have the constitutional right to go into the common territories and take with them the property, of whatever classes, they have legally held in their respective states. In the territories they have the right to continue to hold that property and be protected in its possession and use by the laws, the courts, and the police officers of the territories. According to this doctrine, slaveholders from slaveholding states of the Union had the right to take their slaves into the territories and there hold them as slaves and control them and have

¹⁸ Sec. 10 in the New Mexico act, sec. 9 in the Utah.

¹⁹ Sec. 17 in both acts.

protection for their property therein.²⁰ Whether the proponents of this doctrine thought it also a constitutional right for citizens from slaveholding states to have property in children born of slave mothers in the territories and to buy and sell slaves there does not clearly appear; but presumably they did.

The advocates of the property-rights doctrine made persistent and determined efforts to get their view accepted by Congress and embodied in the Omnibus Bill and every other territorial bill. They were always defeated by substantial majorities. No Northern senator or representative accepted their view of the Constitution, and many Southern Whigs and Jacksonian Democrats, including Clay, Thomas Hart Benton, and Alexander H. Stephens, also rejected it. In the course of the debates, however, Clay and others frequently reminded their states' rights colleagues that the courts were open and that, if their doctrine was sound, the courts would no doubt so decide.²¹ Thereupon the proponents of the property-rights doctrine turned their efforts, as second best, to (1) clearing the way for an early test of their contention in the courts and (2) insuring that, if the prospective court decision should be in their favor, slavery would have the protection not only of the courts but of positive law and the police officers of the territories as well. Southern congressmen frankly admitted that, no matter what the Supreme Court might say, slavery could not exist in the territories unless sustained by positive law and effective police action.²²

It will be remembered that the Omnibus Bill in its original form forbade the territorial legislatures of New Mexico and Utah to legislate "*in respect to African slavery.*" After long and bitter debates the advocates of the property-rights doctrine prevailed upon the Senate to accept an amendment proposed by John M. Berrien of Georgia, which made the clause in question read: "The legislative power of said territory shall extend to all rightful subjects of legislation . . . but no law shall be passed . . . *establishing or prohibiting African slavery.*" This rewording was understood to leave the territorial legislatures with the power, and presumably the duty, to enact legislation to protect

²⁰ This doctrine had first been clearly stated by Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina in the House, January 15, 1847. *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 Sess., App., 244-46. John C. Calhoun embodied it in a set of resolutions, February 19, 1847. *Ibid.*, 455. During the debates on the compromise measures, the best expositions of the doctrine were made by Senator Berrien of Georgia, a former attorney general of the United States. See especially his speech of February 11-12, 1850. *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., App., 202-11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., 1004, App., 424.

²² *Ibid.*, 1004 (Jefferson Davis), App., 1386 (Robert M. T. Hunter).

property in slaves if the courts should decide that under the Constitution slavery was legal in all the territories of the United States and might not be prohibited. The vote on the amendment was 30 to 27.²³

On June 6 David L. Yulee of Florida proposed, also as an amendment to the Omnibus Bill: "That the Constitution and laws of the United States are hereby extended over, and declared to be in force in the said territory of Utah, so far as the same or any provision thereof may be applicable." Yulee explained his object clearly. He was trying, as he supposed those who had voted for the Berrien amendment had been, to put the bill in the same form as the proposed Clayton compromise of 1848. The idea of John M. Clayton's bill had been "to throw both parties on their constitutional rights, removing all obstructions to a fair test, and facilitating an early trial." Daniel Webster and others had contended that the Constitution did not extend to the territories *ex proprio vigore*. The courts might take the same view. To narrow the issue to rights under the Constitution and permit no side-stepping, Yulee was proposing to extend the Constitution to the territories. His amendment was adopted 30 to 24.²⁴

Then with John P. Hale of New Hampshire, a Free Soiler, taking the leading part, the Senate adopted the careful provisions, quoted above, on appeals from the territorial courts to the Supreme Court of the United States. These were designed to insure that no conceivable sort of case involving the alleged constitutional right of slaveholders to take slaves into the territories concerned and hold them in servitude should be finally decided by any court except the highest court in the land. These provisions were adopted without a division.²⁵ The prevailing idea seems to have been that, if the states' rights people were to have their day in court, it must be in the highest court and with no obfuscation of the issue.

As the Omnibus Bill then stood, it still forbade the territorial legislatures to establish slavery or to prohibit it, and it neither affirmed nor denied the validity of Mexican laws on the subject. But on July 31, as we have already seen, the Senate struck out the restriction on the power of territorial legislatures and left them with full power to legislate on slavery as a "rightful subject," subject to veto by a governor

²³ *Ibid.*, 1003-1007, 1018-19, 1083-88, 1113-22, 1131-34, 1379, App., 1467 (Berrien's explanation).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1144-46.

²⁵ But after an illuminating debate. *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., 1212, 1379-80, 1585, App., 897-902. The judiciary provisions as finally adopted were almost identical with those of the Clayton Bill of 1848. The text of the latter is in *Cong. Globe*, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., 1002-1005.

or disapproval by Congress itself. In what status did this leave the provision for appeals to the Supreme Court?

In the first place it should be entirely clear that Congress did not try to wash its hands of the question of slavery in the territories and leave it to the Supreme Court. It gave power to legislate upon the subject to the territorial legislatures, gave power to veto legislation upon the subject to territorial governors (officials appointed by the President with the consent of the Senate), and itself retained the right to disallow such legislation. The appeals provisions meant only that Congress recognized that a case might be got up to test the extent of its power to legislate on the subject of slavery in the territories and to confer upon a territorial legislature the power to prohibit or restrict slavery and that Congress was willing to have its powers so tested in the courts. No one in Congress suggested that the courts be denied jurisdiction of any slave cases that might arise. Such a thing has rarely been done.

The appeals provisions did not even insure that the Supreme Court would have an early opportunity to pass upon the constitutional issues that had been raised. The court must await an actual case; that might be a long time coming. Presumably a case would reach the court in some such manner as this: One of the territorial legislatures must first either confirm the Mexican laws prohibiting slavery or enact new ones to the same effect. Then a slaveowner from one of the states of the Union must bring a slave he had owned there into the territory and hold him or attempt to hold him in servitude. Next, the alleged slave must sue the master or would-be master in a court of the territory for false arrest, or charge him with assault and battery, or apply to a judge for a writ of habeas corpus directed to the person who was holding him in servitude. Finally, the territorial court must make a decision and the decision be appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States. In fact no case involving "title to slaves" or "the question of personal freedom" ever came to the Supreme Court from either New Mexico or Utah. The famous Dred Scott case, which was made to involve the powers of Congress as to slavery in the territories, came by a different route.

Congress did not give a pledge in the New Mexico and Utah acts to carry out the decision of the Supreme Court if that decision should uphold the property-rights doctrine. That is another sort of thing that is not done. Southern defenders of the doctrine did not ask for such a pledge. They had reason, however, to presume that Congress would take whatever measures might seem necessary to secure citizens in their constitutional rights as those rights should be defined by the

Supreme Court in its interpretation of the Constitution. And Southern people were entitled to be disappointed and embittered when their Northern brethren refused to abide by and carry out that decision as they did refuse to accept and implement the Dred Scott decision.

Another section of the territorial bills (number 2 of the New Mexico act, 1 of the Utah) contained this provision: “. . . when admitted as a State, the said territory, or any portion of the same, shall be received into the Union, with or without slavery, as their constitution may prescribe at the time of their admission.” What did this section amount to? Let us again look at the record.

The statehood provision was first introduced, with different wording, by Senator Pierre Soulé of Louisiana, June 15, as an amendment to the Omnibus Bill. Soulé’s declared object was to try to put Northern senators and representatives on record as promising not to oppose the admission of a slave state if one should apply. His amendment was adopted by a vote of 38 to 12 in the Senate after a protracted argument as to what its use would be. The House refused by a vote of 58 to 85 to strike it out.²⁶ Only strong Wilmot Proviso men voted against the amendment. They refused to make any pledge, and they told Soulé that the amendment was useless, since one Congress could not bind a successor. Other senators seemed to think there was little likelihood that a qualified territory would be refused admission to statehood because of a constitution permitting slavery and, therefore, Soulé’s amendment was immaterial. Thus the statehood part of the Compromise of 1850 was a promise by one Congress that a later Congress would not refuse to admit Utah, or New Mexico, or any part thereof for the reason that it would come into the Union as a slave state. That promise was intended to be reassuring to the South. It was certainly not the “crux of the compromise.”²⁷

The statehood provision did not mean, as so many books imply, that Congress was *conferring* upon new states the right to decide for themselves whether they should be slave or free. The Constitution gave them the right. Almost everyone in Congress recognized that they possessed the right. That had practically been demonstrated and agreed upon thirty years before at the time of the Missouri Compromise.

When informed people of the day used the term “squatter sover-

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., 1238-39, 1379, 1773, App., 902-11 (debate).

²⁷ Those who have exaggerated the importance of this provision have perhaps been led to do so by a misleading passage in Alexander H. Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1870), II, 217-20.

eignty" or "popular sovereignty" they meant the right of a *territory* (not of a *State*) to decide for itself what to do with regard to slavery during the *territorial stage*. Congress in the Utah and New Mexico acts gave the power to make that decision to the legislatures of the respective territories. No other method of exercising "squatter sovereignty" can properly be wrung out of the acts.

The slavery provisions of the New Mexico and Utah acts differed considerably from Henry Clay's proposals in his famous eight compromise resolutions. They differed still more widely from the provisions of the Omnibus Bill as originally reported by the committee of thirteen. No one man was their author—neither Clay, nor Webster, nor Douglas.²⁸ They were hammered out line by line and word by word in the Senate by sixty men every one of whom had very definite ideas as to just what they should be and many of whom were among the best constitutional lawyers in the country. The House did not materially change any of these slavery provisions as they came from the Senate.²⁹ The House influenced them, however; for the Senate leaders in charge were in constant touch with House leaders and knew rather well what the House would accept and what it would not accept.³⁰ Passage in the House was recognized as the big hurdle.

Now let us summarize the slavery provisions of the New Mexico and Utah acts and their intent. *First and principally*, the territorial legislatures were given full power to legislate on slavery, subject to a possible veto by the governor or a possible disallowance by Congress. That was squatter or popular sovereignty. *Second*, if one or both of the territories should prohibit slavery and if any sort of a slave case should

²⁸ Cf. Hodder, "The Authorship of the Compromise of 1850," and Holman Hamilton, "Democratic Senate Leadership and the Compromise of 1850," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. XLI (December 1954), 403-18.

²⁹ It has not seemed necessary to follow the fortunes of the various bills here. The succession is made very clear in Professor Hodder's article. Briefly: The Committee on Territories, Stephen A. Douglas, chairman, put California in one bill and the matters of the Texas-New Mexico boundary and the organization of New Mexico and Utah territories in another. The committee of thirteen, not Clay, put all these matters in one bill, the so-called Omnibus. The provisions in regard to slavery in the territories were hammered out in perfecting the territorial parts of the Omnibus Bill. The Senate, not Douglas, broke up the Omnibus Bill into four, not five, bills. The House united the Senate Texas Boundary and New Mexico bills, and the Senate accepted this combination. The matters of fugitive slaves and slave trading in the District of Columbia had never been in the Omnibus Bill. These are simple and not very important matters; but most books mention them, and few get them straight.

³⁰ Hodder, "The Authorship of the Compromise of 1850," and George Fort Milton, *The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (Boston, 1934), chs., iv, v, give numerous illustrations.

arise under that prohibition, the case could go on appeal to the Supreme Court, could not be withheld therefrom because of any technicality Congress had been able to foresee, and the Supreme Court would then have to pass on the question whether Congress had the power under the Constitution to exclude slavery from the territories or to confer upon a territorial legislature the power to do so. *Third*, a promise was given that a future Congress would not refuse to admit New Mexico, Utah, or any part thereof as a state for the reason that it would be a slave state or that it would be a free state.

These were the slavery provisions of the New Mexico and Utah acts. It is understood, of course, that the provisions were not the compromise. The essence of compromise is mutual concessions for the sake of agreement. To know what the compromise was, we must know who conceded what. But one cannot determine what the Compromise of 1850 was until he knows what the provisions of the compromise measures were.

It is admitted, as a possibility, that the slavery provisions of the territorial acts could have been themselves a concession by one side to secure the consent of the other to the passage of one or more of the other compromise measures. It is believed, however, that the territorial acts did contain mutual concessions, that these concessions were an important part of the Compromise of 1850, and that in the main the territorial bills stood on their own merits. It is true that a number of senators and representatives voted for them as a part of a general scheme of adjustment who would not have done so if they had stood entirely alone.

Let us look first at the slavery provisions of the territorial acts from the viewpoint of the proslavery people. Strongly proslavery men had been determined that the territories should be opened to slavery. They were striving desperately to get new slave states into the Union so that they could maintain a balance in the United States Senate friendly to their "peculiar institution." They had long since lost control of the House. They thought they must maintain a balance, or something approaching a balance, in the Senate if they were to continue to ward off federal legislation inimical to slavery. They believed slaveholders had a constitutional right to take slaves into the territories and hold them and that neither Congress nor a territorial legislature could constitutionally deny them that right. Slaveholders did not want to be denied any rights. They did not want to be denied the opportunity to settle in the territories if the territories should prove attractive. Most proslavery people saw nothing in the climate or soil of Utah and New Mexico or in the occupations or probable occupations of the settlers

to make slavery impractical or unprofitable there; and, indeed, there was nothing.³¹ They believed that if these territories could be opened to slavery, slaveholders would move into them with their slaves, and, in due course of time, the majority of the people there would come to accept slavery and the territories would become slave states. The territorial acts held out only a modicum of hope to these men.

The territorial acts did not open the territories to slavery. They neither explicitly nor implicitly recognized the alleged constitutional right of slaveholders from states of the Union to take slaves into the territories and hold them in slavery there. The territories had been free under Mexican laws and were likely to remain free. There was only a bare chance that a large enough number of Southern people friendly to slavery would migrate into the territories to get laws enacted in one or both territories legalizing slavery. There was also only a bare possibility that the appeals provisions would bear fruit. Some slaveholder might assume the risk of taking slaves into one of the territories and trying to hold them there in violation of the laws against slavery, which in all probability would prevail. In such an event, a test case would go to the Supreme Court. If then the Supreme Court should decide that the property-rights view of the Constitution was valid, as extreme states' rights people hoped and professed to believe it would, the territories would be legally open to slavery. Then, if the Supreme Court decision could be implemented by territorial or federal legislation, the territories would actually be open to slavery. Then, if slavery should flourish there, the territories might someday become slave states.³² These possibilities were slender comfort to the South.

Only one feature of the territorial acts, in so far as they affected slavery, was entirely satisfactory to all proslavery men: There was nothing in the acts which pronounced or even implied a moral judgment against slavery.³³ Practically all the Southern people had been determined that nothing should be put in an act of Congress stigma-

³¹ I have argued at some length the point of what determined the profitability of slaveholding in "The Economic History of Negro Slavery in the United States," in *Agricultural History* (Chicago, 1927-), XI (October 1937), 308-21. Cf. Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVI (September 1929), 151-71.

³² After the Dred Scott Decision (1857) had been made, the legislature of New Mexico enacted a law for the protection of slave property. The Census of 1860 showed no slaves in New Mexico, 29 in Utah, 2 in Kansas, and 15 in Nebraska.

³³ One of Clay's compromise resolutions had implied a reproach: "as slavery does not exist by law, and is not likely to be introduced into any territory acquired . . . from Mexico, it is *inexpedient* for congress to provide by law either for its introduction into, or exclusion from, any part of said territory."

tizing slavery as an institution unfit to be extended to new territory. That would have been almost universally regarded in the South as an insult which was "not to be borne" and which would call for resistance to the "last extremity." With the Senate constituted as it was in 1850, there had never been any considerable danger that the Wilmot Proviso itself would be adopted. The largest vote that it received in any form in the critical session was twenty-five in a possible sixty, and that notwithstanding the fact that thirty senators were under instructions from state legislatures to vote for it.³⁴ The danger had been that California would be admitted with its free-state constitution and nothing would be done about settling the territorial question. But the absence from the bills of any sort of "taunt or reproach" was a matter of genuine satisfaction to the Southern people generally. It was sufficient to satisfy that large number who believed the best strategy to pursue in defense of slavery was to refrain from any aggressive campaign to extend the limits of slave territory.

Now let us consider the territorial acts from the viewpoint of anti-slavery people. Strongly antislavery men had been determined that slavery should not go into the territories under any circumstances. They made it a matter of conscience to vote against any provision that would create even a bare possibility of the extension of slavery. They believed slavery would thrive in Utah and New Mexico if permitted there³⁵ and the only way to be sure of keeping it out was by an act of Congress absolutely prohibiting it. They were greatly disappointed, therefore, by their failure to attach the Wilmot Proviso to the territorial acts.

Milder antislavery people could reconcile themselves to squatter sovereignty in the two particular territories; though not as a general principle applicable to all territories. They could persuade themselves that the existing populations—Mexicans in New Mexico, Mormons in Utah—were so firm in their opposition to slavery that they would never let it get started among them. They were strongly reassured on this point when a convention held in New Mexico during the very time the great struggle was going on in Congress framed a constitution for the prospective state which forbade slavery.³⁶ Or antislavery men of

³⁴ Lewis Cass and Alpheus Felch of Michigan, Daniel S. Dickinson of New York, and Webster made no pretense of obeying their instructions. Several other senators, Douglas for one, technically obeyed them but worked for compromise. They often absented themselves when the Proviso was being voted on.

³⁵ See, for example, statement of William H. Seward in his "Higher Law" speech, March 11, *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., App., 266.

³⁶ Roger S. Baldwin, Whig of Connecticut, gave this as a reason why he had reversed his position on the proposed squatter-sovereignty provision between June 5 and July 31. *Ibid.*, App., 1472.

the milder sort could persuade themselves, as Webster seems to have, that slavery was excluded from these territories by "an ordinance of nature." Still milder antislavery men could further salve their consciences, if that was necessary, by rationalizing that they might as well leave the determination of the status of slavery to the territorial legislatures in the first place, for those bodies would determine it in the long run anyway.³⁷ As for the possibility under the territorial acts that a case might be taken to the Supreme Court and the court might decide in favor of the property-rights view of the Constitution, antislavery people could reassure themselves in several ways: The likelihood that a case would get to the court was remote. At any rate a citizen must have the opportunity to take a question of constitutional rights to court. That could have been done even though the Wilmot Proviso had been in the laws, and the issue would have been substantially the same.³⁸ In any event the Supreme Court was not likely to accept the property-rights doctrine; for the power of Congress to legislate for the territories in the matter of slavery or let them legislate for themselves was sustained by the practice of over sixty years.

It is a testimonial to the great skill with which the slavery provisions of the territorial bills had been framed that no one, North or South, had to vote contrary to his deep-seated feelings or convictions on slavery in order to get the bills passed. No antislavery man had to vote affirmatively to permit slavery where it was already prohibited. No Northern representative could have brought himself to do that, and several Southerners, including Clay and Benton, could not have done it either. No antislavery man had to feel that by his vote he was even making probable the establishment of slavery in a region where it did not already exist. No proslavery man had to vote directly to exclude slavery anywhere. No proponent of the property-rights view of slavery in the territories had to betray his views. Of course, many members of both houses and of both sections could not bring themselves to make even the limited concessions of principle or interests necessary to vote for these acts, and they opposed them to the end. The acts, passed over their stubborn opposition by substantial majorities in the Senate and narrow in the House.

It would be futile to attempt to say which side came off the better in the territorial acts. They were a compromise. The late Professor

³⁷ This was the line taken by Douglas and William A. Richardson of Illinois. *Ibid.*, App., 369-70, 423.

³⁸ The Dred Scott case actually arose in Missouri, and judges examined the constitutionality of the provision in the Missouri Compromise of 1820 prohibiting slavery in a portion of the Louisiana Purchase.

Hodder thought "The Compromise was more largely . . . a southern measure than a northern one." He had reference to the compromise measures as a whole.³⁹ As to the territorial bills alone, there is no question that a larger proportion of Southern Congressmen than of Northern voted for them. In the Senate 21 Southerners voted for the Utah bill, and only 2 against it; 11 Northern men voted for it, and 16 against it. In the House 56 Southerners voted for it, and 15 against it; 41 Northerns voted for it, and 70 against it.⁴⁰ But this distribution by no means proves that the territorial acts were more favorable to the proslavery cause. The proslavery party was the weaker of the two. Proslavery men had to make greater concessions to effect a settlement. They were more in need of an immediate settlement. Time and the trend of events favored the other side.

³⁹ Hodder, "The Authorship of the Compromise of 1850," 535.

⁴⁰ *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., App., 1485 (Senate vote), 1776 (House). The votes on the Utah bill were more of a test on the slavery provisions than those on the New Mexico bill, for the latter was always involved with the Texas boundary dispute.

