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MAKING THE 'WHITE MAN'S COUNTRY' WHITE: RACE, SLAVERY, AND STATE-BUILDING IN THE JACKSONIAN SOUTH

Lacy K. Ford, Jr.

Any examination of race as a formative influence on the American South must first acknowledge the interpretation advanced decades ago by the putative founder of southern history as a field of study: Ulrich Bonnell Phillips. A Georgia-born Progressive and author of the first scholarly account of slavery to gain widespread acceptance in the national academy, Phillips surveyed the otherwise wrenching journey from Old South to New and found continuity in the timeless commitment of white southerners to the common cause of white supremacy. Phillips insisted that the "central theme" of southern history was "a single resolve indomitably maintained" that the South "was and shall remain a white man's country."¹ Long before the recent interpretive bent of cultural history refocused scholarly attention upon culturally and historically constructed definitions of race as critical factors shaping American society, Phillips posited a shared allegiance to white supremacy as the central theme of southern history and established an interpretation that would remain both influential and controversial for the remainder of the twentieth century.²

During the 1990s, practitioners of the new cultural history, influenced by anthropological research and the techniques of literary postmodernism, have maintained that most American historiography fails to account

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¹ Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History," *American Historical Review*, 34 (Oct. 1928), 30-43.

² Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian To Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 37-57.

adequately for the social and cultural construction of race. Race, as postmodernists remind other scholars, emerges not as biologically determined from the genome, but as the product of distinct and identifiable social, cultural, and historical forces. Because it is culturally constructed rather than genetically determined, understandings of race and racism necessarily change over time, historically constructed and reconstructed by complex social negotiations within societies that also change.³ From this valuable new understanding of race as a social and cultural construction emerged the current genre popularly known as “whiteness” studies. Roaming widely across chronological and disciplinary boundaries, “whiteness” scholarship has effectively returned race to the center of American historiography without diminishing related considerations of class and gender.⁴

In reminding American historians that race is a mutable historical construct, that ideas about race and racism change over time, “whiteness” scholars have also tied the Jacksonian reconsideration of race and racial ideology to other major trends of the era that have garnered recent historiographical attention. Certainly the Jacksonian reconsideration of race occurred within the context of a market revolution that touched almost every facet of American life. Driven by dramatic improvements in transportation and communication, the market revolution quickened the pace and broadened the scope of commerce in the new nation, both extending the boundaries of the market economy and intensifying the

³ Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in J. Morgan Kousser and James McPherson, eds., *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York, 1982), 143-78.

⁴ Among other things, these studies have found that racial ideology has not only served as a mechanism for elites to manipulate atavistic masses but also as leverage for white workers and immigrants to wedge their way into the American mainstream on the basis of skin color. For an introduction to “whiteness” historiography, see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, UK, 1991); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 1990); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995); Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York, 1997); Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review*, 106 (June 1993), 1709-91; David Stowe, “Uncolored People: The Rise of Whiteness Studies,” *Lingua Franca*, 4 (Sept.-Oct. 1996), 68-77; and also the essay by David Roediger in this issue. For recent applications of the “whiteness” approach to the study of the South, see Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York, 1998); and Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910-1948* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

market orientation of many American households.⁵ Second, the Jacksonian reconsideration of racial ideas emerged in response to the rapid spread of humanitarianism as a social ideal. Spawned and nurtured by widespread acceptance of evangelical Christianity during the Second Great Awakening, and spurred to extend its reach by the opportunities accompanying the market revolution, humanitarianism forced a dramatic rethinking of racial ideologies in both North and South during the Jacksonian era.⁶ Finally, the potent egalitarian reform movement of the Jacksonian era, characterized by Robert Wiebe as an assault on gentry politics, not only drove most states toward more democratic political cultures and constitutions during the 1830s but also prompted a reevaluation of how racial differences defined American citizenship.⁷ In a stimulating recent essay, James Brewer Stewart termed the product of this Jacksonian reconsideration of race the "emergence of racial modernity."⁸ This new Jacksonian racial modernity denied the viability of a biracial republic, doubted the efficacy of efforts to promote respectability and social uplift among people of color, and

⁵ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991), esp. 137; Melvin Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville, 1996); Paul A. Gilje, *Wages of Independence: Capitalism in the Early Republic* (Madison, WI, 1997); James A. Henretta, "The 'Market' in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 18 (Summer 1998), 289-304.

⁶ Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility," *American Historical Review*, 90 (Apr.-June, 1985), 339-61, and 547-66; David Brion Davis, "Reflection on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony," *American Historical Review*, 92 (Oct. 1987), 797-812; John Ashworth, "The Relationship Between Capitalism and Humanitarianism," *American Historical Review*, 92 (Oct. 1987), 813-28; Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York, 1994).

⁷ Robert H. Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (Chicago, 1995); Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York, 1998), esp. 47-94; Robert J. Stenfield, "Property and Suffrage in the Early American Republic," *Stanford Law Review*, 41 (Jan. 1989), 335-76; Lacy K. Ford, Jr., "Popular Ideology of the Old South's Plain Folk: The Limits of Egalitarianism in a Slaveholding Society," in Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed., *Plain Folk of the South Revisited* (Baton Rouge, 1997), 205-27; see also Fletcher M. Green, "Democracy in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History*, 12 (Feb. 1946), 2-23.

⁸ James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 18 (Summer 1998), 181-217. See also the comments by Jean L. Soderlund, James Oliver Horton, and Ronald G. Walters along with Stewart's response in the same issue, 218-36. Though substantial quarrels over exactly how different racial modernity was from the systems of race relations and the racial ideologies that preceded it remain unresolved, it nevertheless appears that a new set of racial values emerged in the United States during the 1830s.

conceded only a measure of white responsibility for the well-being of an allegedly "inferior" race.⁹

The coming of racial modernity in the South, which by the 1830s held more than ninety percent of the nation's African Americans and virtually all its slaves, looms as an especially inviting area of inquiry. Moreover, as scholars have explored "whiteness" as a national phenomena rather than as the source of southern exceptionalism, they have implicitly challenged southern historians to review and perhaps recast their understanding of precisely how the Old South became a white man's country. In response to these twin challenges, this essay will attempt to explain the triumph of racial modernity in the South of the 1830s by focusing on the political process through which race or "whiteness" became codified, formally and informally, as the defining characteristic of antebellum southern society. Put differently, it will describe how shapers of the Old South's Jacksonian political tradition ventured to make what U. B. Phillips later called "the white man's country" white.

A peculiar combination of economic circumstance and political ideology shaped the Jacksonian South's reconsideration of race and slavery. Contrasting subregional political economies, together with patterns of racial demography associated with these different political economies, ensured that questions relating to slavery and race were framed in different ways in different parts of the South. Central among these many internal variations in the Old South's political economy lay the growing contrast between the Upper South and the Lower South. Between 1800 and 1830, much of the Lower South swirled into the vortex of an economic transformation that Ira Berlin has aptly labeled the "cotton revolution."¹⁰ The "cotton revolution" pulled slavery and plantation agriculture from its comparatively limited tidewater and alluvial strongholds and spread them across a vast plain of black and brown loam soils and through lush river valleys that became the Old South's rich Black Belt. It also promoted staple growing among the region's yeomen and helped spur the expansion of the cash economy in the red clay upland portions of the Old South. The process of cultivating cotton and complementary foodstuffs required steady attention for much of the growing season, making slave labor, with its high

⁹ *Ibid.*, esp. 213-17. See also George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, 1971), 1-164.

¹⁰ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), esp. 358-65. See also Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 31-57.

ratio of fixed to marginal costs, a highly profitable system. To a large extent, the cotton revolution transformed the Lower South into a true slaveholding region rather than a region characterized by important slaveholding enclaves known for their production of rice, sugar, and sea-island cotton. By doing so, it accelerated the movement of population, both slave and free, from long-settled regions to the frontier of the Old Southwest.¹¹

In the Upper South, however, during the same three decades, the once dominant staple, tobacco, whose success had sustained first Chesapeake and later Piedmont demand for slave labor, fell into comparative decline. Alternative cash crops, including grains such as wheat and oats, emerged, but they required substantially less labor than tobacco, except during harvest. With sharp peaks and valleys in the demand for labor, grain cultivation rendered slavery, with its high fixed costs for labor, inefficient and financially unattractive. Thus, although some areas within the Upper South remained heavily dependent on slave labor, the future prospects for the region's slave-labor economy appeared problematic.¹²