The Economic History of Negro Slavery in the United States

By ROBERT R. RUSSEL

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ANY DESCRIPTION of the economic characteristics of Negro slavery must be tested by the economic history of the institution. In turn the economic history of Negro slavery, to be truthful, must be written with the inherent characteristics of slavery and the native traits of Negroes in mind. It also should be written whole, and it should be written with the general economic history of the entire country as a background. Thus, it is at least possible to avoid attributing conditions in one period of history or in one portion of the Union to slavery while attributing the same conditions in another period or in another region to entirely different causes. It is believed that many misjudgments have been commonly pronounced upon slavery in its economic aspects and that such misinterpretations have been due principally to a too exclusive concern with slavery in only one section of the Union during only one period, namely about 1830 to 1865, and to using the approach of political rather than economic history.

Slavery was first introduced into the Continental English Colonies in response to the demands of the tobacco-growing industry. It was early found that the soil and climate of Virginia and Maryland, particularly, were suitable for growing tobacco. Tobacco was not bulky in proportion to its value, it was not perishable, and the small ships of the day could collect it from the wharves of individual planters on the numerous rivers and creeks of the Tidewater region; consequently, it would stand the long shipment to Europe. The English Government imposed discriminatory taxes on tobacco not grown in English colonies and forbade its growth in the British Isles. The English and European appetite for the weed grew. Thus an adequate market was established. Enterprising tobacco growers in the Colonies naturally looked about to see how they might enlarge the scale of their operations.

Land and labor were the chief requisites for growing tobacco on a large scale. Land was easily obtained, but labor was not. Men would not work for wages when it was so easy to become independent farmers. Planters first had recourse to white indentured servants, and the plantations in Virginia and Maryland in the seventeenth century were built up chiefly with that kind of labor, but it was not entirely satisfactory. To secure such servants the planters had to pay their passage to America,—a considerable sum. The supply was limited and many were “jail birds” or poor quality.¹ A large proportion died before they had become acclimated. At best they served only the period of indenture—about four years on the average—and then they were free and their children with them.

The use of Negro slaves elsewhere suggested their use in the English Colonies. The English Government encouraged it, prompted largely by the desire of various influential people at home to profit by the African slave trade. The tobacco planters were hesitant; they had to overcome racial prejudice and gain experience in handling slaves. Although Negroes fresh from Africa or from a few years’ sojourn in the West Indies were not as effective laborers as their descendants came to be a few generations later, they could be taught the comparatively simple operations involved in colonial agriculture, the supply was adequate, and they were comparatively cheap. In the tobacco and corn fields the slaves could be worked in gangs and readily supervised. They could be advantageously employed on the plantations the year around, and the women and children could be used as well as the men. Perhaps most decisive of all, they thrived and multiplied, and they served for life and their children after them, thus giving planters reasonable assurance that their labor forces would not melt away. Restraints, therefore, were gradually broken down, and slavery eventually came to be firmly established in the tobacco belt.

For similar reasons, and without the preliminary indentured-servant stage, rice and indigo plantations with Negro slave labor developed in the eighteenth century in the Carolinas and Georgia. In the case of rice growing, an added inducement to employ slaves was that they stood the fevers of the swamps better than whites.

The New England Colonies were unable to utilize slave labor in their agriculture to any considerable extent. It was not because Puritan consciences would not permit; they did not gag at the African slave

¹ There is a difference of opinion among students as to the quality of these transported prisoners. See, for example, C. M. Andrews, *Colonial Folkways*, 190-194 (New Haven, 1919), and T. J. Wertenbaker, *The First Americans, 1607-1690*, p. 25 (New York, 1929).

trade nor at selling captive Indians into slavery. Nor was it that more intelligent labor was required to grow wheat, corn, beans, and pumpkins in New England than corn, tobacco, rice, and indigo in the South; the Southern staples certainly required the greater care and skill. The fundamental reason was that, except in a few localities, New England farmers found no product for which there was a ready market. They had, perforce, to produce only for home consumption and for the very limited local markets. There was, therefore, little incentive for the New England farmer to enlarge the scale of his operations to what can be called plantation size. The members of the family, with extra help at the harvest season drawn from the fisherfolk and from the artisans of the towns and countryside, constituted an adequate labor force on the small farm. Producing little that was salable and, therefore, having little with which to buy, New England farm families were constrained to do much household manufacturing, and Negro slaves were not so well adapted to that.

If they had been tempted to use it, New England farmers would have found Negro slave labor rather expensive, considering its low efficiency, because of the cost of shelter, fuel, and clothing during the winter months. The policies of land disposition initially adopted and long continued in the New England Colonies were less conducive to the accumulation of large holdings than were those of the Southern Colonies; but it is not unreasonable to suppose that this handicap would have been overcome if there had been strong inducements for individuals to acquire large holdings for farming purposes.

In connection with the reasons why New England farmers did not employ many slaves, it is an illuminating fact that neither did they use many white indentured servants. It is very illuminating also that the back-country districts of the South, being debarred from growing staples by inaccessibility to markets, had a rural economy quite similar to that of New England—with few plantations, little bound labor, and much household manufacturing.

The chief New England industries which produced for commercial markets and in which, therefore, there was an incentive to large-scale operations, were fishing, lumbering, and ship building; shipping also employed many men. It is almost obvious why Negro slaves could not be used advantageously in such occupations. They required chiefly strong men, and therefore complications concerning ownership of the women and children would have arisen. They were largely seasonal; and masters would have had difficulty in finding employment for their slaves in off seasons. The risks to life and limb were great; and slaves, unlike wage laborers, were capital and would have to be replaced by

purchase. A large proportion of the workmen must be skilled and intelligent, as in fishing, at least, men could not be worked in gangs and closely supervised. Rude Africans could hardly be made into skilled artisans to work at the numerous handicrafts of prefactory days. So the chief employment of Negro slaves in New England was as menials; and the rich or well-to-do who could and would afford such servants were not numerous enough to utilize a large number.

The economy of the Middle Colonies was more like that of New England than that of the South, but there were districts which produced wheat or livestock for export, generally in the forms of flour or biscuit and salted meats. In such districts plantations developed, and a considerable number of slaves appeared, although not nearly so many as were to be found farther south. Quakers were numerous in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and they had scruples, sometimes overcome, against holding slaves. These colonies were fortunate also in getting a large number of high-grade indentured servants from Germany. For these reasons and perhaps others, indentured servants continued to be more numerous than slaves in the Middle Colonies throughout the eighteenth century.

The American Revolution, with its philosophy of equality and inalienable rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, brought a reaction against slavery. This reaction, together with the hostility of a growing class of wage earners to slave competition, was sufficient to bring about, within two decades, provision for either immediate or gradual emancipation of the slaves in all the Northern States and to dedicate the Old Northwest to freedom.²

It was one of the accidents with which history abounds that, after slavery had been abolished in the North, after a strong antislavery sentiment had developed, and after the likelihood that the institution should ever be reestablished was *nil*, industries developed there in which slaves could have been employed to advantage had they been available. They probably could have been used in the textile mills, which sprang up in great numbers as the industrial revolution came on. Such mills employed men, women, and children, and the operations did not require skill beyond the capacity of Negroes to acquire. The work was easily supervised, and the chances of loss by death or serious injury were not great. Whether slaves would have been used in textile factories is a different question. White free-labor was available and the

² In 1795, John Adams said: "Arguments might have some weight in the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts, but the real cause was the multiplication of labouring white people, who would no longer suffer the rich to employ these sable rivals as much to their injury."

choice between the two classes would have been determined by a variety of factors impossible to evaluate at this distance in time.³

As means of transportation improved and the growth of an industrial population expanded the home market for foodstuffs, Northern agriculture became more commercialized and specialized along the trade routes. Wheat came to be the chief market crop in extensive areas; corn and hogs were staples in other localities. Slave labor might not have proved to be as well adapted to the production of such commodities as to the production of Southern staples.⁴ For example, swinging cradles in the wheat harvest might have been pretty strenuous exercise for prime field hands, and apparently there would have been difficulty in finding suitable employment for slave women and children at some seasons of the year. But good soil, large yields, and fair prices might easily have offset such minor defects in adaptability. As it was, there was not a sufficient number of whites who would work for the wages which farmers could offer, and Negro slaves were not available at all; the plantation system was not developed, and the small farm prevailed. But there is no good reason to doubt that, if slaves had been available, they would have been utilized and plantations would have developed.

In the South the sentimental reaction against slavery caused by the Revolutionary philosophy coincided in time with a severe depression in the tobacco industry and the decline of indigo. Under the double impact, thousands of slaves were freed by their masters in Virginia and Maryland, and in spite of the social dangers involved in freeing so many still primitive people, these states might have followed the example of their Northern sisters had not the spectacular development of the cotton-growing industry and the slightly less spectacular development of sugar-growing intervened.

The causes for the rise of the cotton-growing industry have often been well told. The development of labor-saving machinery for spinning and weaving in England and elsewhere lowered the prices of cotton goods and thus stimulated the demand for them. Further improvements made it practicable to utilize short-staple cotton as well as long in manufacturing cloth. Eli Whitney's famous invention made it possible to gin short-staple cotton at a small fraction of the cost of ginning by hand and thus to grow such cotton in America profitably at a price manufacturers could afford to pay. Reduction in the cost of the raw

³ See p. 316-318 for suggestions.

⁴ See F. L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, 2:103 ff. (New York, 1907) for interesting contemporary speculations on this point.

material still further reduced the prices of cotton goods, stimulating the demand for them and, therefore, in turn, for raw cotton. Only a few localities in the South were adapted to long-staple cotton, but vast areas were as well adapted to the short-staple variety as any regions on the globe. Land, the section's resources yet untaxed, remained cheap. Cotton had a high value in proportion to bulk, and the South had numerous navigable rivers on which it could be floated to the sea; so the staple could stand the cost of transportation to distant markets even before railroads penetrated the interior. As production increased prices fell, but they were seldom so low that people forsook cotton for other crops. Thanks to improved gins and plows and to the substitution of the mule and the horse for the slow-moving ox, production costs fell somewhat also. Prices and production fluctuated widely, making the industry highly speculative; but this feature perhaps repelled few. Finally cotton growing could utilize slave labor.

If ever any industry was made to order for Negro slavery, cotton growing was. It occupied the slaves a large portion of the year as well, if not better, than tobacco culture, and on farms and plantations the interstices could easily be filled in with other necessary and not unprofitable tasks. Cotton growing could utilize men, women, and children of all abilities and skills, the dullest and slowest as well as the quickest and most intelligent. Although it lent itself well to the gang system and to supervision, a large force was not essential. The cotton belt, except for a few localities, was about as healthy as any other part of the Lower South; and cotton growing could not be termed a dangerous occupation.

The sugar industry developed rapidly after Etienne de Boré had demonstrated on his Louisiana plantation during 1794-95 that sugar could be grown profitably in that region. On account of the vagaries of the weather, production fluctuated widely from season to season, making the industry even more speculative than cotton growing, but frequently the profits were large. The industry remained confined almost exclusively to lower Louisiana.

Sugar growing was not quite so well adapted to slavery as cotton. It required a larger proportion of grown men in the gangs. Health conditions were not as good in the sugar belt as in most parts of the cotton belt. For various reasons, especially the cost of sugar-making machinery and of leveeing, it was a large-scale industry; the small slaveholder could not engage in it. But it met most of the qualifications for the profitable use of slaves. And because it was a large-scale industry, sugar planters did not, as did cotton and tobacco planters, have any direct competition from small farmers.

The cotton-growing industry, reenforced by the sugar industry, eventually employed an absolute majority of all the slaves in the country and provided the chief market for slaves that were sold.

After the American Revolution the tobacco-growing industry, which had employed the bulk of the slaves in Colonial days, did not again enjoy real prosperity until the 1850's. Thousands of planters removed with their slaves from the tobacco to the cotton belt. Slave prices were always higher in the cotton and sugar areas than in the tobacco areas with the result that most of the slaves sold in the latter were bought up by traders who took them to the Lower South. This traffic, indeed, reached such proportions that the abolitionists charged Virginians and others with breeding slaves for sale. This charge, which was strongly resented, was not true in the literal sense, but, no doubt, the money received from the sale of surplus slaves enabled many a tobacco planter, who otherwise must have removed from the tobacco belt or given up slaveholding altogether, to go on year after year holding slaves and raising tobacco. In general, if all the natural increase of the slave population of the tobacco States had had to remain there, the tobacco industry could not have absorbed them, and, unless other commercialized industries which could utilize slaves in sufficient numbers had then sprung up, the surplus slaves would have been emancipated. It was, therefore, principally the prosperity of cotton growing which maintained slavery as a vigorous institution in the border slave States.

The rice industry grew steadily and utilized an increasing number of slaves, and hemp was a product of slave labor in various localities. Household service, in town and country, continued to absorb a considerable portion of the slave population.

As time went by there developed in the South other industries or occupations which demanded labor bond or free. Steamboats were operated, loaded, and unloaded, and railroads were built and operated. A number of cotton factories sprang up, especially in the Carolinas and Georgia, and there were saw mills, flour and grist mills, iron works, car shops, and tobacco factories. Nearly all of the handicrafts of the time were followed to a greater or less extent in the slaveholding States, where they competed for labor against agriculture and domestic service, and attracted some slave labor. Slaves were owned or hired in considerable numbers by artisans. Many a master hired out his slaves to railroad contractors or went in person with his gang to work at railway grading, and occasionally a railroad company would buy slaves for construction and maintenance work. The Virginia tobacco factories and iron works, and at least one cotton factory, the Saluda, in South Carolina, successfully employed Negro slaves for several years. There

was a protracted debate in Southern journals as to whether they could be successfully utilized in factories and, if not, whether other labor could be found, that is, whether the section could have an industrial revolution or not.⁵

In general as time passed the class of white and, to a less extent, free-Negro wage-labor grew, by immigration, transfer from agriculture, and otherwise, and gradually took over a large proportion of such jobs, especially the ones requiring skill, while the slaves were more and more concentrated in staple agriculture and domestic service. During the 1850's the slave population of Baltimore, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Charleston actually declined although those cities, except Charleston, were growing rapidly, while in a number of other towns, including Richmond, Savannah, Augusta, Memphis, Nashville, and Mobile, the slave population declined relatively to the white.

The reasons for this partial displacement were various. Slaves could not be so advantageously employed in some of the occupations indicated as in agriculture. In some cases the character of the industry would practically necessitate hiring labor instead of owning it—because the work was seasonal or required quite unnatural proportions of men, women, or children—and slaveowners were loath to entrust their valuable slaves to the care of those whose interest would be to exploit them to the limit. Some trades demanded more skill than Negroes could readily acquire. The newly organized manufacturing and railroad companies had trouble enough in raising capital for construction and equipment without saddling themselves with debts incurred in buying hands. In some of the employments concerned, the risks of loss of slaves by accident or disease were great; free laborers usually bore their own risks. As towns grew and Negroes became more sophisticated, it became increasingly difficult to control slaves. White labor was becoming class conscious and demanding the exclusion of slaves from various employments in which whites commonly engaged.⁶

The chief reasons why slaves retained almost a monopoly of domestic service even in the towns were the disinclination of free-born whites to do menial tasks and the preference of employers for servants

⁵ Kathleen Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era*, ch. 6 (New York and London, 1931); C. H. Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925*, ch. 1 (New York, 1927); U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 375-378 (New York, 1918); Robert R. Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-1861*, ch. 2, "Movement for the Diversification of Industry, 1840-1852," p. 33-64 (Urbana, Ill., 1923).

⁶ Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States*, ch. 3; Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era*, 236-237; Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism*, 53, 218-220.

who would remain in their service more permanently than the average hired domestic.

For various reasons a free-labor class did not develop as rapidly in agricultural as in nonagricultural pursuits. White free labor had greater relative advantages over Negro slave labor in the latter than in the former and, therefore, as long as there was not enough for both, naturally gravitated into the nonagricultural employments,—always excepting domestic service. The skill required was usually greater than in agriculture and consequently wages tended to be higher. The towns had social attractions. Immigration from the North and from Europe largely entered at the seaports and tended to stay there. In the towns the varied nature of industry made it more practicable to provide separate tasks or distinctions in task for whites and Negroes and thus enable the whites to avoid feeling that they were doing slaves' work.

In the towns, with their denser population and more varied industry, employers could employ free labor and be reasonably assured of constantly having a supply available. In the rural districts, however, with their sparser population, planters hesitated to dispose of slaves and engage wage labor because they did not feel assured of being able to fill vacancies that were certain to arise. In other words, until there should be a large free-labor class in the country, planters would fear to rely upon it, and this fear would, in turn, prevent the class from developing. The story is told of a sugar planter who, becoming disgusted with slave labor, sold all his slaves and hired German and Irish immigrants in their stead. During the first grinding season they struck for double wages, and the planter went back to slaves.⁷

In the rural South it was still too easy for freemen to become independent farmers for any large number to seek work for wages. During the last decade before the War between the States, Southern agriculture was so prosperous that, in spite of the shift of slaves from town to country, demand greatly outran supply. Prices of slaves soared to unheard of heights; smuggling from Africa was renewed; and agitation began for a repeal of the laws against the foreign slave trade (an agitation inspired in part by other than economic motives, to be sure). A large number of small white farmers increased their production of staples. Yet few whites, "poor" or otherwise, entered Southern agriculture as wage earners.

If slavery could have been maintained in the South until the growth of population and scarcity of land caused a large number of white people of good quality to work for wages on farms and planta-

⁷ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 337.

tions, then, according to all the signs, employers would have preferred the white wage-labor. And if, in such a case, a surplus of labor had developed, slaves would have been set free, presumably, to shift for themselves.

But, as has been so often remarked, although still frequently overlooked, the displacement of Negro slaves by white wage earners in any branch of industry did not, or would not, prove that free labor in general was superior to slave labor; it only proved that white labor of a certain quality was superior to Negro slave labor of a certain quality in a particular branch of industry.

The statement has frequently been made that Southern slaveowners would have been well advised at some time before 1861 to free their slaves and hire the freedmen back for wages. The proposal is manifestly absurd if made applicable to a period before the Negroes had been in America long enough to acquire the white men's ways and want to live like them and not run off to the woods and swamps or join the Indians. But even for later periods, if considered only in its economic aspects, and if it is not assumed that the slaveholders should have foreseen that persistence in slavery would lead to war and a long train of consequences, the suggestion does not seem wise. In the country districts the freedmen, like the whites, would have desired to become independent farmers, and, unless land ownership or leaseholding had been denied them (something we have no right to assume), at least the more capable and enterprising would have succeeded. The masters would, therefore, have had a smaller labor force to exploit for their own advantage, and furthermore, those Negroes who had to earn their living by working for wages would in all probability have been less effective workers as freemen than they had been as slaves.⁸ The average Negro would have been content with a lower standard of living and, consequently, would not have worked as regularly. He would have been sick or ailing more frequently and would have lost considerable time during the intervals between quitting his old jobs and finding new ones.

These conclusions seem to have been borne out by experience after the slaves were actually freed. The planters tried to continue their plantations substituting wage labor for slave, but the experiment failed, and they were forced to divide their landholdings into small farms, which were rented out to white or Negro tenants, usually on a crop-

⁸ M. B. Hammond, *The Cotton Industry; An Essay in American Economic History*, 186 (New York, 1897); U. B. Phillips, "The Economics of Slave Labor in the South," *The South in the Building of the Nation*, 5:121 (Richmond, Va., 1910).

share system. Only as time passed and land values increased, have the landowners been able to make better bargains with their tenants, and, in the case of Negro tenants especially, to exercise such a degree of supervision over them as to restore some of the advantages of the old plantation system. If the slaves had been freed in more propitious times, not in a country half-devasted by war and with ill feeling between the races augmented by the events of the reconstruction period, things might not have worked out in just the same way, but it is unlikely that the result would have been substantially different.

Negro slavery was introduced into this country to meet a demand for labor which could not be met as satisfactorily in any other manner. It was long maintained for various reasons but chiefly because it continued to satisfy the demand for labor, caused by the continued scarcity of free white wage-earners. The introduction and perpetuation of Negro slavery do not prove that free whites were less effective workers than Negro slaves.

It has often been asserted that, had it not been for the War between the States and consequent abolition, slavery would soon have died out anyway because of economic inadequacy. If the analysis presented in this article is at all sound, this common judgment requires much qualification. If the fate of Negro slavery had been left to be determined solely by the economic interest of the master class, it is not likely that it would have died a natural death for a long time.⁹ But the fate of the institution, even barring forces exercised from outside the slaveholding States, would not have been determined solely by the self-interest of the masters.

It is, of course, impossible to tell just what would have happened if something else had not occurred, but certain tendencies are reasonably clear. Southern society was not static. A free labor class was growing and was becoming increasingly class conscious and hostile to slave-labor competition in one trade after another. As means of transportation improved, a larger and larger part of the small-farmer class would have been drawn into commercialized agriculture, and, losing hope of acquiring slaves, would have become more antagonistic to the planters. As means of transportation and communication developed, the Negroes themselves would have grown more sophisticated, less satisfied with their status, and more difficult to control as slaves. As the slaves became more and more concentrated in the cotton and sugar belts, greater areas in the South would have become "abolitionized." All of these "internal"

⁹ Cf. L. C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 476 (Washington, 1933).

dangers to the peculiar institution were recognized before the War by the master class and thoroughly canvassed. There are strong grounds for believing that one of the most impelling motives to secession was the desire of the slaveholding class to shake off the external threats against slavery in order to be better able to cope with internal dangers.

The General Effects of Slavery upon Southern Economic Progress

By ROBERT R. RUSSEL

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MANY WRITERS have made sweeping generalizations as to the effects, allegedly injurious, of Negro slavery upon the economic progress of the South. It is believed that many time-honored generalizations about the subject are incorrect. The economics of slavery as expounded by the abolitionists, especially the English economist, J. E. Cairnes,¹ seemed to triumph on the battlefield. Such views have subsequently been accepted too implicitly not only in the North but even in the South.² It is proposed to examine anew several widely-accepted generalizations.

Slavery is still being blamed for the wasteful and unscientific methods of farming practiced in the South before the Civil War. The authors of two popular college textbooks in the economic history of the United States both quote a table of statistics found in Ezra C. Seaman's *Essays on the Progress of Nations*, published in 1868, which

¹ J. E. Cairnes, *The Slave Power: Its Character, Career, and Probable Designs* (New York, 1862).

² The writer's quarrel is principally with general histories and history textbooks, especially economic texts. Of the latter, Edward C. Kirkland, *A History of American Economic Life* (New York, 1932), is excepted, although it is believed that some of his conclusions require modification. Among the more detailed accounts which have greatly influenced recent textbooks are M. B. Hammond, *The Cotton Industry: An Essay in American Economic History* (New York, 1897), which is very critical of slavery, and the various works of Ulrich B. Phillips, especially *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1918), and *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, 1929). Those familiar with these works will readily recognize the differences between the conclusions reached in this article and the conclusions of the scholars named. The writer has great respect for the treatment of slavery in Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1933), and agrees with most of it, but cannot accept his interpretation of several important matters.

compares the "free" and the "slave" states in respect to number of acres of improved and unimproved land in farms in 1860 and the total value and the average value per acre of farm lands. The comparison shows inferiority of the slave states in all respects; and the writers leave the impression that slavery was the cause.³ One author says:

A second condition which made slavery possible and profitable was an abundance of new land . . . If land anywhere became scare and dear, slavery tended to disappear. Intensive and scientific methods of farming were seldom possible under the indifferent and wasteful slave system. Consequently, the colonial method was persisted in, of cropping a tract of land until it was exhausted and then moving on to a fresh piece.⁴

As a matter of fact, "skinning" the soil was practiced in all sections of the country. It was as common in most districts of the North as it was in the South. It was at least as common in the small-farm belts of the South as in the plantation districts. The preponderant reason was the same everywhere, namely, the cheapness of land. It was cheaper to acquire and clear a new farm of virgin soil than it was to restore, or even maintain, the fertility of the old. Contributory reasons were inertness and ignorance; but the want of initiative and knowledge was not as great among planters as among small farmers. The best farming in the South was done by planters,⁵ many of whom took keen interest in agricultural reform and experimental methods⁶ and farmed in an intensive manner.⁷ In general, however, before the Civil War, it was only in the vicinity of cities where land became dear by reason of its demand for special purposes such as dairying and truck gardening, that much attention was given to manuring, fertilizing, and crop rotation. Speaking by and large, Southern soils—except rich bottom lands—wore out more rapidly than Northern. Cotton did not

³ Ernest L. Bogart, *Economic History of the American People* (New York, 1935), 456; Harold U. Faulkner, *American Economic History* (New York, 1935), 391.

⁴ Bogart, *Economic History of the American People*, 455.

⁵ Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860*, in *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences*, XIII, No. 1 (Urbana, 1925), 86-91, and *passim*. W. H. Russell told of a great sugar plantation which was "better tilled than the finest patch in all the Lothians." *My Diary North and South* (New York, 1863), 103.

⁶ Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 86-121, 124-44; *id.*, "The Agricultural Reformers of the Ante-Bellum South," in *American Historical Review* (New York, 1895-), XXXIII (1926), 302-14; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, II, 779-92.

⁷ Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, I, 447, 449.

exhaust the soil as rapidly as grain crops; tobacco was hard on the soil.⁸ But the land is nearly everywhere rolling or hilly, the soil is generally lighter than in the North, the greater part of the section lacks good native grasses, which would check erosion on lands retired from cultivation, and there are more heavy, dashing rains. Consequently there was much more soil erosion in the South.⁹

There was nothing inherent in slavery that prevented the adoption of more scientific methods of agriculture.¹⁰ A planter could direct his slaves to spread manure, cotton seed, or marl, to plow horizontally on the hillsides, to avoid shallow tillage, and to pile brush in incipient gullies. The small farmer might do such things himself, but he was less likely to do them than the planter was to have them done.

Slavery may have retarded the adoption of improved agricultural machinery. At any rate, the proposition is true that employers will hesitate to entrust expensive and complicated machinery to careless, irresponsible, and incompetent workmen. On the other hand, large farmers, other things being equal, are abler and more likely to adopt improved machinery than small farmers. The small farmers of the South certainly made no better record in this regard than the planters. Cotton growers were not slow to adopt the cotton gin, one of the most revolutionary pieces of agricultural machinery in our history. Sugar-making machinery was complicated and expensive. Southern planters adopted the various improvements in the plow as the improved plows could be had. They rapidly substituted horses and mules for the slow-moving oxen when they were found to be better adapted to their pur-

⁸ Hammond, *Cotton Industry*, 45, 79; Eugene W. Hilgard, *Report on the Geology and Agriculture of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1860), 242; Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 32-33.

⁹ R. O. E. Davis, *Soil Erosion in the South* (United States Department of Agriculture, *Bulletin No. 180* [Washington, 1915]), 8, 17-20; Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 27-39, 162.

¹⁰ Cf. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 162-64; and Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, I, 445-48; II, 940. Rosser H. Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View* (Chapel Hill, 1926), 43, believes that slavery may have contributed to the clearing of new fields instead of improving old ones "as it was convenient to employ slaves in winter in clearing new fields." Phillips (ed.) *Plantation and Frontier, 1649-1863*, Vols. I and II in John R. Commons (ed.), *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, 10 vols. (Cleveland, 1910), I, 93, states that in the piedmont region the frequent need of clearing new fields disturbed the plantation routine and enabled small planters to hold their own against large. Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 81, states that the practice of paying overseers by allowing them a share of the crop "was criticized on the ground that it was rapidly producing deterioration of the soil." Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, 38, believes the criticism valid, and so does Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, I, 448.

poses. In fact, the ox was displaced more slowly in New England than in other sections of the country, including the South.¹¹

There is only a modicum of truth in the assertion, which still finds its way into print, that slavery inspired a contempt for physical labor among the white people of the South, and thereby rendered the section a great economic disservice. Slavery, or the presence of Negroes, which was the result of slavery, may properly be credited with responsibility for the idea universally prevalent in districts with considerable black population that whites must not perform *menial* services, that is, such personal services for others as cooking, washing, scrubbing, and attendance as maids or valets.¹² Originally, perhaps, whites shunned the performance of such services simply because of their menial character. Because whites shunned them, they were the more readily assigned to Negroes; and the more the blacks were thus employed, the more odious to whites such tasks became. But, although slavery may have excluded whites from menial services, it does not follow that whites were deprived of productive employment on that account.

Slavery and Negroes may also have bred the idea in slaveholding regions that people who could afford to own or hire servants should not perform their own domestic tasks, much as generations of low wages for household servants in England have established the idea that no woman of the middle class or above may do her own housework, at least not without a servant or two about for the sake of appearances. It was indeed true that families in slaveholding regions began to employ domestic servants at a lower income level than was the case in nonslaveholding districts. In so far as slavery was responsible for this, the institution rendered the South an economic disservice to the extent that it caused a greater degree of idleness than existed among similiar classes in other sections—provided that such leisure is not to be considered economically desirable. But it should not be overlooked, in this

¹¹ Perhaps the principal reason for delaying substitution in various localities was the lack of sufficient grain for feed, without which horses and mules could not do much hard work. There were other reasons for delay, however. See Percy W. Bidwell and J. L. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860* (Washington, 1925), 111-13, 243, 403-405; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, II, 851-52.

¹² The line was often finely and strangely drawn. A Virginia farmer told Frederick L. Olmsted that he did not know that white farm laborers were particular about working with Negroes, but no white man would ever do certain kinds of work, such as taking care of cattle or getting water or wood for use in the house. If one should ask a white man to do such work, he would get mad and reply that he was no "nigger." Poor white girls never hired out to do servants' work, but they would help another white woman with her sewing and quilting and take wages for it. There were some "very respectable ladies" that would go out to sew. *The Cotton Kingdom*, 2 vols. (New York, 1861), I, 82.

connection, that mistresses on all but the largest plantations had heavy responsibilities in supervising servants in various household manufactures, in looking after the sick, in teaching the children, and in many other concerns.

There was no stigma attached in the South in slavery days to the performance of manual labor, as distinguished from menial, or of any other sort of labor not considered menial.¹³ There were *situations*, however, in which whites would not work with slaves, just as now there are situations in which whites will not work with Negroes. White wage earners, except perhaps immigrants who had not yet learned to draw the line, would not labor on a plantation under an overseer. They would, however, work with slaves if there was some evident distinction in tasks or status. A white farmer and his sons had no repugnance to working along with their own or hired slaves at any task required on the farm. White hired men, too, would work with the farmer and slaves. A farmer's wife and daughters might not work in the fields with slaves, but the women folk of nonslaveholding whites were about as likely to work in the fields as were Northern women similarly circumstanced. In both sections, as in England, women were withdrawn from the fields as standards of living rose. An overseer on a plantation was not supposed to do physical labor, even if so inclined; to do so, it was thought, and no doubt correctly, would be detrimental to discipline. A foreman who had charge of a small group of slaves on a farm or a small plantation—and there were many such—was expected to work along with the slaves. A large planter and his sons might not engage in physical labor; to do so would lower them in the esteem of their neighbors and slaves. It is difficult to say whether slavery was responsible for this pleasing fancy or only made it more possible to humor it. English country gentlemen and their sons likewise eschewed manual labor, and Northern millowners did not as a rule send their sons into the mills as hands. Furthermore, even planters who employed overseers usually had their time well-occupied with the management of their plantations, and their management was economically more productive than wielding the plow or hoe would have been.

The same situation obtained in the cities and towns of the South. In factories, mills, and shops, and about the wharves, white laborers, free Negroes, and slaves, sometimes of both sexes, worked side by side, usually, but not always, with some distinction of tasks. Frequently the

¹³ In the South considerable point was made of this distinction between menial and manual labor. In the North the word *menial* was not so commonly used, either as adjective or noun.

whites objected to working with Negroes and sought to have them excluded from certain employments, but never successfully. The opposition arose partly from race prejudice and partly from dislike of Negro competition. In the North, where Negro laborers were relatively few, the opposition of whites to Negro competition was more effective. It would seem unlikely that many whites were deprived of useful employment by their disinclination to work with Negroes or to labor at certain tasks commonly performed by slaves.¹⁴

Southern people in general were more inclined than those in the East and Northwest to dislike physical labor, especially heavy physical labor, and to seek "white-collar" jobs or to live by their wits. The evidence on this point is overwhelming. But it does not follow that slavery was the cause of this difference. A similar variance in other places and in other times has commonly been explained by differences in temperature, humidity, ease of making a living, eating and drinking habits, general health, cultural antecedents, and social organizations.¹⁵ If such explanations are valid for other places and other times, they are equally valid for the United States in slavery times.

A more difficult question with regard to the general economic effects of slavery is whether or not the institution retarded the growth of population of the slaveholding states. If so, it was a grievous fault; for economic history shows that increase in population in a region has been conducive to the development of improved means of transportation, the commercialization of agriculture and manufactures, and the extension of the factory system—developments which, with all their evils, have contributed to economic progress.

At the close of the colonial period the six commonwealths which continued to permit slavery and to colonize new "slave" territory, that is, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, the two Carolinas, and Georgia, together with Louisiana, Florida, and Texas, had a slightly greater

¹⁴ The last four paragraphs are based upon numerous but widely scattered scraps of evidence gleaned from a variety of sources, especially *De Bow's Review* (New Orleans, 1846-1880); the various works of Olmsted dealing with the South; and Phillips (ed.), *Plantation and Frontier*, I, II. Considerable evidence is presented in an uncritical manner in Charles H. Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925: A Study in American Economic History* (New York, 1927), Chap. III. Particular statements made above are confirmed by Kathleen Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era* (New York, 1930), Chap. VI; Ivan E. McDougale, "Slavery in Kentucky, 1792-1865," in *Journal of Negro History* (Lancaster, Pa., 1932-), III (1934), 296; Alfred H. Stone, "Free Contract Labor in the Ante-Bellum South," in *The South in the Building of the Nation*, 12 vols. (Richmond, 1909), V, 142.

¹⁵ The influence of such factors in the case of the poor whites is well described by Paul H. Buck, "The Poor Whites in the Ante-Bellum South," in *American Historical Review*, XXXI (1925), 41-55.

population than the seven states to the north which shortly became "free." In 1860 there were eighteen free and fifteen slave states. According to the census for that year the former had a population of 18,800,527, the latter, 12,315,374. Wherein lies the explanation? We can not now detect any differences in the birth and death rates of the two sections.

For one thing, the number of people of Southern birth who migrated to the North was much greater than the number of people of Northern birth who moved to the South. In 1850 there were 608,626 people of Southern birth living in free states and only 199,672 people born in free states residing in the South. The corresponding numbers for 1860 were 713,527 and 371,421.¹⁶ In 1860 there were, by careful estimate, about 800,000 more people of Southern birth and parentage living in free territory than there were people of Northern stock living in slaveholding regions. This accounts, then, for approximately 1,600,000 of the 6,500,000 disparity in population between sections.

This large net loss to the South in intersectional migration, in turn, is to be explained almost wholly by the circumstances of the westward movement of population during the period and the various conditions and political maneuvers that determined which of the new states beyond the mountains should be free and which slave. The old story of thousands of small farmers from the South fleeing across the Ohio River to escape slavery is almost pure fiction.¹⁷ People from the older states moved west with various motives, the principal one being the acquisition of land. They usually followed the most available routes. Before the railroads were built, great numbers of people from Virginia and Maryland went up the Potomac Valley, crossed over to the Ohio River, using the Cumberland National Road after it had been built, floated down the Ohio, and eventually found homes in Kentucky and the southern parts of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, or beyond the Mississippi in Missouri, Arkansas, and Iowa. Many other people from Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina crossed the Blue Ridge by various routes, picked up the trail in the Great Valley, and followed it down into Tennessee or turned off and went through Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. Thousands of Kentuckians and Tennesseans in turn, of the first, second, or later generations, moved on west or northwest into southern Indiana, southern Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, and, in less

¹⁶ *Compendium of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, pp. 116 ff.; *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Population*, 616 ff. The District of Columbia is included with the South.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 56-58.

numbers, into Iowa and southwestern Wisconsin. Only slaveholders who wished to take their slaves with them were debarred from choosing a location north of the Ohio; scores of slaveholders, in fact, did take their slaves into Indiana and Illinois under life or other long-term indentures permitted by the early laws.¹⁸ Of the 608,626 natives of the South living in 1850 in free states, 505,096 resided in the four states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, and of the latter number 462,088 had been born in Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The corresponding numbers for 1860 were 713,527, 530,843, and 481,322 respectively.

Many thousands of people from Pennsylvania and, to a less extent, from New York and New Jersey, crossed to the Ohio River, floated down that stream, and eventually settled on the left bank in Kentucky or crossed the Mississippi into Missouri. Other thousands settled first on the right bank of the Ohio, and then later, they or their children moved on into Kentucky or, especially, Missouri. Of the 371,421 people born in free states but living in 1860 in slave states, 208,059 were to be found in Missouri and Kentucky. Northerners certainly did not shun Missouri. In 1860 there were 166,620 people living there who had been born on free soil and 274,572 who had been born in other slave states. There was also a large interchange of population across the line between Pennsylvania and New Jersey on the one side and Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware on the other; 49,827 people born north of the line were living south of it in 1860, and 50,958 born south of it were living on the other side. There was much less exchange of population between New England and the Great Lakes region on the one hand and the Lower South on the other. But such exchange did occur. Thousands of Yankees undeterred by slavery went south to farm, work in mills, run steamboats, buy cotton, sell merchandise, teach school, and fill all manner of other jobs which became available. There were many more Northerners scattered about the Lower South than there were people from the latter region residing in the Upper North. In 1860 there were 12,549 natives of New England living in the seven cotton states and only 2,169 people from the cotton states to be found in New England.

The other important cause of the disparity of population between the North and the South in 1860 was the fact that the former had received much the greater share of the foreign immigration. In 1860 there were 3,582,999 people of foreign birth living in free states and the

¹⁸ John B. McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War*, 8 vols. (New York, 1883-1913), III, 526-28; V, 187.

territories and only 553,176 in the slave states. In 1850 the numbers had been 1,900,325 and 310,514. Why did not the slave states get a larger share of the immigrants? The blame has often been unjustly placed upon slavery.

Most of the immigrants in ante-bellum days, as since, landed at New York City, for that was the principal terminus of the trans-Atlantic packet lines and, after their advent, the steamship lines. Many remained in New York; the majority scattered to various parts of the country. Most numerous among the immigrants after 1845 (about the time the tide of immigration set in strongly) were the Irish. They were poor and sought work for wages. They found it chiefly in the cities and factory towns and in railroad and canal construction. The cities and mill towns were mainly in the East, and the railroads and canals were being built mostly there and in the Northwest. A considerable number of Irishmen found work building Southern railroads and many were employed at the wharves of New Orleans and other Southern towns. They showed no great prejudice against slavery or against Negroes.

Next most numerous among immigrants were Germans. They usually had more means than the Irish, and a larger proportion of them went to the growing Northwest, acquired land, and grew grain and raised livestock. They undoubtedly disliked slavery. But they would have preferred the Northwest even if slavery had not been in the picture. There they could get excellent land at the minimum government price located in districts which were being rapidly opened to markets by the building of railroads. They could practice a type of farming more like that of the old country. And acclimation was less difficult than in the South. Thousands of Germans went to the quasi-slave state of Missouri where land and farming were quite like those of states of the Northwest. And a considerable number were lured to the rich, cheap lands of Texas to grow cotton and grain.¹⁹ Few of them acquired slaves, partly because they disliked slavery and partly because they could not afford to purchase them.

It would seem, then, to be a safe conclusion that neither slavery nor the presence of Negroes was in any direct sense responsible for the failure of the slaveholding states as a whole to grow as rapidly in population as the free states as a whole between 1790 and 1860. No doubt thousands of individuals were deterred from going South by race prejudice, dislike of slavery, or a disinclination to compete with slaves for jobs. But, since so many others were undeterred by such motives

¹⁹ Albert B. Faust, *The German Element in the United States*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1909), I, 490-501; Olmsted, *Cotton Kingdom*, II, 96, 262-66.

and considerations, it is reasonable to suppose that, if economic opportunities had been great enough, people would have come in greater numbers from the North and from Europe to seize upon them.²⁰

This conclusion is further justified by events which have occurred since slavery was abolished. The percentage of immigrants locating in the South has been even less than it was in slavery days. For example, in 1890 only 8.3 per cent of the foreign born of this country lived in the South whereas 13.4 per cent had lived there in 1860. Now it is possible that it has been the presence of the Negro, a resultant of slavery, which has repelled. But it is highly probable that it has been the comparative lack of economic opportunities in the South, still suffering from the ravages of war for much of the period.²¹ Many whites and blacks have gone North to get jobs, especially during the great boom prior to 1929. Moreover, the presence of Negroes has not kept Northerners out of particular localities or particular occupations in the South where opportunities have called.

The conclusion just stated brings up another question which has caused historians much trouble, namely, to what extent, if at all, was slavery responsible for the comparative dearth of economic opportunities in the South which, in turn, kept the population from growing more rapidly? In agriculture slavery reduced opportunities somewhat for nonslaveholding whites but not for the population as a whole. Because of it the white farm population was probably less than it would otherwise have been, but the total farm population was greater. And, be it noted, when writers say that slavery retarded the growth of the population of the South, they mean total population, not white population only.