¹¹ Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York, 1988), 5-95; Bradley G. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South: Mississippi, 1830-1900* (Baton Rouge, 1995), 43-80; Daniel S. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840* (Baton Rouge, 1997); John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1776-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1988); Ralph V. Anderson and Robert E. Gallman, "Slaves as Fixed Capital: Slave Labor and Southern Economic Development," *Journal of American History*, 64 (June 1978), 47-66; Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century South* (New York, 1978), 43-88. For purposes of this essay, I am defining the Lower South as those states heavily committed to the cotton economy. See the map in Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 16. Thus, in this essay, the terms Lower South and cotton South are essentially interchangeable.

¹² Joseph C. Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom: Plantation, Market, and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Durham, NC, 1938); Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill, 1986); John T. Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm: Social and Economic Change in Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1716-1860" (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1980); Paul G. E. Clemens, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain* (Ithaca, 1980). For purposes of this essay, I am defining the Upper South as all slaveholding states that were not heavily committed to the cotton economy. Thus the Upper South is essentially the noncotton South. Substantial cotton was grown in scattered locales across the Upper South, in Southside Virginia, in the southern Piedmont, and a few northeastern counties in North Carolina, and in parts of middle Tennessee; but neither Virginia, North Carolina, nor Tennessee could be accurately described as a cotton state during the Jacksonian era. As William Freehling has pointed out, given these differing subregional political economies, the so-called mind of the Old South

By the early 1830s, an ominous antislavery challenge to the slaveholding social order of both the Upper and Lower South appeared from several different quarters. In 1827 the American Colonization Society first requested public funds from Congress; two years later, militant free black David Walker published an appeal for slaves to rebel against their masters; and in 1831, William Lloyd Garrison ushered in a new era of abolition propaganda with *The Liberator*, a publication dedicated to “immediate” emancipation and effusive in its moral chastisement of slaveholders.¹³ But no event focused southern attention on slavery and related issues as intensely as did the bloody if ultimately unsuccessful slave uprising led by Nat Turner in August 1831. Turner’s rampage across a small swath of Virginia’s lower Tidewater spread fear, rumor, and recrimination across the Old Dominion and sent waves of anxiety through the white population in other areas of the South.¹⁴

Virginia’s Robert Pollard bluntly revealed the fears of Virginia’s slaveholders in the wake of Turner’s rebellion when he observed, “[E]very family that have slaves are in the power of those slaves, they sleep in our houses—they in this way have the power of cutting our throats or knocking our brains out while we sleep.” News of the Southampton bloodbath also spawned fears in the deepest South. In the Natchez region, banker and planter Stephen Duncan confessed “a great apprehension that we will one day have our throats cut in this county.”¹⁵ The timing and particular conjunction of these events prompted not simply a short-term return of vigilance against slave rebellion, but also serious reconsideration of public policy toward slavery and the region’s free black population precisely at the moment when mounting pressure from white egalitarians spurred most

was an often divided one, and one always shaped in part by the creative tensions among its various subregions; see Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York, 1990), esp. 13-38.

¹³ Robert H. Abzug, “The Influence of Garrisonian Abolitionists: Fears of Slave Violence on the Antislavery Argument, 1829-1840,” *Journal of Negro History*, 55 (Jan. 1970), 15-28; James Brewer Stewart, “Peaceful Hopes and Violent Enterprises: The Evolution of Reforming and Radical Abolitionism, 1831-1837,” *Civil War History*, 17 (Dec. 1971), 293-309; P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York, 1961); William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York, 1966), 49-65.

¹⁴ Henry J. Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst, MA, 1971).

¹⁵ Robert Pollard to William C. Rives, Jan. 30, 1832, William C. Rives Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, DC); Stephen Duncan to Thomas Butler, Sept. 4, 1831, Butler Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection (Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA).

southern states to consider sweeping democratic revision of their existing state constitutions, thus giving southern constitution makers a chance to write a new racial order into fundamental law at their early convenience.