The story is briefly this: The staple crops of the South gave the incentive for men of enterprise to engage in large-scale agriculture. Land was plentiful and cheap. The labor problem was more difficult. People of good-enough quality would not work for low-enough wages, in large-enough numbers, and with sufficient regularity in a country where it was so easy to get land and farm independently. The solution was first found in indentured servants, and the earliest plantations were developed with that class of labor. As time passed Negro slaves were preferred, great numbers were imported, they thrived and multiplied, and many farmers developed into planters.²²

²⁰ Cf. Emory Q. Hawk, *Economic History of the South* (New York, 1934), 220-21.

²¹ Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, II, 940.

²² The subject of this paragraph has been amplified and more thoroughly

Although a time did not arrive when more than about one third of the agricultural population of the South, including the Negroes, lived on plantations as distinguished from small farms,²³ the great bulk of the staple crops came to be produced on plantations—all the sugar and rice, most of the tobacco, and at least three fourths of the cotton. There were several reasons for this.²⁴ In the production of sugar and rice, which required considerable capital, small farmers could not compete with planters and were crowded out. The competitive advantages of the plantation in the growing of cotton and tobacco were not so great, if, indeed, there were any. But planters held slaves for the primary purpose of producing staples for market; they would not have kept slaves had it not been for this motive. Small farmers, on the contrary, were under no particular urge to engage in commercialized agriculture. They might make a better living by doing general or subsistence farming. Slaves were better adapted to the routine of the plantation than they were to the more varied tasks of general farming with considerable household manufacturing. Also, as a class, the planters were more enterprising and they were better managers than the small farmers; the more ambitious and capable of the small farmers were likely to graduate into the planter class. So planters got the better lands, near enough to transportation facilities to justify staple agriculture, while small farmers had cheaper, but not necessarily poorer, lands more remote from the routes of commerce and followed a more self-sufficing economy or, if they remained in the plantation belts, lived on the poorer lands and practiced a more general agriculture than their planter neighbors.

If slavery had not existed in the South and, consequently, there had been few or no plantations, it is reasonable to presume that the lands which were in fact in plantations would have been held by the more capable small farmers, who would have raised staples although in somewhat smaller quantities than they were actually produced. In this case the white farm population of the South would have been greater than it actually was, but not as great as the actual farm population, both white and black.

reasoned in Robert R. Russel, "The Economic History of Negro Slavery in the United States," in *Agricultural History* (Chicago, Baltimore, 1927-), XI (1937), 308-21.

²³ The percentage depends upon where the line is drawn between the plantation and the farm. If the minimum number of slaves on a plantation be arbitrarily set at ten, about 30 per cent of the farm population resided on plantations in 1850. Cf. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, I, 482, 529.

²⁴ These reasons are developed at greater length in an unpublished paper by the writer on "The Effects of Slavery upon Non-Slaveholders in the Antebellum South."

But immigrants into the North after 1790 went largely into non-agricultural occupations. To what extent, if at all, was slavery responsible for the backwardness of the South in other lines of economic development than agriculture? Manufacturing may be selected for consideration since, next to agriculture, it is the most fundamental industry.

Even in colonial times the Southern commonwealths did less manufacturing in proportion to population than did the Northern. In the middle period, as the industrial revolution proceeded, the South did a smaller and smaller percentage of the nation's manufacturing. In 1860 the capital invested in manufacturing in the South was only 9.5 per cent of the capital so invested in the entire country; and the number of hands employed was only 8.4 per cent of the nation's total. Moreover, nearly one half of Southern manufactures consisted of flour and grist, lumber, and turpentine, products of simple operations.

A number of reasons may be advanced to account for the industrial backwardness of the South, few of which have much relevance to slavery. In colonial times in the tidewater region, the continued and anticipated profits of staple agriculture, together with the superior adaptability of slaves thereto, made it unnecessary and unprofitable to do much household and shop manufacturing. In the Northern colonies and the back country of the South, the lack of markets for agricultural products constrained the people to do more manufacturing. A combination of factors—the abundance of white pine, water power near the sea, the demand for ships and boats for the fisheries and the carrying trade, markets for lumber in the same regions where the fish were marketed—caused lumbering and shipbuilding to be concentrated largely along the New England coast. In a similar fashion other special factors caused various other branches of manufacturing to be more or less concentrated in the North.

When the Industrial Revolution reached the United States, population was comparatively sparse in the South, distances were great, and means of transportation poor. The poorer whites afforded little demand for manufactured goods. Neither did the slaves, but the masters, who exploited their labor, presumably compensated for them in this regard. So markets were too dispersed and inadequate to encourage large-scale manufacturing. The population of the East was more compact and, therefore, transportation facilities could be provided at lower cost. The purchasing power of the people was greater.

The streams of the South were less manageable for power than were those of the East. Southern power sites were relatively inaccessible to natural avenues of transportation; in New England, especially, considerable power was available very near the sea.

The principal Southern raw material, cotton, was not at all bulky and would stand transportation to distant markets. The humid atmosphere of the New England seaboard was advantageous to cotton mills. For lumbering the North possessed much the same advantages over the South in the middle period that it had possessed in the colonial. Even before coal came to be used in smelting, parts of Pennsylvania had an advantage over other regions of the country in ironmaking by reason of the juxtaposition of wood, ore, and limestone in localities near navigable rivers or other means of transportation. When coal superseded charcoal the advantage of Pennsylvania was enhanced. To illustrate, in the days of charcoal furnaces a considerable secondary iron industry was developed in Richmond, Virginia, which used pig iron smelted in the back country and brought down the James River. After smelting with anthracite was well developed in eastern Pennsylvania, about 1850, the Richmond iron works procured their pig iron there and the back country furnaces died out.²⁵ The principal iron ore field of the South, near present Birmingham, Alabama, was in ante-bellum days all but inaccessible. The Pittsburgh field, by way of contrast, lay at the head of a magnificent system of inland waterways transportation. After railroads penetrated northern Georgia, northern Alabama, and eastern Tennessee, during the fifties, numbers of small furnaces and foundries sprang up, but they could not compete with those of Pennsylvania except in the local markets.

In the East, where there had been more household and shop industry, and much manufacturing done under the "putting out" system, there were more laborers to be diverted to mills and factories when they came in. The opening of improved means of communication with the fine farming regions of western New York and the Northwest brought destructive competition to Eastern agriculture, released still more men, women, and children to become mill hands, and supplied them with food and raw materials. In the South the continued profitability of staple agriculture prevented slaveowners from turning to manufacturing or diverting their slaves thereto. Although slaves were frequently used successfully in mills, factories, and shops, in fact in practically every mechanical pursuit, they were certainly not as well adapted to mechanical employments as to agriculture.²⁶ It was difficult

²⁵ Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era*, 275-78.

²⁶ There was much discussion of this point in the South about 1845-1852. The consensus was about as stated here. *Ibid.*, Chap. VI; Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States*, Ch. I; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 375-78; Robert R. Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-1861*, University of Illinois *Studies in the Social Sciences*, XI, No. 1, Pts. I, II (1923), 41, 54.

to transform the small, independent, self-sufficing farmers of the South into urban wage earners.

Capital for industry in the East had come from the profits of merchandising and shipping as well as from the profits of industry. In the South there was no considerable source of capital outside manufacturing itself. The profits of agriculture, such as they were, were absorbed in expanding agriculture and providing facilities for transportation. If the section had offered exceptional opportunities, capital and labor would have been diverted from agriculture or would have flowed in from the outside, but such was not the case. Once the North had gained a good start upon the South in manufacturing, it became harder for the latter to make progress. For then infant industries in the South would have to get started in the face of unrestricted competition from firmly established industries in the North.²⁷

Of the various reasons enumerated for the backwardness of the South in manufacturing, only one relates directly to slavery, namely, slave labor was not so well adapted to manufacturing as to agriculture, and, therefore, other things being equal, slaveowners preferred to keep their slaves engaged in the latter. A second reason for which slavery has frequently been blamed may relate indirectly to the institution, namely, a dearth of capital for investment. It becomes necessary, therefore, to ascertain what effects, if any, slavery had upon saving and investment in the South.

Slavery, as we have seen, made possible the development of large-scale farming. By all the rules of economic history the planters should have saved much for investment in further productive enterprises; it is the people with the larger incomes who do most of the saving for investment. The planters did save. They saved more than their small-farmer neighbors did. They saved enough to keep expanding their agricultural operations. They provided much of the capital for internal improvements and other productive undertakings. But the fact remains that they did not save as much for investment as might logically be expected of them.

Many of the planters, especially those of old families, did not have steady habits and frugal instincts. They often had visions of grandeur inherited from spacious colonial days and reinforced by real or fancied

²⁷ The reasons for the backwardness of the South in manufacturing are described in greater detail in Victor S. Clark, "Manufactures," in *The South in the Building of the Nation*, V, 299-335; Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism*, 54-64; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, II, 931-36.

descent from English aristocracy.²⁸ At any rate, planters who were making money, and often those who were losing it,²⁹ lived well. They built big houses. Their habitations were literally overrun by domestic servants. They bought luxuries. Those with the largest incomes frequently spent their substance at Northern watering places or in European travel. How slavery could have been responsible for these enlarged views it is impossible to see, except, of course, that it was slavery that made it possible to indulge them.

Again planters' savings were diminished by the almost universal practice of living and operating not upon the income from the preceding crop but upon the anticipated income from the next crop; that is, they lived largely upon advances received from their factors upon contemplated or growing crops as security. These advances cost dearly. They cost not only interest but also the reduced prices which they occasioned, for the markets were frequently glutted and prices depressed because so many planters were under the necessity of selling their crops as soon as harvested in order to pay their debts. This practice of obtaining advances upon anticipated crops would not have prevented, it might even have facilitated, the accumulation of capital in the South, if the advances had been made by Southern men. But they were not. They were made in last analysis by Northern or British firms.³⁰ Even if the planter eschewed advances from his cotton factor, the result was much the same, for in that case he bought supplies on long credit from his merchant who in turn had bought them on long credit from Northern jobbers or wholesalers. It would be difficult to name anything more efficacious in preventing the accumulation of capital than eight, ten, or fifteen per cent interest, often compounded.

This system of advances was caused partly by the lack of habits of thrift, already bemoaned. Its principal cause was the speculative character of a commercialized agriculture with distant markets. A farmer who produces for market is always under strong temptation to borrow money, get more land and hands, and put out a larger acreage, because there is always the possibility of raising a bumper crop and selling it at top prices. Nature is not consistent. There is always the prospect in any community of having a big crop while there is a total or partial failure

²⁸ Thomas J. Wertenbaker has thoroughly discredited the old idea that Virginia was largely settled by cavaliers. *Patrician and Plebeian in Virginia, or the Origin and Development of Colonial Virginia* (Princeton, 1922).

²⁹ Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 95-96.

³⁰ Alfred H. Stone, "The Cotton Factorage System of the Southern States," in *American Historical Review*, XX (1915), 557-65; Hammond, *Cotton Industry*, 108 ff; Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism*, 100-107.

elsewhere, with consequent high prices and big income for those who dwell in the favored community. Farmers gamble on the big year.³¹ Such speculation has by no means been confined to slaveowners and cotton growers. It has been as evident in nonslaveholding regions as in slaveholding—the wheat belt for instance. Slavery only made it possible for some farmers to gamble on a bigger scale.

Another thing, closely related to the factor just mentioned, which militated against the accumulation of capital in the South was the occasional overproduction of the staples. Within a few decades after the invention of the gin, the cotton states were producing over three fourths of the cotton sold in the world's markets. A big crop in the South sent the price down, a small crop sent it up. It happened more than once that a smaller crop of cotton at a high price brought in a larger aggregate amount to the growers than a large crop at a low price. But constant pleas to grow less cotton and more corn fell on deaf ears. In the cases of tobacco, sugar, and rice, the American crop was such a small part of the world's total that its quantity had comparatively little effect on world prices, and, therefore, there could be overproduction in the South, considered alone, only in the sense that labor and capital might more profitably have been directed into other channels. A chief reason for the overproduction of staples, when it occurred, was the speculative character of commercialized agriculture just noted. Slavery did not supply the urge to speculate, but it made speculation possible on a larger scale and thus contributed to overproduction. In general, of course, it was to the advantage of the South to produce great crops of cotton and other staples. Occasional overproduction was preferable to consistent underproduction. And without slavery there probably would have been consistent underproduction during the period under consideration.

It has frequently been stated that slavery "absorbed" capital in the South which otherwise might have been used in productive enterprises.³² Such a statement needs much qualification if it is not to be misleading. While foreign slave trade lasted, part of the profits of Southern industry went to Yankee skippers, English lords, Dahomey chiefs, etc., in exchange for slaves. Thus capital which might have been used to build sawmills or ships or for other productive purposes in the South was "fixed" in the form of slaves. Capital could not be taken out of the South by the internal or domestic slave trade, however. To

³¹ Cf. Hammond, *Cotton Industry*, 109; Olmsted, *Cotton Kingdom*, II, 49.

³² For example, Phillips seems to have said this. *American Negro Slavery*, 395-99; *id.*, "The Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt," in *Political Science Quarterly* (New York, 1886-), XX (1905), 271-75.

illustrate, suppose Mississippi cotton planters, out of the profits of the industry, bought Virginia slaves. The slaves would still be in the South and presumably capable of paying for themselves and providing a reasonable profit on the investment. The saving of the planters would still be in the South also, although in Virginia instead of Mississippi, and, presumably, could be invested in factories, railroads, and other productive enterprises. They in turn might attract labor from the North or from Europe. Suppose, however, the Mississippi planters were able to hire free-born Virginians to come down and work the plantations and, instead of buying slaves, invested their savings in sawmills in their own state, employing workers attracted from the North or from Europe to operate the sawmills. The South as a whole would lose no laborers and no savings in this case, but Virginia would have been to the trouble and expense of rearing workers until they had reached maturity only to see them go away to contribute to the prosperity of another state. Thus slavery did not absorb Southern capital in any direct sense; it affected the distribution of capital within the section. The mere capitalization of the anticipated labor of a particular class did not destroy or diminish any other kind of property.³³

But in an indirect way slavery may have had the effect of absorbing capital nevertheless. Take the case of the Virginia tobacco planters and the Mississippi cotton planters again. The Virginians probably received considerably more for their slaves than they had invested in rearing them, for the supply of slaves was not adjusted to demand and prices were normally considerably in excess of costs of production. And probably, instead of investing their profits in productive enterprises, the Virginians used them for living expenses, not having produced enough on their worn-out tobacco plantations to maintain their accustomed style of living. Thus as a consequence of slavery the profitable cotton industry of Mississippi might be carrying along the incubus of an unprofitable tobacco industry in Virginia or at least enabling tobacco planters there to live in a style not justified by their earned incomes.³⁴ Under a free-labor system this would hardly have been possible. But, on the other hand, if it had not been for slavery, cotton growers of Mississippi might not have had any savings to invest.

³³ Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, I, 460, has put this point very clearly.

³⁴ For similar views of contemporaries of slavery, see Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country* (New York, 1861), 325; Cairnes, *Slave Power*, 72-76. See, also, Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 66. Edmund Ruffin of Virginia, another contemporary, held a contrary view. See "The Effects of High Prices on Slaves," in *De Bow's Review*, XXVI (1859), 647-57.

In conclusion, the importance of Negro slavery as a factor determining the character and extent of the economic development of the South has been greatly overestimated. It brought a racial element into the population which would not otherwise have been represented in any considerable numbers. The importation of slaves and the increase of the Negro population gave the South a larger total population, at any date, than it otherwise would have had, but no doubt retarded the growth of the white population. Slavery made possible the widespread development of the plantation system of farming and, thereby, gave a great impetus to the growing of the various Southern staples. This was beneficial to the South on the whole, although there was occasional overproduction, to which slavery contributed. Slavery may have retarded the diversification of Southern industry. It was conducive to the accumulation of capital on the whole, although it had the serious disadvantage of permitting more productive districts to contribute to the livelihood of the people of less productive regions. But compared with such great economic factors as climate, topography, natural resources, location with respect to the North and to Europe, means of transportation, and character of the white population, Negro slavery was of lesser consequence in determining the general course of Southern economic development.

The Effects of Slavery upon Nonslaveholders in the Ante Bellum South

By ROBERT R. RUSSEL

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PERHAPS no interpretation of the economic history of American Negro slavery is more generally accepted today than that the institution was detrimental to the nonslaveholding whites of the South. There have been frequent expressions of the view that the master class knew its own interest. Occasional admissions of doubt that emancipation conferred economic benefits upon the typical Negro are encountered, but it would be difficult to find any divergence from the opinion that the peculiar institution was a curse to the nonslaveholding whites. The fact that the latter did not become abolitionists is usually attributed to ignorance of their own interests, domination by the slaveholders, racial prejudice, or fond expectations of rising into the master class.¹ It is the purpose of this article to attempt to show that the commonly accepted interpretation requires great qualification to bring it into accord with the truth.

In 1860 approximately one-fourth of the white families of the South were slaveholding and three-fourths nonslaveholding; and of the slaveholding families a great many had only one or two slaves each. In earlier years of the period, the proportion of slaveholders was slightly larger.

The slaves and slaveholders were very largely concentrated in belts—the so-called black belts—which coincided with the areas devoted to the growing of staples, chiefly cotton, tobacco, sugar and rice.² There were also many slaves in the cities and towns in or near the

¹ See, for example, William E. Dodd, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 32 (New Haven, 1921).

² Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Origin and Growth of the Southern Black Belts," *American Historical Review*, 11:798-816 (July 1906).

staple-growing areas. These had been marked out by climate, the character of the soil, and, not least, by accessibility to market. Cotton, for example, for climatic reasons could not be grown to advantage north of an irregular line crossing North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas. South of this line cotton was grown on the better lands which lay within reasonable distances of navigable rivers or of railroads. Some of the best of the present-day cotton lands were not utilized for that crop as late as 1860, because they were too far from navigable rivers while railroads had not yet penetrated into their vicinity.³

The great majority of the nonslaveholding whites lived outside the principal staple-growing districts in what is commonly called back, up, or hill country, or in mountainous regions. In these areas there were comparatively few slaves. The people were mostly small farmers and, because of lack of markets or inaccessibility to them, were engaged in a more or less self-sufficing agriculture with much household manufacturing.

It is difficult to see how people living in the back country could be injured by slavery in the black belts. Except possibly to a slight extent and in a most indirect way, it was not slavery which prevented them from producing staple crops for market; it was inaccessibility. Such markets as they had for their surplus bacon, lard, mules, whiskey, etc. were chiefly among the planters or in the towns which served the staple-producing districts. In so far as it was slavery which caused planters to concentrate on the growing of the great market crops while purchasing various supplies elsewhere, the institution created markets for back-country farmers and thus benefited them.

It is said that slavery had driven nonslaveholding whites out of the black belts and out of staple production and had thus worked them a great injury; that, had it not been for slavery, more of them would have lived in the staple-producing regions and raised the great market crops and would have had a higher standard of living on that account.

This time-honored indictment of the peculiar institution has such great plausibility that its validity has seldom been questioned. The black belts were a fact. Even nonslaveholding whites who lived in the staple-growing areas did not produce the staples in quantities proportionate to their numbers. Virtually all the sugar and rice and the bulk of the cotton and tobacco were produced by slave labor. In 1850, according to J. D. B. DeBow, there were about 800,000 slaves engaged in cotton

³ Very illuminating on this point is Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 16: 151-171 (September 1929).

growing and only about 100,000 whites, and there is no reason to doubt the essential accuracy of his estimate.⁴ Much the greater part of the cash farm income of the South was received by a comparatively small number of planters, all of whom employed slave labor, of course. In the cotton States in 1850, according to William E. Dodd, "A thousand families received over \$50,000,000 a year, while all the remaining 666,000 families received only about \$60,000,000."⁵ This may also be accepted as approximately accurate. Yet, in spite of such prima facie evidence, the contention that slavery drove nonslaveholding whites out of staple production and thus did them a great injury contains considerably less than a half truth. Both the extent to which slavery excluded nonslaveholding whites from commercialized agriculture and the extent of the injury caused by such exclusion have been greatly exaggerated.

It is recognized at the outset that the problem involves not only the question of the comparative effectiveness of Negro slave labor and free white labor, but also that of the efficiency of the plantation as compared with the small farm as a unit of agricultural organization. The plantations of the ante bellum South were operated with slave labor almost exclusively. Almost all white agricultural workers were employed on small farms; very few served as wage earners on plantations. Moreover, the plantation system could not have existed extensively in the ante bellum South without slave labor, for the simple reason that, where land was cheap and plentiful and it was easy to become an independent farmer, free whites would not work for low enough wages, in large enough numbers, and with a sufficient degree of regularity to permit large-scale farming.⁶ White indentured servitude, with which the earliest plantations had been started, was an impossibility in the ante bellum period. Therefore, any competitive advantages which the plantation may have possessed over the small farm as a unit of farm organization must be accredited to the institution of slavery.