The Jacksonian South's political discussion of race and slavery revealed a variety of racial attitudes and ideologies ranging from exclusion and marginalization at one end of the spectrum to complete subordination of African Americans at the other end, with a bewildering array of selectively cobbled together variations on either the exclusion or the subordination themes, or both, lying in between. Full-voiced advocates of exclusion sought either to remove African Americans from southern society altogether, or, more realistically, minimize the role of blacks, slave and free, in the civic, social, and economic life of the South, much as had been done in northern society following the postrevolutionary emancipations. To implement their strategy, southern exclusionists advocated pushing free blacks further toward the margins of society and taking some cautious first steps toward putting slavery on the road to ultimate extinction. Thus they favored colonization because it reduced the free black population in the near term and established a working mechanism to facilitate gradual emancipation on a larger scale in the future. In essence, exclusionists wanted to "whiten" their society by reducing the size and diminishing the importance of the region's African-American population.

In contrast, champions of subordination recognized that the southern staple economy depended so heavily on slave labor that the region could not thrive without it. Subordinationists accepted racially justified slavery as a necessary labor system, and some argued affirmatively that the region's reliance on slaves for menial labor strengthened the virtues of independence and equality among whites. Viewing slavery as at least essential, arguably beneficial, and, in all likelihood perpetual, subordinationists sought to render white dominance of blacks as complete and thorough as possible.¹⁶

¹⁶ My choice of terms requires some clarification. I have used the term "exclusion" to refer to the idea that African Americans, whether slave or free, should be either removed from American society or, failing that, pushed to its social, political, and economic margins. Thus it was an ideology of exclusion and/or marginalization. I have used the term "subordination" to refer to the idea that slaves were simply too numerous and their labor too valuable to the South to consider exclusion a viable option. Thus long-term southern dependence on slave labor must be accepted and measures taken to guarantee white domination and black subordination in a biracial, slaveholding society in which slavery was justified largely on racial grounds. Clearly exclusionists saw marginalization as a way of subordinating blacks who remained in their society, and just as clearly subordinationists wanted to exclude both slaves and free blacks from the realm of political and social equality.

But if the ideological poles of the southern Jacksonian debate over race and slavery seemed well-defined, the actual terms and issues of the discussions varied widely across the region. In the Upper South, the debate occasionally focused on the future of slavery itself, and almost without exception, addressed the problematic role free blacks played in a slaveholding society. As a whole, the Upper South remained committed to a conception of slavery as a necessary (but possibly temporary) evil—an evil that could be at odds with the ideals of white independence and equality over the long term. Thus the arguments over race in the Upper South often centered on how the region might “whiten” itself, either through gradual emancipation and colonization of slaves, the colonization of free blacks, a gradual shift to free white labor facilitated by the sale of slaves to the cotton growing areas of the Deep South, or some combination of these approaches.¹⁷ By contrast, in a heuristic “Middle South” of Tennessee and North Carolina, even though few saw slavery as a positive good, sentiment favoring emancipation on any terms nevertheless declined. In these states, the discussion of race centered on whether or not free people of color should have a political voice. In the Middle South, Whiggish paternalists defended the idea of promoting uplift and respectability among free blacks, while subordinationists championed disfranchisement.

In the Lower South, the case for slavery as a positive good remained in its infancy at the beginning of the Jacksonian era, and some of the peculiar institution’s defenders still called it a necessary evil. But the “evils” of slavery were less and less often proclaimed openly, and public policy treated slavery as if it were a permanent institution, or one likely to thrive for as long as white southerners could imagine. Indeed, most Lower South political leaders considered slavery essential to the region’s staple economy, which, despite fits and starts in the international market and vulnerability to unpredictable credit crunches, remained the bellwether of the region’s prosperity. In the cotton South, the Jacksonian debate over race centered more on the prevention of insurrections, tighter regulation or removal of free blacks, and the desirability of regulating or even eliminat-

Although the terminology is my own, my thinking on these points has been influenced heavily by Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, esp. 178-210.

¹⁷ The most thorough account of the Virginia slavery debate is Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-32* (Baton Rouge, 1982), esp. 122-95; for a more recent perspective, see Trenton E. Hizer, “‘Virginia is Now Divided’: Politics In the Old Dominion, 1820-1833” (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1997), 269-379. Generally speaking, egalitarian constitutional reformers advocated exclusion, while conservatives tended to favor subordination.

ing the interstate slave trade. Together, these three subregional debates constituted the larger Jacksonian South's attempt to define "racial modernity" and render it tangible in their political arrangements.