⁴ J. D. B. De Bow, *The Industrial Resources, etc., of the Southern and Western States*, 1:175 (New Orleans, 1852-1853). See also A. N. J. Den Hollander, "Tradition of 'Poor Whites'," in William T. Couch, ed., *Culture in the South*, 411 (Chapel Hill, 1934).

⁵ *Cotton Kingdom*, 24.

⁶ This point has been developed at greater length in Robert R. Russel, "The Economic History of Negro Slavery in the United States," *Agricultural History*, 11:308-321 (October 1937). Only whites of the poorest quality worked as farm laborers in the Old South—that is, when they worked at all. Often young men of a better sort worked for neighbors for hire (sometimes as overseers) until they could accumulate the little capital required to start farming on their own account. People who worked regularly at trades or other occupations oc-

In sugar and rice culture the plantation undoubtedly had great competitive advantages over the small farm.⁷ Sugar growers who owned sugar-making machinery had a great advantage over those who did not, and the machinery was so expensive that only large producers could afford it. The cost of building levees also was conducive to large-scale operations. The plantation had similar advantages over the small farm in rice growing. Since plantations would have been impossible without slavery, it is proper to conclude that slavery kept small farmers from growing sugar cane and rice or, at least and more probably, from growing other crops on lands which were actually devoted to sugar and rice.

In the growing of cotton and tobacco, however—and these staples employed about eight slaves to every one in sugar and rice—it is very doubtful that the plantation was superior to the small farm as a unit of agricultural production.⁸ The planter might buy supplies, sell his produce, and obtain credit—a very doubtful advantage—on somewhat better terms than the small farmer. Joseph C. Robert has described the marketing of tobacco in ante bellum Virginia in great detail. The buyers were very numerous, widely distributed, and quite competitive. The planter seems to have had little advantage over the small farmer in selling his product.⁹ In a newer community where marketing facilities were not so well developed, the advantage of the large-scale farmer in buying and selling may have been considerable. In a district where the large planters bought and sold through nonresident merchants or agents and the small farmers were too few and too poor to support competitive buyers and retail merchants adequately, the small

casionally worked for farmers at harvest or other special seasons when wages were temporarily high. Plantations obviously could not be run with such labor.

⁷ There is a well-reasoned statement of this fact in Edward C. Kirkland, *A History of American Economic Life*, 181-182 (New York, 1932). See also Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, p. 479-480 (Washington, 1933).

⁸ U. S. Census Office, Seventh Census, 1850, *Statistical View of the United States . . . Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census . . .*, by J. D. B. De Bow, 178. Cf. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 309-330 (New York, 1918); M. B. Hammond, *The Cotton Industry: An Essay in American Economic History*, 98-110 (New York, 1897); Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 478-480; Kirkland, *History of American Economic Life*, 182-183; Rosser H. Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View*, 81, 86-91 (Chapel Hill, 1926); Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country in the Winter of 1853-4*, 1:73, 131, 141, 167; 2:65-70, 119 (Putnam's Sons edition, New York, 1907).

⁹ *The Tobacco Kingdom: Plantation, Market, and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina, 1800-1860* p. 94-117 (Durham, 1938). The facts are given by Robert. The conclusion has been drawn therefrom by the writer.

farmers would receive considerably less than the planters for what they might sell and pay considerably more for what they might buy.¹⁰

The planter was able to effect a division of labor among his hands that was not possible on a small farm, but the operations and the machinery required in farming in those days were too simple to permit any considerable advantage to be gained from that. In fact the division of labor on a large plantation tended to become fixed and, by its inflexibility, may have impaired rather than promoted efficiency. For example, there would have been a moral difficulty about sending a dignified coachman to the field to plow or "chop." A farm worker of a reasonable degree of competence probably increases his efficiency by making the frequent changes from one sort of common task to another which are necessary on the farm.

The slaveholder had no compunctions about putting female slaves in the field gangs. White women and girls of small-farm families also worked in the fields to a considerable extent. Frederick Law Olmsted reported: "I have, in fact, seen more white native American women at work in the hottest sunshine in a single month, and that near mid-summer, in Mississippi and Alabama than in all my life in the Free States, not on account of an emergency, as in harvesting, either, but in the regular cultivation of cotton and of corn, chiefly of cotton."¹¹ However, white farm women and girls certainly did not go into the fields as regularly as slave women and girls. The planter had an advantage here as far as production of field crops was concerned.

The cotton planter usually had his own gin and press while his small-farm neighbor had to pay toll. Whether the planter had a competitive advantage in his ownership depended upon the tolls paid by the farmer. The advantage may have been the other way. Other implements and tools used in cotton production and the implements and tools used in tobacco farming were too simple and cheap to give any advantage to the large-scale farmer in their use; it would be a poor farmer indeed who could not afford a plow and a mule.

These competitive advantages of the plantation over the farm, to the extent that they existed, were at least partially offset by certain disadvantages. The overhead expenses of the large planter were proportionally greater than those of the small farmer. The large planter had to hire an overseer or overseers and often had various other functionaries such as manager, foreman, drivers, and yard boy. The pro-

¹⁰ Olmsted, *Journey in the Back Country*, 2:65-67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56. Cf. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 362-363, 471.

duction and curing of tobacco required especially close supervision because care in handling greatly affected the quality, which was an important factor in determining price. The number of slaves which could be supervised efficiently by one overseer was, therefore, small.¹² The planter himself, the mistress, and the sons and daughters did not ordinarily engage in physical labor, as did members of the small-farm family. The plantation house was often literally overrun with domestic servants.

If large-scale farming had possessed any considerable competitive advantages over small-scale farming in producing cotton and tobacco, there would not have been so many small farms and small plantations devoted to their production. Perhaps one-half the cotton was grown on farms where there were either no slaves at all or fewer than ten or a dozen.¹³ Such farms were too small to possess in any material degree the alleged advantages of large-scale production. Probably an even larger percentage of Southern tobacco was produced on small farms or small plantations. Robert has shown that even in Charlotte County, Virginia, where, in 1850, the average size of the tobacco farms was greater than in any other county of the State, about 53 percent of the crop was produced on plantations employing not more than ten or twelve hands. Robert presents a frequency table showing for seven Virginia counties the number of farms which produced tobacco in 1859 in quantities falling within each of several sets of limits. This table seems to show that, except that farms with two hands were more numerous than those with one—probably because large families were more numerous than small—the numbers of tobacco farms employing the several respective numbers of hands varied in regular fashion inversely with the numbers of hands employed.¹⁴ If the plantation had possessed any appreciable advantages over the smaller farm this inverse variation would not have been so regular.

The laborers employed on the typical small farm, that is the members of the white farm family, were almost certainly as efficient as the slaves on the plantations, if and when the whites chose to exert themselves to a reasonable extent. The qualification is essential, for many whites did not choose to exert themselves very much. In the days of the great slavery debate, Southern controversialists often enthusiastically

¹² Robert, *Tobacco Kingdom*, 18; Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 89; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern States*, 545.

¹³ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 226.

¹⁴ These references are based on Robert, *Tobacco Kingdom*, 245-247, 249-250.

asserted that their slaves constituted the best trained and most efficient labor force in the world. An occasional modern writer has placed a high estimate on the effectiveness of the slaves.¹⁵ The typical slave was certainly a more effective worker than the free Negro after emancipation,¹⁶ but the great weight of the evidence is that slaves were not as efficient as white workers of good quality. Ulrich B. Phillips seems to have aptly characterized slave efficiency: "The generality of planters, it would seem, considered it hopeless to make their field hands into thorough workmen or full-fledged men, and contented themselves with very moderate achievement. Tiring of endless correction and unfruitful exhortation, they relied somewhat supinely upon authority with a tone of kindly patronage and a baffled acquiescence in slack service."¹⁷ The fathers of the Constitution expressed the prevailing estimate of their time regarding the relative productiveness of whites and slaves in the famous three-fifths clause.¹⁸ Olmsted, in the 1850s, thought slaves were not nearly so effective as white farm workers in New York State.¹⁹

It has been quite common for writers, in trying to determine the relative efficiency of Negro slave labor and free white labor, to compare the slaves with the white wage labor of the plantation regions, but this method is unsound. The plantation slaves were of average quality. The wage earners were usually the poorest quality of whites, who worked

¹⁵ For example, Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 361-364, 464-471.

¹⁶ Hammond, *Cotton Industry*, 186; Alfred Holt Stone, *Studies in the American Race Problem*, 125-208 (New York, 1908); U. B. Phillips, "The Economics of Slave Labor in the South," in *The South in the Building of the Nation*, 5:121 (Richmond, 1909); Edward Bryon Reuter, *The American Race Problem: A Study of the Negro*, 227-256 (ed. 2, New York, 1938).

¹⁷ *Life and Labor in the Old South*, 200 (Boston, 1929).

¹⁸ Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, 1: 580-588; 3:253, 255, 342, 400, 428-430 (ed. 2, New Haven, 1937). C. C. Pinckney, when reporting to the South Carolina House of Representatives put it thus: "As we have found it necessary to give very extensive powers to the federal government both over the persons and estates of the citizens, we thought it right to draw one branch of the legislature immediately from the people, and that both wealth and numbers should be considered in the representation. We were at a loss, for some time, for a rule to ascertain the proportionate wealth of the states. At last we thought that the productive labor of the inhabitants was the best rule for ascertaining their wealth. In conformity to this rule, joined to a spirit of concession, we determined that representatives should be apportioned among the several states, by adding to the whole number of free persons three fifths of the slaves."—p. 253.

¹⁹ *Journey in the Back Country*, 1:64, 83, 90; 2:51, 106, 115, and *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 185, 203, 717 (New York, 1856). See also Charles H. Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925; A Study in American Economic History*, 3-6 (New York, 1927).

neither very hard nor very regularly.²⁰ Whites of any competence either got land and farmed on their own account or found other employment which was more remunerative than farm labor for hire.

Slave labor was efficient enough, if employed at tasks for which it was adapted, to produce for the masters, taking one year with another, an appropriable surplus over the cost of maintenance. However, the appropriable surplus of the individual slave was normally so small that a master could not enjoy a large income unless he had a large number of slaves.²¹ A farmer with a few slaves worked along with them and made a somewhat better living than his neighbor who had no slaves. A farmer with a larger number of slaves might escape physical toil and enjoy a still higher standard of living. Only the great planters could live in a liberal style. The evidence seems conclusive that planters with fewer than about fifteen slaves did not live well.²²

Except, then, in special cases like sugar and rice where much capital other than slaves was required for effective production, the much touted advantage of the plantation with slave labor over the small farm with white labor reduces to about this: The plantation could not produce more in proportion to land and equipment or to the number of hands employed; if large enough it could produce more goods and leisure for the white family. That, in all common sense, was why people acquired slaves and ran plantations. The small farm with reasonably good management and reasonable industry on the part of members of the farm family afforded at least as high a standard of living as the plantation afforded the planter family and the slaves averaged together.

Why, then, if Negro slave labor was not inherently superior to free white labor, and if the plantation possessed little, if any, competitive advantage over the small farm as a unit of agricultural organization, did nonslaveholding whites fail to produce a larger share of the cotton and tobacco? There were several reasons.

First and foremost come the major matters of enterprise and managerial ability. Nowadays, the more competent and industrious

²⁰ Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 80, Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 468; Frederick Law Olmsted, *Journeys and Explorations in the Cotton Kingdom* 1:82 (London, 1861), and *Journey in the Back Country*, 1:255; 2:12-13, 29.

²¹ Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 474.

²² Olmsted made this point over and over again with much illustrative detail. For examples, see his *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 329, 384-386, 393, 559-563, and *Journey in the Back Country*, 1:174-196, 230-231, 261-266; 2:22, 88, 167-174.

farmers in any community generally get the better land and larger acreages. In slavery days in the South, the better farmers got the more desirable lands, larger holdings, and also the slaves to work them and grew more cotton and tobacco. If a small farmer in the cotton or tobacco belt prospered by growing the staple of his region or otherwise, the natural and attractive thing to do was to buy land and slaves as he could. If he continued to thrive, he would eventually become a planter. Thus a small farmer would have been "driven out" by a planter. Of course the man who inherited land and slaves had a better chance of remaining in the planter class than one who had inherited nothing had of entering it. However, many a young man who inherited wealth in slavery days mismanaged his patrimony, lost it in whole or in part, and ended his days in "reduced" circumstances, while many a young man who started with neither land or slaves became a prosperous planter. Thomas J. Wertenbaker has shown that the planter class originated in this latter fashion in colonial times.²³ Olmsted admitted that small farmers were not debarred from becoming planters in the ante bellum period.²⁴ One suspects that most farmers who prospered did so not because they had come by land and slaves but because they attended to business and managed well, while most of those who failed did so because they took life too easy and managed badly. Credit has too often been given to slavery or the farm organization which rightfully belongs to the master.

Secondly, even in the staple-growing districts, the small farmers did not have as strong incentives to grow the staples for market as the planters had. They found it to their advantage to do a more general type of farming with more household manufacturing. In contrast, planters almost of necessity produced for the market. There would have been few planters if it had not been possible to grow market crops profitably on plantations. As a rule, a master will not employ a large force in a self-sufficing economy, because, after a certain volume of production has been reached, an additional application of labor can contribute but little to satisfy the wants of the farmer and his family but only to raise the standard of living of the laborers, something in which an employer is only mildly interested.²⁵ In a self-sufficing economy in America a family with a considerable number of slaves would have enjoyed a rude plenty and have been freed from grinding toil but would have had the various cares and worries involved in slave-

²³ *The First Americans, 1607-1690*, 22-48 (New York, 1929).

²⁴ *Journey in the Back Country*, 1:141, 177; 2:66, 121-124.

²⁵ Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 475.

holding. A family without slaves would have enjoyed the same rude plenty, and although it must have engaged in hard labor, would not have had the cares and worries of the slaveholding family. A planter in the ante bellum South produced the various necessary and desirable articles for home consumption which could be produced cheaper on the plantation than they could be bought in the market. However, the wants of the slaves were simple, perforce, and easily satisfied, and the demand of the planter's family for such articles was limited. These wants having been satisfied, the planter sought to produce as large a salable surplus as possible in order that he might command for his slaves certain things from outside the community which might be necessary for their continued efficiency and for himself and family the various articles of necessity, comfort, and luxury which could not, or at least not advantageously, be produced on the plantation. The small nonslaveholding farmer, on the contrary, found it desirable to devote a larger share of his labor to the production of the numerous articles for consumption which could be produced advantageously at home, because, in proportion to numbers, the farmer family consumed larger quantities of such things than did the planter family and the slaves together.

The small farmer of the nineteenth century had a further reason for carrying on more self-sufficing activities than the planter. This was the feeling, already mentioned, that white women and girls, although allowed to work at various household industries which were just as useful and productive as plowing and hoeing, nevertheless, should not be expected to labor in the fields. The planter was under no moral pressure not to send his female slaves into the fields.

The planter had a further reason to concentrate his efforts on the growing of cotton or other staples in the fact that Negro slave labor was relatively more efficient therein than in the production of the various other things commonly produced on Southern farms in slavery days, for examples, fruit, poultry, dairy products, bacon, lard, soap, candles, whiskey, coarse textiles, clothing, and axe and hoe handles. The planter, on this account, sometimes found it to his advantage to grow more cotton or tobacco and buy other things. The small farmer and his family, on the other hand, could produce the varied articles of the general farm more effectively than could the slaves and, therefore, more often found it advantageous to produce them at home instead of buying them at the store.²⁶ The fact that in a given community

²⁶ Cf. Walter L. Fleming, "The Slave-Labor System in the Ante-Bellum South," in *The South in the Building of the Nation*, 5:16. A planter told the

planters specialized more in producing the great Southern staples while small farmers went in more for general farming does not of itself prove that white labor was less efficient than slave labor in cotton and tobacco, as has so often been assumed; it can just as well prove that white labor was more efficient than slave labor in general farming.

In comparisons of slave-labor plantations with small white-labor farms this simple fact has been too frequently overlooked. Even if the former had competitive advantages over the latter in the production of a crop, say cotton, the small farmers nevertheless would have grown that crop for a living if thereby they could have made a better or easier living than by producing something else. Nowadays small farmers in large areas of the South find it advisable to devote their major efforts to producing cotton, tobacco, or some other crop or crops for market while buying at the store a great variety of articles formerly produced at home; but the fact that they do so now does not prove that they would have done so in the 1830s or 1850s if it had not been for slavery. The abolition of slavery almost certainly made the Negroes of the South less effective as producers of farm products. It is certainly wrong to assume that it was the abolition of slavery only, or even principally, which gave the small farmers their "opportunity." The same general factors have operated to further commercialize agriculture in the South that have operated elsewhere, namely, cheap transportation, which has enabled people to get more for what they sell and to pay less for what they buy; the industrial revolution, which has made it possible to manufacture more and better goods in the mills and factories in towns and cities at incomparably lower costs than they can be made on farms; and the agricultural revolution, particularly the introduction of improved farm machinery, which has encouraged specialization and commercialization by making it too expensive to own machinery applicable to more than one or two crops and too great a handicap in competition not to adopt some of it.²⁷

Since planters had such strong incentives to produce staple crops for market, they must remain where there was access to markets. Small farmers, who did relatively more subsistence farming regardless of location, were not under such pressure to remain in the commercialized farming districts. Therefore, if planter neighbors made attractive

English geographer, Robert Russell, that the reason more planters did not raise hogs and make their own bacon was that the Negroes would steal the little pigs and roast them. *North America, Its Agriculture and Climate*, 265 (Edinburgh, 1857).

²⁷ Cf. Den Hollander, "The Tradition of 'Poor Whites'," 422-425.

offers for the land, the farmers might find it to their advantage to sell and move to a more remote region where land was cheaper but about as well adapted to their type of farming.

The American people during the slavery period were already a race of land speculators. Large numbers moved to the frontier and submitted for the time to frontier living conditions with the hope that the "progress of the country" and especially the development of means of transportation would soon catch up with them and give their lands a value far in excess of the original cost. Masters with numerous slaves would not or could not be frontiersmen unless the frontier had natural facilities for transportation to market and could almost at once be reduced to cultivation. If they had debts, as most masters did, they were under strong economic compulsion to get cash incomes every year. It follows, therefore, that the proportion of small farmers in the commercialized-farming districts would tend to be reduced by this movement toward the frontier. If a few years later the planter followed the small farmer to the erstwhile frontier and bought up his farm, the farmer was not injured; at least he had done what he had hoped to do and could move on to a new frontier to repeat the process.²⁸

Once a given district became rather thickly settled with masters and slaves, small farmers moved out to get away from the "niggers" and live in a neighborhood where there were more of their own kind. Repelling them from good neighborhoods was probably the principal way in which slavery worked to the economic detriment of nonslaveholding whites. Some of the best lands in the South today are being cultivated by Negroes, who are in general less efficient farmers than whites, because once the Negroes were there in great numbers, the whites would not move in.²⁹

It is true, of course, that if slavery had never been established in the United States and, therefore, the plantation system had not developed extensively, the lands held by planters would have been held by small farmers who, in many instances no doubt, would have been the same persons who were planters. In that hypothetical case, being located near transportation facilities and finding prices, at least of cotton, somewhat higher than they actually were by reason of the smaller production which would have occurred, small farmers would have grown greater quantities of cotton and tobacco, but considerably less

²⁸ Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 576-577; Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rise of the New West*, 90-92 (New York and London, 1906); Fleming, "The Slave-Labor System in the Ante-Bellum South," 107, 113-114.

²⁹ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 396.

than actually were grown in the South by planters and farmers combined. In this sense, then, slavery may be said to have "driven" nonslaveholding farmers out of staple production and deprived them of an economic opportunity. This is far different from the usual implication, namely, that plantations produced a great quantity of cotton and tobacco very cheaply and thereby depressed prices so greatly that, while planters continued to make money, small white farmers could not make a living by growing the staples. Furthermore, even this concession requires qualification. It may well be that, if slavery had never been established in the South or, although established, had been abolished later, the direct benefits conferred upon small farmers by the absence or removal of competition from plantations and slaves would have been more than offset by the possible injury to the prosperity of the section as a whole.³⁰

The farmer folk of the South who received the most meager rewards were the "poor whites." Slavery has so often been blamed for the condition and even the existence of the poor whites that their relation to the institution seems to require special mention.