Upper South sentiment in favor of gradual emancipation, though always conditional, retained significant strength throughout the Jacksonian era. In the pensive months following Nat Turner's rebellion in the late summer of 1831, Virginia actively reconsidered its policy toward slavery and the free black population within its borders. Long time advocates of both gradual emancipation and colonization found full voice. Virginian John Marshall, the venerable Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, believed that the "removal of our free colored population" had emerged as a "common object" in postinsurrection Virginia and expressed a fervent hope that the legislature would seize upon "the excitement produced by the late insurrection" to pass sweeping legislation facilitating colonization. John Rutherford, a Richmond conservative, also denounced slavery as "the greatest curse that ever blighted the prospects of any people," and warned the legislature that the "evil" of "our colored population . . . increasing as it does so rapidly and so awfully, requires some prompt and energetic remedy." Thomas Ritchie urged Virginia lawmakers to do more than merely turn "their attention to preventing Insurrections" by considering a "more radical remedy," such as "an energetic system of manumission followed by a removal to Africa."¹⁸

Arguing an exclusionist position, Virginia's critics of slavery generally cited the harm the institution inflicted on white society, whether in retarding individual opportunity for ordinary whites, dragging the whole society down in comparison with the dynamic free labor society further north, or simply exposing whites to the horrors of insurrection and perhaps racial warfare. Virginia exclusionists believed that slavery bred personal arrogance and economic backwardness, and hindered the advancement of whites. During a heated debate over the issue in the Virginia House of Delegates 1831-32 session, Shenandoah Valley representative Samuel McDowell Moore blamed slavery for demoralizing the state's poorer whites, who, he insisted, viewed labor "as a mask of servitude."¹⁹ Another Valley delegate, Charles J. Faulkner, echoed Moore's sentiments,

¹⁸ Copy of letter from John Marshall to Reverend B.B. Gurley, Dec. 14, 1831, Faulkner Family Papers (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond); John Rutherford to William C. Rives, Nov. 6, 1831, Rives Papers; John Rutherford to William C. Rives, c. July 1832, John Rutherford Papers (William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham); Thomas Ritchie to William C. Rives, Oct. 12, 1831, Rives Papers.

¹⁹ Richmond (VA) *Enquirer*, Jan. 19, 1832.

explaining that the “independent yeomanry” west of the Blue Ridge feared losing its vitality to the “slothful and degraded African.” Slaveholder and colonization advocate Thomas Marshall carried the curse of blackness argument even further, contending that both slavery and a large free black population “banishes the yeomanry of the country . . . until the whole country will be inundated by one black wave, covering its whole extent, with a few white faces here and there floating on the surface.”²⁰

As a rule, proslavery Virginians admitted the evils of the institution but argued that, for all its faults, slavery remained essential for maintaining racial control and ensuring the availability of an adequate agricultural labor supply. Only a small band of the Old Dominion’s staunch subordinationists claimed that slavery enhanced white zeal for independence by daily presenting visible examples of the misery of abject dependency among black slaves. Summarizing the position of these diehard subordinationists, William Roane, son of distinguished Jeffersonian jurist Spencer Roane, claimed “that the torch of liberty has ever burnt brightest when surrounded by the dark and filthy, yet nutritious atmosphere of slavery.” Like many proslavery conservatives, Roane rejected the “natural equality of man,” and based his defense of slavery on the explicitly racist proposition that “that the flat-nosed, wooly-headed black native of the deserts of Africa” was not the equal of “the straight haired white man of Europe.”²¹

Not all Virginia opponents of emancipation shared Roane’s assumptions about slavery’s compatibility with white independence. Petersburg lawyer John Thompson Brown, a western Virginian by birth, understood his native region’s desire for a “cordon sanitaire” protecting it from “the withering footsteps of slavery.” Opposed to all legislative plans for emancipation, however, Brown preferred to keep the area west of the Blue Ridge free from slaves through the “fixed and unalterable laws of nature” rather than “legislative art.” Thus Brown recommended reducing the influence of slavery in the Old Dominion by encouraging the “drain of slaves” from Virginia to the Lower South through the interstate slave trade, and he predicted that the cotton states would facilitate this process eventually by repealing all laws restricting the internal slave trade.²² Some

²⁰ *The Speech of Charles J. Faulkner (of Berkeley) in the House of Delegates of Virginia on the Policy of the State with Respect to her Slave Population, January 20, 1832* (Richmond, 1832); *The Speech of Thomas Marshall (of Fauquier) in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Policy of the State in Relation to Her Colored Population: Delivered Saturday, January 14, 1832* (Richmond, 1832).

²¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, Feb. 4, 1832.

²² *The Speech of John Thompson Brown, in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Abolition of Slavery. Delivered Wednesday, January 18, 1832* (Richmond, 1832).

exclusionists who advocated colonization and gradual emancipation agreed with Brown about the probability of slavery's eventual decline in Virginia under the pressure of market forces but yearned to accelerate the process through government action.²³ Amid rumblings from Southside slaveholders about separation from the antislavery western portion of the state, the 1832 Virginia legislature rejected immediate emancipation as "inexpedient" by a vote of 73 to 58, but they endorsed the idea of emancipation at some undetermined future time by a vote of 67 to 60.²⁴

After the legislative debate concluded, Thomas R. Dew, a young professor at William and Mary College, denounced "every plan of emancipation and deportation" that the legislature had considered as "utterly impracticable." Yet Dew predicted that slavery was headed toward "ultimate extinction" through the decline of tobacco as a staple and the steady flow of slaves to the newer cotton states of the Southwest. As slavery waned, Dew envisioned a new type of economic development for Virginia, driven by transportation improvements and the growth of towns, attracting "capitalists and free labourers of the north," and producing the consequent rise of manufacturing. Dew also believed that, despite their post-Southampton hesitancy, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana would open their borders to additional slave labor and serve as an "absorbent" for Virginia's "excess" slave population.²⁵ Focusing on race as the basis of slavery in Virginia, Dew insisted that emancipation without removal was unthinkable since white society could neither absorb nor uplift a free colored population. "[T]he emancipated black carries a mark which no time can erase," Dew maintained; "he forever wears the indelible symbol of his inferior condition: the Ethiopian can not change his skin, nor the Leopard his spots."²⁶ The young Virginia ideologist nimbly advanced a market-driven exclusionist argument for noninterference with slavery,

²³ Richmond *Constitutional Whig*, Mar. 28, 1832.

²⁴ Alison Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution*, 159-69.

²⁵ This gradual, market-driven revolution of the Virginia economy would accomplish the work of reform without legislative action by "increasing the prosperity of Virginia, and diminishing the evils of slavery without those impoverishing effects which all other schemes must necessarily have." Thomas Dew, "Abolition of Negro Slavery," *American Quarterly Review*, 12 (1832), 189-265. A few months later, the essay was reprinted in pamphlet form as *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832* (Richmond, 1832). A modern print of the original essay can be found in Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1981), 21-78.

²⁶ Dew, "Abolition of Negro Slavery."

emphasizing racial differences as permanent and insurmountable obstacles to the successful uplift of blacks, whether slave or free.

Countering Dew, American Colonization Society supporter Jesse Burton Harrison, a native Virginian who moved to New Orleans to further his legal career, warned against the continued presence of “a distinct race of people within our bosom . . . soon to be more numerous than ourselves, exposed to every temptation . . . to become our deadliest foe.” Also an exclusionist, Harrison admitted that his concerns about slavery were “founded but little on the miseries of the blacks” but instead “almost exclusively to the injuries slavery inflicts on the whites.” Slavery degraded labor, Harrison contended, and created among whites “a disposition to look on all manual labor as menial and degrading.” Slavery slowed the growth of manufacturing by retarding the “rearing of a large class of skillful mechanics.” Slavery also discouraged immigration. With its slave-based staple economy stagnant, Virginia lagged behind much of the nation in wealth and population growth, and, Harrison insisted, as Virginia grew “blacker” such economic backwardness would only worsen. If slavery was gradually eliminated, Harrison contended, Virginia would hold “a thousand temptations” for “different sorts of immigrants, for capitalists, for free labourers, and for her own sons who meditate emigration.” Thus he advocated colonization as a means both to stabilize the population ratio of the races in Virginia and to revive the state’s languishing economy, an exclusionist prescription for steady movement toward “whiteness” and prosperity.²⁷