The poor whites were the ne'er-do-wells of the Southern countryside. They were poor, ignorant, shiftless, and almost utterly lacking in pride and the desire to improve their lot. They lived on the poorer lands interspersed among the plantations and better farms or in the pine barrens, sand hills, or other undesirable locations. In some cases they owned the land they occupied, in others they were merely squatters. They lived from hand to mouth. They farmed in a feeble sort of way, raising a little corn and garden truck and keeping a few hogs. Sometimes they raised a little cotton or tobacco. They hunted and fished a little. Some of them made corn whiskey and sold it to the planters and the slaves. They did odd jobs now and then for neighboring planters or farmers but shunned steady employment. They were often suspected of doing a lot of petty stealing from their more provident neighbors. Occasionally the terms "low whites" and "mean whites" were used to denote them.³¹

The abolitionists were fond of denominating all the nonslaveholding whites of the Southern countryside as poor whites. This was a libel

³⁰ Robert R. Russel, "The General Effects of Slavery upon Southern Economic Progress," *Journal of Southern History*, 4:34-54 (February 1938).

³¹ Good descriptions are Paul H. Buck, "The Poor Whites of the Ante-Bellum South," *American Historical Review*, 31:41-54 (October 1925); and Den Hollander, "The Tradition of 'Poor Whites'," 403-431. Frank L. and Harriet C. Owsley almost reason the poor whites away.—"The Economic Basis of Society in the Late Ante-Bellum South," *Journal of Southern History*, 6:24-45 (February 1940).

on the great majority of the small farmers of the section, who were reasonably industrious and self respecting and, in general, made a fairly comfortable living. There were, however, thousands of poor whites. William Gregg, a public-spirited cotton manufacturer of South Carolina, once estimated that one-third of the white population of his State belonged to that class.³² However accurate his estimate may have been, they were found in all the Southern States and the proportion was too high in all.

There seem to have been several causes for the development of the poor-white class. The poor quality of a large proportion of the indentured servants, so numerous in the South in colonial days, may explain it in part. The comparative ease of getting a living of a sort in a country where land, at least poor land, was so cheap, where corn, vegetables, and fruits grew without much care, where game, fish, and edible wild plants abounded, and where winters were short and mild, contributed to easy-going ways. Because of various historical factors, which will readily occur to anyone familiar with American colonial history, there had not been the feeling of community responsibility in the South that there had been in Puritan New England to insist that individuals conform to community standards of industry, thrift, and morality. Perhaps the principal cause was hookworm and repeated attacks of malaria, which sapped people's vitality and robbed them of hope and ambition, although it is not entirely clear whether people became poor whites because they had contracted hookworm or got hookworm because they were poor whites. The class of poor whites in all probability would have developed if slavery had never been introduced. There are poor whites now two generations after emancipation, and in spite of a greater density of population, better health services, more varied industry, public schools, and the many inducements to exertion offered by modern civilization. Similiar classes, under different names, although perhaps not so great in numbers, are to be found in other parts of the country; and, for that matter, the same general type may be found in varying proportions in every country on the globe.

However, in at least two ways slavery seems to have contributed to the formation of the poor-white class of the South. Contrary to the usual rule, many of the poorer whites might have been better off as farm laborers under supervision than as independent farmers, but slavery retarded the development of a wage-earning class in the plantation districts. Originally planters had resorted to the use of bound

³² *DeBow's Review*, August 1851, p. 133. Cf. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 487.

servants because competent free laborers were scarce in a country where it was so easy for people of any competence at all to become independent farmers on land of their own. Once slavery was firmly established in a district, it in turn discouraged the development of a free-labor class.³³ Planters preferred slaves to the poorer sort of whites. They also hesitated to attempt to use wage laborers instead of slaves, because, until a large wage-earning class should have developed, they could feel no assurance of being able to fill the vacancies that were certain to occur. Whites would not work in field gangs along with slaves under overseers. If it had not been for slavery, people with managerial ability might have made greater efforts to get the poor whites to work for wages or to rent the better lands and might have succeeded, as they did, in a measure, other things contributing, after the War for Southern Independence. By creating the black belts in ways described in preceding paragraphs, slavery created a social condition conducive to the development of such a class of poor whites. The more enterprising and intelligent of the small farmers either got out of the staple belts or graduated into the planter class leaving the less enterprising and less intelligent behind on poor lands which the planters could not use. Planters, having their own social life, took little interest in and felt little responsibility for their poor-white neighbors, except, perhaps, at election time. If the small-farmer population had remained larger, there might have been more churches, more schools, and a more wholesome community life in general, which would have given some stimulus, encouragement, and aid to the weaker and less fortunate members of society.³⁴

Slavery was certainly no more detrimental to nonslaveholding whites engaged in nonagricultural occupations than it was to small farmers. There seems to have been no dearth of employment in the Southern countryside for such white artisans as there were. It is true that planters often had slaves trained in various skilled crafts, and they often became excellent workmen. They were, indeed, frequently hired out by their masters to neighbors who needed their services.³⁵ In

³³ This point is developed more fully in Robert R. Russel, "The Economic History of Negro Slavery in the United States," 317-319.

³⁴ Fleming, "The Slave-Labor System in the Ante-Bellum South," 113; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 396; Olmsted, *Journey in the Back Country*, 2:61-70.

³⁵ Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States*, 6-7; Stone, *Studies in the American Race Problem*, 149-208; Reuter, *American Race Problem*, 227-256; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 500, 566; Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier (A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, v. 1-2), 1:172, 253, 334 (Cleveland, 1910).

general, however, the Negro artisans were not as competent as the white, and the latter were preferred. It was the scarcity of the white artisans which caused planters to resort to training slaves in the trades. This scarcity, in turn, was due to the strong inducement there was all through this period for people of good quality to get land and live on it.

In the cities and towns of the slaveholding States, white wage earners had to compete with free Negroes and with Negro slaves, who were either employed in their masters' businesses, hired out by their masters to other employers, or allowed to hire their own time. Such free Negroes and slaves worked at practically every sort of task.³⁶ They had a monopoly of domestic service. Either because of its character, or because Negroes had so long predominated in it, or both, the whites had come to look upon such service as menial and degrading, and employers preferred the Negroes because they were more obsequious. In other occupations the whites and Negroes, sometimes of both sexes, worked side by side, usually, but not always, with some distinction in tasks in favor of the whites. For example, in the Tredegar Iron Works at Richmond, Virginia, each white master workman was given a Negro "assistant."³⁷

The white workers frequently resented the presence of the blacks, either because of race prejudice, or dislike of their competition, or both, and sought to have them excluded from the pursuits concerned. There was, for example, a strike of the white workers in the Tredegar works having this object, but it was unsuccessful, as were all other efforts to exclude Negroes. Employers could not afford to allow such a principle to be established, as white workers were not sufficiently numerous and permanent in most localities to permit reliance on them alone. The use of slaves, if they belonged to the owners of the business, gave the employers assurance that operations would not be interrupted or wages forced to too high levels by strikes and withdrawals; and, even if the slaves were hired from others, the assurance was nearly as great, for still there could be no strikes, and labor contracts were usually made for a year at a time.³⁸

³⁶ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 402-424; Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States*, 1-28; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 467, 566; Kathleen Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era*, ch. 6 (New York and London, 1931); A. H. Stone, "Free Contract Labor in the Ante-Bellum South," in *The South in the Building of the Nation*, 5:142.

³⁷ For reasons not entirely clear, the hands in Virginia tobacco factories were nearly all Negroes,—Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture*, 238-240; Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom*, 197-208.

³⁸ Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States*, 69-86; Phillips, *American*

In the skilled trades the white workingmen were more efficient and were, therefore, preferred. Negro competition was not keen.³⁹ In unskilled and semiskilled labor the superiority of white workers to slaves was not so great, if, indeed any existed, but in general white workers had no difficulty in getting jobs, excepting, of course, that they sought none in domestic service. As the middle period wore on and the demand for labor in the cotton and sugar belts grew, there was a tendency for slave labor to be drawn from the towns to the farms where white labor was not available, leaving places in towns open to the whites. This tendency was reinforced by the increasing difficulty of handling slaves amid urban surroundings and by the better adaptability, generally speaking, of slaves to agriculture than to urban occupations.

Nonslaveowning employers of labor in the cities had no particular disadvantage in competition with slaveowning employers as they would have had in the country, for they were able to hire either whites, slaves, free Negroes, or all three. In fact, railroad companies, manufacturing concerns, etc. usually found it necessary or desirable to start with hired labor, free or slave, because with hired labor it was not necessary to raise so much capital at the outset. Employers sometimes preferred to hire their hands also, because this permitted a selection more in accord with existing needs and enabled the employers to expand or contract their labor forces and more readily adjust production to the state of business.⁴⁰

In slavery days the cities and towns of the South, being neither numerous nor large, derived their support principally from plantation districts, where there were many slaves, rather than from small-farming regions, where there were few. It was chiefly the planters who bought, sold, borrowed, travelled, and sent their children to academies and colleges. It seems quite certain, therefore, that if it had not been for plantations and slavery, the cities and towns of the South would have been even fewer and smaller, resulting in even less opportunity for nonslaveholding whites.

In the days of the great slavery debate, the abolitionists, when

Negro Slavery, 413; Robert Royal Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-1861*, p. 53, 218-220 (Urbana, 1924); Olmsted, *Journey in the Back Country*, 1:199-200; 2:57; Bruce, *Virginia Iron Manufacture*, 234-237, 243-244.

³⁹ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 403, table.

⁴⁰ Robert, *Tobacco Kingdom*, 199; Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 566; Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism*, 210-211, 219.

pressed closely to show how slavery injured the nonslaveholding whites, always replied that it did so by inspiring a contempt for manual labor among all whites who came in contact with it. This answer still finds favor in the textbooks. The writer has examined the contention at some length in another place and found that there was a grain of truth in it but little more than a grain.⁴¹

In conclusion, Negro slavery was in some respects to the economic advantage of many of the nonslaveholding whites of the slaveholding regions; in others it was to their disadvantage. To many nonslaveholding whites it was a matter of economic indifference. It is impossible to strike a balance in which confidence can be placed. It is certain that the net injury, if there was any, has commonly been grossly exaggerated. The fact that nonslaveholding whites did not seek to destroy the institution as injurious to their economic interests may only show that their common sense operating upon a familiar matter was sounder than the economics of abolitionists theorizing at a distance or of some modern historians theorizing after a long lapse of time.

⁴¹ Robert R. Russel, "The General Effects of Slavery upon Southern Economic Progress," 37-40; See also Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 397-398.

A Revaluation of the Period Before the Civil War: Railroads

By ROBERT R. RUSSEL

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THERE HAS been a growing realization of late that the building and improvement of railroads constituted an important factor in the history of the period before the Civil War. We are coming to realize that we must take them more into account both in explaining the rapid transformation American society was undergoing and in interpreting the politics of that time. And it is a far cry from the treatment accorded railroads in one of the older political histories to that found in Beard's *Rise of American Civilization*, for example.¹

Our comparative neglect of the railroad factor in the past has evidently been chiefly due to our preoccupation with the slavery question. To a great degree, however, this neglect may be attributed, it would seem, to the unusually voluminous, varied, and rather inaccessible character of the sources. These sources are gradually being mastered, by a policy of attrition, and we have at length accumulated a considerable mass of monographic and other secondary literature on railroads, some of it definitively done. In a short paper one cannot attempt a description of this literature.² Its existence makes a revaluation of the period a simpler matter and our failure to make such a revaluation less justifiable.

¹ Special mention should be made, also, of W. E. Dodd, *Expansion and Conflict* (Boston, 1915), chaps. x, xi, and of C. R. Fish, *The Rise of the Common Man* (New York, 1927). There are some good generalizations, although scattered and incomplete, in Edward Channing, *History of the United States* (New York, 1905-1925), V, VI.

² There is a rather full bibliography for the period in B. H. Meyer (ed.), *History of Transportation in the United States before 1860* (Washington, 1917). Another good bibliography is in F. A. Cleveland and F. W. Powell, *Railroad Promotion and Capitalization in the United States* (New York, 1909).

Granted, there are still great gaps in our secondary material. For example, we do not yet have a definitive railroad history of the Old Northwest for this period treating the section as a unit.³ Such a study would reveal, better than any other, the complex factors which determined the location of railroads where physical contour was not fundamental. It should also give considerable light on the beginnings of consolidation and on the economic and social effects of the coming of railroads into more or less isolated communities. Someone should do for the Old Dominion what Professor Phillips has done for the eastern cotton belt.⁴ Nowhere was there a more insistent, revealing, and significant public agitation conducted in behalf of railroads from the point of view of public policy and in behalf of state aid to railroad companies.⁵ Perhaps no state illustrates better than Virginia the great obstacles to a reasonable state-aid program which lay in vested interests and in local rivalries, jealousies, and ambitions. Someone might well bring together and organize the scattered facts about railroad rates before the Civil War. We still await a definitive account of the Pacific railway issue in American politics during the period, showing, among other things, how it was interrelated with the slavery and other great domestic issues of the time and with our isthmian diplomacy. Perhaps more than anything else we need a much greater number of good economic and social histories of particular communities into which early railroads entered;⁶ such histories would enable us to speak with authority about the economic and social effects of railroads—a subject on which it is too easy to generalize without data. These and other gaps in our secondary literature must be filled in before we can make anything like a final evaluation of the railroad factor in the history of the period. They do not excuse us, however, from making attempts at evaluation with the materials we have.

Now what can we do with our railroad material in its present state in the way of revaluing the period before the Civil War?⁷ For one thing

³ We have William F. Gephart, *Transportation and Industrial Development in the Middle West* (New York, 1909), and F. L. Paxson, "The Railroads of the 'Old Northwest' before the Civil War," Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, *Transactions*, XVII, 243-74.

⁴ U. B. Phillips, *A History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt to 1860* (New York, 1908).

⁵ A phase of this propaganda is described in C. H. Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776-1851* (Chicago, 1910), 311-19.

⁶ An example of the sort of work we need is B. H. Hibbard, *History of Agriculture in Dane County, Wisconsin* (Madison, 1904).

⁷ The writer has had occasion to read rather extensively in the sources. It

we should be able to give a more accurate and truthful description and explanation of the great economic and social changes which occurred. Railroads helped to take people west and to settle lands there which otherwise must have remained unoccupied. They, with other improved means of transportation, obliterated old frontiers, revolutionized the character of the new frontier, and by 1860 bade fair to carry it forward with seven-league boots. Improved means of transportation caused self-sufficing rural economy to give way to commercial agriculture with distant markets.⁸ The railroads not only brought prosperity to countless rural communities but they caused countless others, sometimes century old, to die out, unable to withstand the new competition with more naturally favored districts far away. Even before the Civil War, railroads were making some towns into cities and blasting the prospects of others. Along with other improved means of transportation and communication, they largely conditioned the progress of the industrial revolution—by providing wide markets, by bringing together raw materials and food supplies at manufacturing centers, and by themselves utilizing and thus stimulating various manufactures.⁹ Improvements in transportation, at various stages, built up promising home industries in many localities only for successive improvements to destroy them to the advantage of more favorably located competitors in other sections of the country. The building of railroads withdrew thousands of laborers from other occupations thus forcing changes therein and encouraging immigration. Railroads ruthlessly annihilated vested interests in the form of canal and turnpike companies, stage lines, and, later, steamboat lines. They contributed greatly to the evolution of business organization.¹⁰ They were instrumental in greatly increasing travel and the commingling of people, thus spreading ideas and notions more rapidly and releasing social energies.¹¹ They con-

would be impossible to cite all the material which has contributed to the various items in this evaluation, and no attempt will be made to do so.

⁸ See especially R. M. Tryon, *Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640-1860* (Chicago, 1917); P. W. Bidwell, "The Agricultural Revolution in New England," *American Historical Review*, XXVI, 683-702; and P. W. Bidwell and J. I. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860* (Washington, 1925), chap. xxiv.

⁹ The best summary is in Victor S. Clark, *History of Manufactures in the United States, 1607-1860* (Washington, 1916), chap. xiv.

¹⁰ For suggestions see Guy S. Callender, "The Early Transportation and Banking Enterprises of the States in Relation to the Growth of Corporations," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XVII, 111-62.

¹¹ C. R. Fish, in writing of early railway cars, contributes an illuminating bit of interpretation: "This type, however, gave way to the long car, with two

tributed greatly to the growth of the United States mails. The telegraph enabled the daily newspaper to garner its crop of news, the railroads in part made possible the larger reading public necessary to the support of these news-gathering and news-mongering agencies.¹² Improved means of communication and travel helped to establish the convention habit among the people of the forties and fifties, and conventions nourished all the "isms." Improved means of travel and communication greatly influenced our political methods and organization. This outline of changes caused or conditioned by improved means of transportation and communication might be extended. But some such outline as this, rounded out with accurate illustrative detail and animated with sympathy for and understanding of human beings of all classes and conditions, should find its way into our general histories.

A study of our railroad material will convince one that we have not been estimating highly enough the initiative, inventiveness, foresight, and boldness of intelligent Americans in the middle period. They grasped with astonishing quickness the utilities of the railroad and the possibilities of improving it. The remarkable fact is not that the railroads were first popularly considered as probably useful supplements to existing water transportation systems, but how quickly bolder spirits saw that they could become competitors and alter the course of trade and how promptly they acted upon their vision. Said a director of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, when construction on that line was begun, 1828: "We are about opening a channel through which the commerce of the mighty country beyond the Allegheny must seek the ocean . . ." ¹³ For the writer of this paper, at least, it illuminates the character of the American people to know that a large proportion of the early railroad lines in this country, short as they were, were built as "links" in "chains" continental in their extent, some of them not connecting with established water routes except at their termini. Most of our present main lines east of the Mississippi existed on paper as chains of railroads years before more than the first links had been

double seats divided by an aisle. Just why this change was made it is difficult to say, but it is significant that when it was complete, the American traveled everywhere, whether by canal boat, steamer or train, in a long narrow saloon, in close association with his fellow travelers, and with the opportunity for general conversation or for the expression of his opinion before an audience, willing or unwilling," *op. cit.*, 82.

¹² I know of no work which attempts to show the correlation between railroads and newspaper circulation. There are so many factors making for an increased circulation that probably no such attempt would be of value.

¹³ Archer B. Hulbert, *The Paths of Inland Commerce* (New Haven, 1921), 149.

actually constructed. Not all early paper systems materialized, but most did; promoters read aright their physical geography and the signs of the times. The necessity of consolidating these chains under single companies, if railroads were to compete successfully with water routes for the carriage of heavy through freight, was not at once realized, to be sure, but consolidation in the form we know it had fairly begun before 1861. American inventive genius did not falter in the task of supplying the improvements necessary to make the railroad an efficient agency of transportation for heavy freight over vast distances; American engineers and builders eagerly watched developments on the other side of the water. The American public, once it had caught the spirit, constantly and confidently expected that the improvements would be forthcoming to meet the demands of a "new age." Our more philosophic citizens attempted to evaluate the railroad's economic, social, political, and moral significance for their time and for "generations yet unborn." Our railroad history contains ample material to illustrate the truth of Charles and Mary Beard's statement: "When at last the cloud lifts, when the fundamental course of American civilization is seen in a long, unbroken development, when the sharp curves of years are smoothed by the reckoning of centuries, then if all signs do not fail the middle period of American history will appear as the most change-ful, most creative, most spirited epoch between the founding of the colonies and the end of the nineteenth century."¹⁴

Certainly in the past our general histories have dealt too largely, relatively speaking, with politics. As we work up our detailed knowledge of the history of transportation, manufactures, agriculture, public lands, immigration, education, culture, various reform movements, and other subjects, we shall be able to correct the emphasis. But much in our politics requires revaluation in the light of the facts about these other subjects.

Our state and local politics in the period concerned, have been treated too often as completely subordinated to and bound up with national politics. Complaints were indeed numerous in the ante-bellum period that state and local party contests turned altogether too largely on national issues. Such complaints were justified, but it is easy to exaggerate. There were all sorts of state and local issues which shared with national questions the interest and attention of politicians and people generally. Between 1845 and 1860 no questions figured more largely in state and local politics outside of New England, possibly, than railroad questions.

¹⁴ *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, 1927), I, 632.

It could not be otherwise. The building of railroads was a matter of vital public interest. People were quick to grasp their economic and some of their social and political effects. They understood well enough that the outlines of a permanent transportation system were being laid down, and they realized accordingly that the determination of the location of railroads at the moment was fated with consequences for the future of their communities. In fact, they exaggerated the importance of the location of particular railroads, not foreseeing the great multiplication of lines in later years. From the point of state policy, a properly planned railroad system would settle the vacant lands, open mineral and other natural resources to exploitation, increase the taxable wealth, and build up cities within the commonwealth with trade which otherwise might seek "commercial metropolises" in other states. If a city could secure a radiating system of these arteries of commerce, "its life blood," its future greatness seemed assured. And as Governor Bebb of Ohio said: "—wo to the commercial city that suffers these [artificial] rivers to be diverted from it."¹⁵ Farming communities realized no less well their interests in the routes railroads might take. "Every farmer along the line wants the road to run by his front door," said one harassed railroad president. In the South, where there was concern about southern decline, railroads were presented as an agency that might regenerate the economic life of the section, give it a varied industry, free it from galling dependence on the North, attract immigration, and enable it to contest more equally in the national councils.¹⁶

With such public interests involved, and I have not named all of them, all the agencies of social control were enlisted to assist in getting the roads properly located and built. The merits of rival routes were fought out in conventions, in newspaper columns, on the stump and platform, and in the pulpit, and the purchase of stocks and bonds was urged on grounds of civic pride and public spirit as well as of economic self-interest. Under the special-charter system, which generally prevailed, struggles over railroad routes were carried into the legislatures. Pressure was brought to bear upon legislatures to make railroad charters more and more liberal. The legislatures were requested to build railroads, or to grant state aid to private companies, or to permit municipal divisions to vote such aid, or, if constitutional provisions forbade state or local aid, to call constitutional conventions to alter the inconvenient

¹⁵ *DeBow's Review*, VIII, 444.

¹⁶ R. R. Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-61* (Urbana, 1924).

sections.¹⁷ Cities, counties, and townships were asked to vote bonds or subscribe stock, where constitutions and laws permitted. But such measures met opposition. The American people in the pre-Civil War period were individualistic. There was fear of corporations. There was the Jeffersonian tradition of non-interference. *Laissez faire* proclivities had been confirmed by experiences during the panic of 1837 and its aftermath. There was opposition to railroads from vested interests which would be injuriously affected—canal companies, turnpike companies, steamboat lines, stage lines. So railroad questions became campaign issues and led to spirited contests which we can not recount here. Even in years when the slavery controversy was most bitter, numerous state contests, to say nothing of local, turned primarily on the question of state aid to railroads or other railroad matters. It is doubtful whether any other subject occupied more of the time and interest of state legislatures in the period from 1848 to 1860 than did railroads. It is doubtful whether the average citizen in the West gave as much interest and attention to the slavery question, in the same period, as to railroad questions.

The general historian who would give a true picture of American life should insert paragraphs on the more or less corrupt influence of railroads upon politics years before the day of Oakes Ames and Credit Mobilier. Politico-railroad scandals were not as common before the Civil War as they afterwards became, to be sure, but the explanation for their comparative infrequency in the former period seems to lie chiefly in the deficiencies of the press of that time and a lack of tenderness in the public conscience with regard to business in politics. To illustrate, remarkably large numbers of railroad men were elected or appointed to offices in which they would be concerned with railroad matters; remarkably large numbers of state or locally prominent politicians became railroad presidents or financial agents without prejudice to their influence in party councils or their chances for political preferment.

Railroad issues figured in our national politics also. There was the Western demand for congressional grants of land in aid of railroads. This was one of the major western policies of the period. It led to lengthy congressional debates and to all sorts of political combinations, log-rolling, lobbying, jobbery, and corruption. A land grant having been obtained from Congress, its history was only begun, both in the arena

¹⁷ In 1852 New Orleans was given a new charter largely to facilitate the giving of aid to railroad companies, and Louisiana adopted a new constitution of which the most important feature was the absence of the former prohibition of state aid to corporations.

of national and in that of state politics. There was the issue of the tariff on railroad iron—by no means an insignificant one. There was the difficult question of the remuneration to be paid the railroad companies for transporting mails, troops, and government freight. The building of railroads increased the number of cases concerning the bridging of navigable rivers.¹⁸

Accounts of the acquisition of Oregon, California, and New Mexico could be made more truthful and satisfying by putting them against a background of progress in means of transportation and communication. The process of acquisition was accompanied by interesting debates in Congress and out as to the ability of the United States to colonize, assimilate, and retain such distant possession with such a vast mountain barrier separating them from the settled eastern states.¹⁹ The proponents of acquisition expressed great confidence in the political properties of steam and electricity. "Manifest destiny" was manifest to men who were witnessing the wonders of a revolution in means of communication and travel.

The issue of better means of communication with the Pacific coast, whether by Pacific railroad or isthmian projects, deserves greater consideration than has as yet been accorded it in accounts of American politics of the dozen years before the Civil War. The conquest over nature which would necessarily be involved appealed powerfully to the imagination of the generation. The stakes involved in the solution of the problem were supposed to be, and were, enormous. Failure to provide proper facilities might result in estrangement and separation of the coast communities or their loss in a war with a strong naval power. The choice of route for a transcontinental railroad would powerfully affect the future prosperity of cities, states, and strong railroad interests farther east. It would largely give direction to the colonization of the coast and of the great plains, and that, in turn, would have important bearing on the balance of political power between the sections engaged in the struggle over slavery and other issues. A decision in favor of a railroad built and operated by the government might go far toward altering the character of our govern-

¹⁸ These matters are discussed satisfactorily in Lewis H. Haney, *A Congressional History of Railways in the United States* (Madison, 1906-10), I and II; and John B. Sanborn, *Congressional Grants of Land in Aid of Railways* (Madison, 1899).

¹⁹ See especially *Cong. Globe*, 27 Cong., 3 Sess., 154, 198-200, 227; 28 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 224, 622; 29 Cong., 1 Sess., 1214-17; 29 Cong., 2 Sess., 356, 367, Appendix, 127-28, 132; 30 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 337-40, 350, 370, 383-93.

mental system. The interest in this issue was, therefore, great and general, the rivalry over routes and termini was intense.²⁰ Professor F. H. Hodder has shown what can be done toward illuminating one famous episode in our history, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, by sketching in this Pacific railway background.²¹ The real dignity and importance of our ante-bellum isthmian diplomacy would be better understood if we should more often discuss it along with the Pacific railway issue²² rather than as a detached episode in our history.²³

Then there is the matter of sectionalism. Of course, we must cease writing our history as if sectionalism of the North and South were the only important fact in the ante-bellum period and every other matter turned or waited upon it. We have allowed sectionalism to obscure somewhat the story of the onward march of democracy, industry, culture, and even nationalism. Yet when all is said by way of correcting emphasis, sectionalism was one of the greatest facts in our history and had most tragic consequences.

We cannot ignore it or exorcise it away. We must understand and explain it. All factors bearing upon it should be analyzed. The effect of improved means of transportation and communication upon sectionalism has by no means been neglected,²⁴ but it still awaits satisfying analysis and summarization.

Orators and political philosophers before the Civil War fondly pictured railroads, steamboat and telegraph lines as bonds which were operating to bind the Union together, remove prejudices and misunderstandings, spread common ideas, and establish a community of interest. But sectionalism was not allayed, the war came. What was the matter? Were the railroads, steamboats, and telegraph lines enough? Or were there too many? There were more in 1861 than ever before.

²⁰ These ideas are somewhat amplified in R. R. Russel, "The Pacific Railway Issue in Politics prior to the Civil War," *Miss. Val. Hist. Rev.*, XII, 187.

²¹ F. H. Hodder, "The Railroad Background of the Kansas-Nebraska Act," *ibid.*, 3-22.

²² John B. McMaster, *History of the People of the United States* (New York, 1909-1918). However, this account is incomplete.

²³ Separate discussion has too often led authors to emphasize jingoistic assertions of the Monroe Doctrine or a restless search after more land for cotton and negroes as the prime motives of our isthmian diplomacy. See, for example, M. W. Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy, 1815-1915* (Washington, 1916).

²⁴ For examples see Chaning, *op. cit.*, VI, chap. xiii; C. R. Fish, "The Decision of the Ohio Valley," American Historical Association, *Report*, 1910, pp. 153-64; Phillips, *op. cit.*, 386-96; and T. D. Jervay, *The Railroad the Conqueror* (Columbia, 1913) and *Robert Y. Hayne and His Times* (New York, 1909).

The net effect of improved means of communication down to 1861 seems to have been actually to augment sectionalism rather than to allay it. Improved means of communication made the North and South somewhat better acquainted, but this better acquaintance did not remove prejudices in the North against slavery nor in the South against abolitionists; rather it seems to have increased them. Better facilities of travel encouraged the northern people to become excessively addicted to the convention habit, the southern people at least moderately so. Intersectional conventions, however, were comparatively few. Northern conventions nursed generous enthusiasms for various reforms, striking the shackles from the slave for one; southern conventions nursed a feeling of southern wrongs. Nor, before 1861, did better means of transportation even tend to bring a community of interest between the sections. Such facilities enabled the southern people, more readily than before, to get their manufactured goods and a portion of their foodstuffs from the East, or from the Northwest, or from Europe by way of the East, while they devoted themselves more exclusively than ever to growing their great staples for export to the North or to Europe, chiefly in northern ships. Northern people regarded this intersectional exchange of goods and products as mutually advantageous. A large proportion of the southern people came, especially when cotton prices were low, to look upon their commercial and industrial dependence on the North as "degrading vassalage," and economically disadvantageous.²⁵ Furthermore, northern commercial and industrial interests and southern agricultural interests demanded different policies on the part of the federal government, and bitter quarrels ensued.

Steamboats, canals, and railroads also contributed to the development of northern sectionalism in another way, by assimilating the Old Northwest to the economy and culture of the East. Thus they made possible a political alliance between the two as against the South. The fact has been frequently cited that they developed a considerable trade between the Northwest and the East and between the Northwest and Europe through the East. In fact, this trade soon came to exceed greatly the trade between the Northwest and the South. The East looked upon this trade as mutually advantageous and came eventually to lend support to western measures designed to increase it, while for various reasons, there was not the same disposition in the Northwest as in the South to regard commercial and industrial dependence on the East as degrading vassalage. For one thing, the Northwest never became so exclusively devoted to staple agriculture. However, there was an econ-

²⁵ Russel, *op. cit.*

omic basis for political alliance between East and Northwest much more important than a mere large volume of trade. Canals, steamboats, and railroads, together with great natural resources and the energy and thrift of the people, brought prosperity to the Old Northwest. They brought towns, cities, merchants, packing-houses, carshops, ship-yards, prospects of iron and coal mines, eastern capital, and the prospect of more employers and wage earners, in short, an economic order which, by 1860, began to resemble that of the East. In one respect the two sections had never been widely different; in both, small farms and free labor everywhere prevailed. In this similarity of systems lay chiefly the economic basis for political alliance. But the basis for political co-operation between East and Northwest was not solely or even primarily economic. It was cultural. The majority of the early emigrants to the Old Northwest were of southern stock, but when railroads, steamboats, and canals came they gave the section a population preponderantly eastern in origin and, therefore, preponderantly eastern in ideals, beliefs, and prejudices.²⁶ The new facilities for travel and communication were an influence making for continued and greater homogeneity throughout the North in these respects.

Likewise, better means of transportation and communication helped to develop southern sectionalism by assimilating more and more of the South to a uniform type of economy and culture. They did not develop a great internal commerce within the South.²⁷ Most of the trade continued to be with the North and Europe. Rather, improved connections with the outside world made it possible for similar physiographic and climatic conditions to support in the larger area the same sort of economic and social system, namely, plantations, slavery, and staple crops produced for export. Culturally the newer parts of the South were the offspring of the older and there had been little time to stray from the paternal pattern. The new means of communication and travel brought greater uniformity in this respect. Thus was the way prepared for the acceptance of the tenets of the South Carolina school (so vigorously propagated) by a sufficient number to precipitate the cotton states into revolution when an exclusively northern combination threatened to gain control of the national government.

It would seem, therefore, that in the period before secession, improved means of communication, as far as they had developed, had

²⁶ This statement is well supported in the case of Illinois in A. C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870* (Springfield, 1919), chap. i; also F. J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 135-42.

²⁷ Phillips, *op. cit.*, 386-96.

actually tended to augment sectionalism. There can be no doubt, however, that in the long run they have been nationalizing factors. If armed conflict could have been avoided by compromises for another decade or so, it would have become impossible, and the railroads would have played a large part in determining the issue.

Already, by 1860, railroads were beginning to draw sections of the border slave states into the current of national life; the influence of railroads, built or prospective, upon the decision of the border states in 1861 has often been remarked. Railroads would soon have become numerous enough to give the South some internal trade, thus giving an impetus to the growth of towns and cities. They would have taken more northern men South, and many more southern men North. They would have brought in their wake repair-shops, carshops, and locomotive works. They might have given an impetus to the lumber industry. They would have penetrated iron and coal fields and aroused southern people to the prospect of their development. They would have put southern water-power sites on transportation lines, thus giving another incentive to manufactures. They would have put isolated rural communities in touch with the currents of commerce and thus would have began the transformation of backwoodsmen into moderately prosperous farmers. In these several ways they would have contributed to the formation of a class of capitalists who were not plantation owners, of free laborers with class consciousness, and of independent farmers not directly and primarily interested in slavery. The grip of the planting class on southern politics would have been weakened, possibly broken, and the influence of classes less antagonistic to national policies would have been correspondingly increased. With such changes slavery itself would have become difficult to police,²⁸ and, therefore, less earnestly defended. Within a decade several more north and south roads would have crossed the intersectional boundary line, and with both northern and southern stockholders and personnel, would have strengthened the bonds of union, in one respect at least. When secession came, Texas was on the point of becoming the scene of railway struggles and land speculation and settlement, the like of which the South had not yet seen. Within ten years or less a railroad would have extended across her plains from New Orleans, another from Vicksburg, one from Memphis by way of Little Rock, another from Cairo with Chicago connections, and still another from St. Louis through Springfield and Fort Smith. Texas cattle would have been going to St. Louis and

²⁸ Russel, *op. cit.*, chap. viii.

Chicago markets. Ten years without armed conflict would have been sufficient for the construction of a Southern Pacific railroad. Texas interests might have become too varied to be conducive to revolution.

Likewise, another decade or two of uninterrupted railroad building would have influenced powerfully northern sectionalism. Railroads would have helped to colonize the territories with a free labor population; and this done, the North might have become more willing to let the South solve her labor and racial problems without interference. Nor is it certain that the new West thus created would have had such a community of interest with the East as to permit its joining a northern political combination against the South.

Considering these signs of the times and others which it is not within the province of this paper to discuss, it would appear that, whether it was so understood at the time or not, in 1861 secession was a matter of then or never for the old order in the cotton states. It is extremely improbable that in the sweep of social forces the peculiar combination and play of factors and conditions so conducive to secession sentiment would have persisted long. It was the task of national statesmanship to interpret the trend of the times and to make the compromises, concessions, and adjustments necessary to prevent conflicting interests and ambitions from resulting in an attempted dissolution of the Union.²⁹ Statesmanship failed. Secession and civil war came. But we are not entitled to lay the flattering unction to our souls that the Civil War was an inevitable conflict.

²⁹ Dodd, writing of the state of the Union at the opening of Franklin Pierce's administration said: "A new era had begun . . . and all the social tendencies seemed to be working out a national life which was no longer parochial. It was the business of politics so to guide and regulate the varying activities of the people that sectional hatreds should pass away and that the resources of the country should not be squandered," *op. cit.*, 206.

The Pacific Railway Issue in Politics Prior to the Civil War

By ROBERT R. RUSSEL

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ONE OF THE great national issues or problems of the period from about 1840 to 1860 which have not received their just deserts from historians, was that of communication and transportation between the settled portions of the United States east of the Rockies and the possessions on the Pacific. It is the object of this article to deal with some aspects of this question, particularly with the extent of public interest in it, why so much interest was manifested, and why such great public interest did not earlier result in the establishment of a Pacific railroad or other satisfactory means of communication.

The question of communication with the Pacific was one of considerable interest from the time of our first claim to Oregon, but it began to arouse something like general interest in the later 1830's and early 1840's. Such an interest may be accounted for by the growth of our whaling industry in the northern Pacific, the extension of the fur trade to the Oregon country, the discovery of new routes, the diplomatic contest with Great Britain over the ownership of Oregon, and a growing interest in the possibilities of trade with China and other Asiatic countries, evoked by the actual increase in that trade and by British efforts to open Chinese ports to the commerce of the world.

As early as 1835 the United States Senate requested President Jackson to consider opening negotiations relative to a canal across New Granada or Central America.¹ Senator Benton, of Missouri, early took an interest in establishing means of overland transportation. From time to time after about 1836 (when very few railroads existed anywhere in the United States) various individuals suggested building a railroad to

¹ James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents . . .* (Washington, 1895-99), IV, 512.

Oregon² but it was Asa Whitney, New York merchant, who popularized the idea. In 1845 he proposed to build a railroad along a vaguely defined route from Lake Michigan to Puget Sound if the government would sell him for ten cents an acre a strip of land sixty miles wide the length of the road. According to Whitney and other advocates of the plan the road would bind Oregon to us, settle our western lands, thus solving our immigration problem, and, finally and most important, become the great artery of a magnificent trade between Asia and the United States and between Asia and Europe across our territory. It was to be the ultimate solution of the problem that had excited the imagination of Columbus and so many others, to find a short route to the Indies.³ Whitney memorialized Congress and gained many friends for his plan there. During several years he toured the country addressing mass meetings, railroad conventions, chambers of commerce, and state legislatures, and inducing them to pass resolutions indorsing his project. He wrote voluminously. A majority of the newspaper press of the country at one time or another lent him support. His plan was kept prominently before the country for about seven years before it was definitely rejected.

But Whitney's bold scheme soon raised up numerous advocates of other routes and plans. For example, Senator Benton championed a national road, built by the government, from St. Louis as the eastern terminus. As long as Oregon was the only territory on the Pacific to which we had a claim, the Whitney road found considerable support even as far south as the Gulf states; but even then several Southerners suggested a southern route for a Pacific railway terminating in Mexican territory.⁴ No direct evidence has been found to prove that they advocated war upon Mexico to secure such a route. There is plenty of evidence, however, to show that the government sought to acquire California from Mexico because, among other reasons, the fine harbor of San Francisco might become the "depot of the vast commerce which must exist on the Pacific."⁵ And once the Mexican War was begun

² These early suggestions are discussed in some detail in E. V. Smalley, *History of the Northern Pacific Railroad* (New York, 1883); J. P. Davis, *The Union Pacific Railway . . .* (Chicago, 1894); and H. H. Bancroft, *History of California* (San Francisco, 1884-90), VII, chap. xix.

³ See especially Whitney's third memorial to Congress in 30 Cong., 1 Sess., *House Report No. 733*.

⁴ *DeBow's Review*, I, 22-23; III, 328-39, 475-83. Cf. Edward Mayes, "Origin of the Pacific Railroads, and Especially of the Southern Pacific," in *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, VI, 313-14.

⁵ E. g., J. K. Polk, *Diary . . .* (Chicago, 1910), I, 71-72; M. W. Willi-

there were numerous suggestions that the government seize the territory over which ran specified, prospective railroad routes.⁶ During the negotiations for peace a large sum was offered Mexico for the right of way across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec but was refused.⁷ The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo contained an article relative to a railroad which might be built along the Gila River, designated as a part of the boundary.

The acquisition of the Mexican cession, the discovery of gold in California, the great migration thither, and the phenomenal development of that region gave the establishment of means of communication with the Pacific an importance and interest it had not possessed before. The government must be able to dispatch troops to the new possessions to defend them against foreign enemies, along the emigrant trails to protect the emigrants against the Indians, or to the Mexican border to prevent Indian depredations across the frontier (as required by treaty). Means were required to transport troops for these several purposes speedily and cheaply and along with them the necessary military stores. The mails must be carried to and from the new possessions. Better means of transportation were needed for the convenience and safety of the thousands of emigrants. It was represented that, unless there could be a constant and speedy interchange of intelligence and goods between the people on the east side of the Rockies and those on the other, estrangement would arise and eventually political separation might occur.⁸ Transcontinental railroads and other means of communication and transportation would promote the settlement of the intervening territory along the routes and the development of the resources of the vast interior. A railroad near Canada might help to draw her into our system;⁹ one along the Mexican frontier might hasten the absorption of the northern tier of Mexican states.¹⁰ The control of transit routes across the Isthmus might in the fullness of time bring the regions traversed under the Stars and Stripes.¹¹ To the rapidly growing popula-

ams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy, 1815-1915* (Washington, 1916), 53; Richardson, *op. cit.*, IV, 536-47, 635; *DeBow's Review*, I, 64-66.

⁶ *DeBow's Review*, III, 147-48, 475-83, 495; *American Railroad Journal*, XIX, 761-62.

⁷ Richardson, *op. cit.*, V, 16-17.

⁸ The best statements of the above mentioned considerations are to be found in [Annual] *Report of the Secretary of War (Jefferson Davis)*, Dec. 3, 1855, and in his letter to Rep. J. M. Sandidge, Jan. 29, 1856, in Dunbar Rowland (ed.), *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist*, II, 588-90.

⁹ *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., App., 430.

¹⁰ *Idem*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., 882; *DeBow's Review*, XXI, 469-90, *passim*.

¹¹ Richardson, *op. cit.*, V, 447-48.

tion of the Pacific Coast, satisfactory means of communication with and transportation to the rest of the Union was a matter of urgent importance and almost of necessity. The establishment of such facilities there became the public policy of paramount interest and the highest object of statesmanship.

Weighty as were the political and military considerations which counselled the construction of a railroad or canal connecting with the Pacific, it must be said that the great interest in the subject shown by the people of the Mississippi Valley and farther east grew chiefly out of the expectation that, with the provision of proper transportation facilities, a great tide of trade and travel would set in, not only with the Pacific Coast and the settlements which would accompany the road but also between Europe and Asia by way of the United States. The people of every city or town of any pretensions whatever near our Mississippi Valley frontier or on the Gulf believed that, if they could make their city the terminus of a railroad, or of *the* railroad, to the Pacific, or of an isthmian route, so that it might exact tribute from the enormous trade to develop, it would become a great metropolis. Said a citizen of New Orleans: “. . . we shall have all the commerce and travel of the Northern Atlantic States, and all the commerce and travel of Europe that is destined for the Pacific Ocean, for India and China, passing through our city; portions of their products will be left for sale here, or exchanged for our own, or those of the great West, and the thousand products of our artistical and manufacturing skill. Is not every State in the West and South interested in securing such a mart as New Orleans will then be for their productions? It will then be the market of the world . . .”¹² Even people of cities on the Atlantic Coast entertained glowing expectations of the nourishing qualities of that stream of trade and travel even after it should have been divided and subdivided.¹³

By about 1850 the main outlines of the railroad system of the United States were rapidly taking form either in the shape of roads actually built or building or in well-defined projects for which charters had been or were about to be secured. Cities and states were contending in

¹² *American Railroad Journal*, XXV, 502.

¹³ For example, “The subject of connecting the cities of Savannah, Mobile, and New Orleans by a railroad, has already been much agitated in the South. This will, undoubtedly, be soon undertaken; and, together with the New Orleans and Opelousas road, now under contract, would form the eastern half of the great connection between the Atlantic and Pacific. If the El Paso route is the one adopted by the government, Savannah would become the great Atlantic Depot, and San Diego the Pacific.” *DeBow's Review*, XV, 641.

"mighty rivalry" with each other for these arteries of commerce which would assure their future greatness. Every railroad company with a project pointing westwardly anywhere near a possible starting point for a Pacific railroad or a possible direct continuation of one to the Atlantic, the Gulf, or the Lakes, was determined to make its road a link in, or at least a branch of, a great chain of railroads stretching to the Pacific. The possibility that a road might occupy such a favorable position was used to win the favor of investors and the public. It would seem that the locations of several roads projected in the Mississippi Valley during this period were determined very largely by the possibility of making them links in, or continuations of, a Pacific railway. Said the agent of the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western: "The hundreds of millions of gold produced by California; the rapid development of our possessions in Oregon; the great increase in the whale trade in the north Pacific; an increased trade with Mexico and South America; the absolute certainty of finally crushing the Chinese walls and overthrowing Japanese nonintercourse; and the opening of commercial relations with 700,000,000 people who inhabit Asia, and the millions of the islands of the Pacific; . . . will furnish to this road and its St. Louis branch a transportation and business unknown to the annals of railroad prosperity on this globe."¹⁴

The question of communication with the Pacific had its sectional aspects also. About this time the people of the South were becoming keenly aware of what they pleased to call "Southern decline." Their section was not keeping pace with the North in various lines of economic progress. There was much analyzing of causes and searching for remedies. Commercial conventions were held to consult over the matter.¹⁵ A railroad to the Pacific by a southern route was among the most prominent measures considered for the regeneration of the section. Said the New Orleans *Delta*, commenting on the deep interest shown in a Pacific railway by the Southern Commercial Convention meeting in Memphis, 1853: "This was the Aaron's rod that swallowed up all others. This was the great panacea, which is to release the South from its bondage to the North, which is to pour untold wealth into our lap; which is to build up cities, steamships, manufactories, educate our children, and draw into our control what Mr. Bell calls 'the untold wealth of the gorgeous East.'"¹⁶

¹⁴ *American Railroad Journal*, XXV, 517.

¹⁵ See R. R. Russel, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-1861*, (University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, Vol. XI, Nos. 1-2, Urbana, 1923), especially chap. v.

¹⁶ Quoted in Richmond *Enquirer*, June 24, 1853.

In the North there was not the same disposition to look upon a Pacific railroad as an instrument for sectional economic aggrandizement. There was a sectional aspect of the question, however, which the leaders of neither section overlooked. If, for example, the first railroad to the Pacific, and probably the only one for a generation, should follow a southern route, California and the intervening territory would be settled most largely by Southern people, would in all probability be slaveholding, would be economically allied to the South, and thus the South would gain an advantage in the sectional struggles of the time. If, however, the first railroad should follow a northern or central route, the North would, in a similar manner, gain the political advantage. If an isthmian route or a railroad route near the Mexican border were adopted, it might result in the annexation of territory, which would be allied to the South in interests. In 1849 a distinguished Southerner wrote: ". . . I can tell you that the accursed question of slavery is already mixing itself up with the road, and the free States, who are removed from it, will not go for it if it is to go through slave territory."¹⁷ The Southern Commercial Convention of January, 1855, resolved, "That the construction of a railroad to the Pacific Ocean, from proper points on the Mississippi river, within the slave-holding States of the Union, is not only important to those States, but indispensable to their welfare and prosperity, and even to their continued existence as equal and independent members of the confederacy."¹⁸

After about 1846 no one suggested improved wagon and stage roads to the Pacific as more than a temporary, makeshift solution of the problem; although many believed such roads would have to precede and blaze the trails for railroads. Telegraph lines would be valuable but would solve the problem only in part, and that a minor one. A canal across one of the isthmian routes was considered desirable by many, but its construction would be a long and costly undertaking. Railroads across the Isthmus, connecting with steamship lines in both oceans, could be provided quickly and at comparatively small cost. But isthmian projects in general would require the consent of foreign governments to their construction. In case of war with a stronger naval power, they might be closed to our commerce, mails, troops, and military supplies, and our Pacific coast rendered defenseless. Because of

¹⁷ *DeBow's Review*, VII, 37.

¹⁸ *Idem*, XVIII, 520. Cf. speech of J. A. McDougal of Cal., Aug. 24, 1852, in *Western Journal and Civilian*, IX, 97; and article by W. W. Burwell on "The True Policy of the South," in *DeBow's Review*, XXI, 469-90.

the greater distances to be traversed, they, especially railroads, were not expected to bring to our ports the great Asia trade. And, more, they could be of no direct commercial benefit to the vast interior of the country.¹⁹ Such projects, therefore, found their chief support in the Gulf ports like New Orleans and Mobile, whose interests would be best served by a canal or railroad across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and from the private companies which gained control of transportation across Panama and Nicaragua, namely, the Pacific Mail Company, the Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company, and their subsidiaries. The country at large regarded means of transit across the Isthmus with no great favor except as a temporary convenience until trans-continental railroads could be constructed.

For providing the latter, plans and projects multiplied amazingly in the years immediately following the War with Mexico. Almost all of them agreed in demanding aid of the federal government; for no private corporation in that day would, or could, undertake such a gigantic task unaided. But the plans differed widely as to the kind and extent of the aid they demanded. They differed more widely still as to route and terminus. By about 1850 it was apparent from reports of explorers, travelers, and military reconnaissances that each of about five routes through the Rockies might prove practicable, namely, the extreme northern route between the 47th and the 49th parallels of latitude, the 42nd degree routes by way of South Pass and Great Salt Lake, Benton's or the central route by a pass at the head of the Arkansas River between the 38th and 39th parallels, the 35th degree route by way of the Canadian Valley and Albuquerque, and the extreme southern or 32nd degree route via El Paso and the Gila Valley. Each one had its staunch advocates, before as well as after the government surveys were made. On the Pacific end two of these routes (the 42nd degree route and Benton's route) naturally terminated at San Francisco and the others could be made to do so; and after that city had had a year or two of its phenomenal growth, it was generally agreed that San Francisco must be one of the western termini if not the only Western terminus. Memphis, St. Louis, and some point on the Mississippi or Missouri in line with Chicago were most frequently advocated for the eastern terminus, but there were at least a dozen other towns and cities which had their champions, ranging from Galveston, on the Gulf, to Superior, Wisconsin, at the head of lake navigation.

¹⁹ *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 225; App., 74; 35 Cong., 2 Sess., 458-59; *American Railroad Journal*, XXII, 723; *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine*, XXII, 153-54; Rowland, *op. cit.*, III, 364-65, 397, 418.

It was difficult to unite the people and interests of any state near the frontier in support of any single route, terminus, or plan of financing the road. The people of states farther removed were less divided as to route and terminus. Sectional agreement in support of a single project was out of the question. A partial analysis of the alignment on the issue of terminus and route will be sufficient to substantiate these statements.

In Missouri in 1849, a railroad, rather suggestively called the Pacific, was chartered and soon begun, to run from St. Louis to the western border of the state at the mouth of the Kansas River. A southwest branch was shortly provided for to run via Springfield to the southwest corner of the state. Another railroad, the Hannibal and St. Joseph, was to cross the northern part of the state from east to west. A north and south road was to connect the Hannibal and St. Joseph with St. Louis. People of St. Louis generally demanded that the Pacific railway be built from the mouth of the Kansas by the central route, but if that could not be secured they were prepared to go for a continuation of the southwest branch of their Missouri Pacific by the 35th degree, or Albuquerque, route. But people along the line of the southwest branch, including Congressman Phelps of the Springfield District, would support no route except that of the 35th degree.²⁰ People living near or interested in the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad believed that St. Joseph should be the eastern terminus of the Pacific railway, as did, to a diminishing degree, people interested in any one of a prospective chain of roads continuing the Hannibal and St. Joseph eastward via Quincy and Springfield, Illinois. People financially interested in or living near any of the chain of roads leading from St. Louis to Cincinnati and thence to Baltimore or Pittsburgh were favorable to St. Louis for a terminus and a central route. A chain of railroads connecting Terre Haute, Indianapolis, Columbus, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia could connect about equally well with the Hannibal and St. Joseph or the Missouri Pacific, and, consequently, Pennsylvania, and central Ohio and Indiana were for either a St. Louis or a St. Joseph terminus with little choice between them.

Iowa by about 1853 had developed projects for three main east and west roads across the state, the Dubuque and Pacific, the Mississippi and Missouri, to run from Davenport to Council Bluffs, and the Burlington and Missouri River. Each road was urged as a link in the road to the Pacific, and each connected with various roads or chains

²⁰ *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., App., 424; 36 Cong., 1 Sess., 2331, 2408-11, 2439-40.

of roads to the east across Illinois or beyond. The people of Chicago and that city's eastern connections wanted the Pacific railroad to connect with one of Chicago's several western railroad radii, preferably the Chicago and Rock Island, which was continued by the Davenport and Council Bluffs and pointed toward South Pass and San Francisco.

The people of New York could, and did, profit by either the Panama or Nicaragua transportation route. Of transcontinental routes, they preferred a northern one connecting with the Great Lakes, but they did not oppose a central route from St. Louis or St. Joseph. Senator Seward more than once made the proud boast that, no matter what route might be chosen, its eastern terminus would be New York City.²¹ Michigan and New England could gain no special benefit from a road terminating south of Chicago, and, therefore, preferred the extreme northern route.

The settlers and speculators of Superior, Wisconsin, and vicinity were convinced that no Pacific railway which did not connect with that magnificent inland waterway system, the Great Lakes, at its westernmost point could be expected to attract any of the China trade. The population of far away Oregon Territory or, a little later, the State of Oregon and Washington Territory inclined strongly to the same view.

Arkansas citizens were divided three ways as to where they wanted the Pacific railroad to cross their state. They could not agree even in their choice between the 35th degree and the 32nd degree route.²² Tennessee people were united in support of a Memphis terminus and had little choice between the two southern routes. Because of the Virginia and Tennessee and the Memphis and Charleston railroad projects, most of the people of Virginia east of the Alleghenies, of South Carolina, and of northern Georgia and Alabama who wanted a Pacific railroad at all, supported the pretensions of Memphis. However, interested persons in Savannah, the central parts of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, and northern Louisiana inclined to favor a connection by way of Vicksburg, Shreveport, El Paso, and the valley of the Gila. The hopes of the city builders of New Orleans centered chiefly in a project for a railroad across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, but when that project encountered unexpected difficulties and the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Western Railroad made a promising start, they bent

²¹ *Idem*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 750; 35 Cong., 1 Sess., 1584.

²² Some of them wanted a route from Memphis via Little Rock to Fort Smith; others, one from Memphis via Little Rock to Fulton in the southwest corner of the state; still others wanted it to run from Cairo, Illinois, via Little Rock to Fulton. Fort Smith was on the 35th degree route; Fulton was on a proposed connection with the 32nd degree route.

their efforts toward making the latter the first link in a road to the Pacific.

Numerous railroad conventions were held for the purpose of crystalizing or creating public sentiment in favor of particular plans or locations. The most notable of these were the St. Louis and Memphis Pacific railroad conventions of October, 1849, and the Philadelphia convention of April, 1850.²³ At least three of the sessions of the Southern Commercial Convention devoted more time to the subject than to any other.²⁴ Several Pacific railroad companies were formed, and waited in a receptive mood for federal aid. Western governors frequently discussed the subject in their messages, and legislatures resolved and petitioned in regard to it. Both the Democratic and Republican parties declared in favor of a Pacific railroad in their platforms of 1856, the Republicans going so far as to say that it should be built by the "most central and practicable route." In 1860 the Republicans and both wings of the Democrats declared for the immediate construction of the railroad. But because federal aid was demanded by almost all of them, the struggle among the various rival interests and projects had to be fought out very largely in Congress, and, in spite of the fact that the nation as a whole after about 1849 approved the extension of considerable aid to one or more transcontinental railroads, it was impossible until 1862 and 1864 to get legislation that would insure the building of a road.

The difficulties were enormous. Pacific railway legislation had to contend for the time of Congress with the exciting sectional quarrels over slavery. The isthmian projects could command no governmental financial aid beyond liberal contracts for carrying the mails, yet they used their influence to defeat legislation which might bring rivals into the field. Democrats from the old South, especially, had constitutional scruples against federal aid to internal improvements and a disinclination to increase government expenditures which could not be overcome. Whigs and Democrats were inclined to divide along party lines over such questions as whether or not the federal government could charter a railroad company; if so, whether it could authorize it to operate in the states or only in the territories, and whether money appropriations in aid of a Pacific railroad must be confined to sections in the territories

²³ Proceedings in *American Railroad Journal*, XXII, 663-64, 690-93, 708-11, 721-23; XXIII, 228-31; *Western Journal and Civilian*, III, 71-75 (St. Louis).

²⁴ Memphis, 1853, Charleston, 1854, and New Orleans, 1855. See Russel, *op. cit.*, chap. v.

or might also be extended to sections within the states. Yet neither party was able to unite upon a Pacific railroad bill and force it through as a party measure.

The Pacific railway question also became involved with other issues over which much division had arisen. Advocates of land grants in aid of railways on the alternate sections principles insisted upon applying that principle to Pacific railway bills. Many congressmen who favored giving away the lands to actual settlers for homesteads objected to grants to railways. Many congressmen from landless states objected to large grants to Pacific railroads because they wanted the lands divided among the several states. Tariff men insisted that only American iron be used in the construction of railroads to the Pacific.

But the greatest obstacle in the way of Pacific railway legislation lay in the inability to agree upon a route or routes. If a bill were framed for a central route the advocates of northern and southern routes would unite with the small, compact minority altogether opposed to government aid and defeat it. If the bill provided for two roads, or for three roads, or for one main trunk with several branches to take care of the chief contenders for the terminus, the votes gained by such log-rolling process were always offset by votes lost on the ground that the project was too costly for the country to bear. On more than one occasion the old guard which opposed government aid in any form or amount united with the friends of some particular plan or route to amend a bill in such a way as to make it unsatisfactory to other friends of a Pacific railway, and then united with the latter to defeat the bill upon its final passage. Even bills to establish overland mail service by stage were bitterly fought over because it was believed that the choice of the stage routes might have an influence on the selection of the route of a Pacific railway.²⁵ Representatives from the Pacific Coast were about the only ones who would support almost any bill to further the

²⁵ *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., App., 25-28; 35 Cong., 2 Sess., 239, 261-63, 305; 36 Cong., 1 Sess., 1061, 1131-33, 1647-49, 2338-39, 2457-60. Prof. F. H. Hodder has shown that the organization of Kansas and Nebraska as territories, 1854, was in large part an incident in the struggle over the terminus and route of a Pacific railway. "The Genesis of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill," in *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, 1912. Prof. Hodder further developed this thesis in his presidential address before the meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Detroit, May 1, 1925, (printed in *Mississippi Valley Hist. Rev.*, XII, 3-22). Dr. James C. Malin has described how our Indian policy in the West in the period before the Civil War was greatly influenced by the sectional and local struggle over the route of a Pacific railway. *Indian Policy and Westward Expansion* (Bulletin of the University of Kansas, Humanistic Studies, Vol. II, No. 3, Lawrence, 1921), especially pp. 44-52.

establishment of means of communication with the Pacific, and even they did not always coöperate effectively among themselves.²⁶

The limits of this article will not permit even a summary account of the chapters or episodes in the struggle of the several contending interests over the terminus and route of a Pacific communication, with their varying hopes and fortunes. New factors constantly entering or being interjected into the struggle modified its charter somewhat, but none altered it essentially until the secession of eleven Southern states in 1860 and 1861 left the location of the route to the North alone.

An adequate account of the struggle would require a retelling of the story of American isthmian and Mexican diplomacy prior to the Civil War with particular reference to, and greater, but not undue, emphasis upon, the attempt to get transit rights and privileges and the right to protect the same, and somewhat less emphasis upon attempted extension of slave territory.²⁷ It would include also the story of the politico-economic activities and intrigues of the several American companies which secured or tried to secure the privilege of providing and operating transportation facilities across the Isthmus. The account would tell also how a bill giving aid in money and lands to a Pacific railroad and leaving the route to be selected by the President, Pierce being the president-elect, was about to pass the Senate in the second session of the Thirty-Second Congress, but was defeated at the last minute because Southern men found it was loaded against the choice of a southern route.²⁸ Another chapter would show how Southern men had the stage all set and the public mind largely prepared for government aid for a railroad by the route of the thirty-second degree early in Pierce's administration but were frustrated in the House of Representatives by the advocates of a central route.²⁹ Many Southerners then in desperation lent encouragement to a plan fathered by Albert Pike, of Arkansas, to have the road built by a combination of southern states, cities, and railroad companies without the aid of the federal govern-

²⁶ For example, Gwin and Broderick in the Senate. *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., 1298, 1537, 1641-42; 35 Cong., 2 Sess., 357-59.

²⁷ Williams, *op. cit.*, and J. M. Callahan, "The Mexican Policy of Southern Leaders under Buchanan's Administration" (in *American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1910*, pp. 135-51), are authoritative, but do not entirely cover the subject.

²⁸ The statement is based upon an unpublished study by the author of this article. Davis, *op. cit.*, 44-53 gives the same explanation, but does not try to determine whether or not the bill was loaded. I believe it was.

²⁹ Thomas H. Benton partially analyzed the southern plans in a speech in the House of Representatives, Jan. 16, 1855, *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., App., 73-82. See also *ibid.*, 335.

ment.³⁰ The account would further relate how the Buchanan administration did its utmost to further the projects of the Southerners, particularly by sending the great overland mail by the extreme southern route, from St. Louis and Memphis, and by lending energetic aid in behalf of the Tehuantepec speculators.³¹ But it would also show how Southern political and diplomatic finesse was more than offset by such great factors as capital and commerce, growth of population, and extension of settlements, working for the north or center. Most of the California mail was northern in origin or destination. The same was true of commerce. Settlements extended into Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota, and sprang up along the central route with the discovery of gold in the Pike's Peak region, and at Carson City, 1858, and the Mormon colony in Utah increased in numbers. Most of the population in California was in the northern part, and Oregon had sufficient population to be admitted to statehood in 1859. By 1860 the railroad system was more fully developed north of the Ohio than south of it, and connecting links for a Pacific railway were pushed farther to the west across Missouri and Iowa than across Arkansas and Louisiana. Finally, while the organization of the sectional Republican Party did not insure the building of a railroad to the Pacific by a northern or a central route, it rendered the building of one by a southern route well-nigh hopeless.

³⁰ *DeBow's Review*, XVI, 636-37; XVII, 205-13, 408-10, 492-506, 593-99; XVIII, 520-28, 632-35; XXI, 469-90; XXII, 81-105, *passim*.

³¹ See especially the report of Postmaster General Aaron V. Brown in *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess., App., 25-28; speech of Sen. Wilson of Mass., Jan. 11, 1859, in *idem*, 2 Sess., 304-15; letter of Robert Toombs to W. W. Burwell, Nov. 30, 1857, in "The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stevens, and Howell Cobb" (American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1911, Pt. II).

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