Two years after the Virginia debate, memorials offered by antislavery societies sparked a brief consideration of emancipation at Tennessee’s constitutional convention.²⁸ Rather than permit a lively public debate over the antislavery memorials, the convention appointed a special committee, chaired by East Tennessee delegate John McKinney, to respond. McKinney committee’s report rested its carefully qualified defense of slavery on racial grounds. Where the slave and master were of the “same race and wore the same complexion,” the committee observed, slavery had

²⁷ Jesse Burton Harrison, “Abolition Question,” *American Quarterly Review* (Dec. 1832), 1-48. For biographical information on Harrison, see Michael O’Brien, *All Clever Men, Who Make Their Way: Critical Discourse in the Old South* (Fayetteville, AR, 1982), 55-57. Harrison, “Abolition Question,” 46-48. Harrison confined his critique of slavery to its impact on the economy of Virginia. He conceded that the staple growing areas of the Lower South might prosper with slave labor and stopped well short of calling for general emancipation across the region.

²⁸ Chase C. Mooney, *Slavery in Tennessee* (Bloomington, IN, 1957), 64-85; *Journal of the Convention of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1834), esp. 70-71.

"long ago been extinguished." But, in the American South, "the African slave stands in a different attitude—he bears upon his forehead a mark of separation which distinguishes him from the white man—as much after he is a free man as while he was a slave." Agreeing with the committee report, Terry Cahal, a nonslaveholder, professed regret "that domestic slavery ever found a home in our country," but he dismissed emancipation without colonization as absurd. Can the emancipator, Cahal asked, "change the African's skin, and elevate his feelings and his mental capacity to the dignity and honor of the white man's?"²⁹ On the key test vote, the Tennessee convention supported the McKinney committee report 42-12, and ultimately the new constitution barred the legislature from emancipating any slaves without the consent of their owners.³⁰

In sum, the Jacksonian debate over slavery and race in the Upper South raged between, on the one hand, committed exclusionists who lacked the political muscle they needed to succeed, and on the other, apologetic but uncompromising subordinationists. Given the Upper South's large slave population, exclusion loomed a daunting task, and even its advocates recognized that it could be accomplished only gradually and with respect for the rights (including financial compensation) of slaveholders. But the putative defenders of slavery in the Upper South, tentative subordinationists if subordinationists at all, accepted many of the basic propositions advanced by the exclusionists. These opponents of legislative emancipation favored letting time and the market economy do the work of exclusion rather than using collective or state efforts to accelerate the process. The Upper South's defenders of slavery, however qualified their arguments, held the advantage of defending the existing social order. Proslavery ideology proved unconvincing to many in the Upper South, but slavery as

²⁹ Nashville *Republican and State Gazette*, July 10, 1834; however, McKinney's committee also rejected the idea of a Virginia-style whitening of Tennessee through massive sales of slaves to the Lower South. Such action could hardly alleviate, and might actually increase, the plight and misery of slaves. "Let the slaves in the Unites States, by the operation of any cause whatever, be congregated together within the bounds of three or four states, so that they can ascertain by their own numbers and strength, concert plans among themselves, and co-operate with each other," the McKinney committee reasoned, "then what is to prevent a servile war?" As long as slavery existed in the United States, the committee believed, "the benefit of both the slave and the free man" hinged on the principle that "slaves should be distributed over as large a territory as possible, as thereby the slave receives better treatment and the free man is rendered more secure." Thus the Tennessee convention endorsed "diffusion" rather "exclusion" as the best policy for protecting whites from the dangers concomitant with slavery.

³⁰ Chase C. Mooney, "The Question of Slavery and the Free Negro in Tennessee," *Journal of Southern History*, 12 (Nov. 1956), 487-509.

a working institution remained firmly entrenched. In these Upper South debates, critics of slavery never found enough public support or legislative votes for emancipation, however gradual, and, advocates of colonization generally failed to find sufficient resources to accomplish anything more than a mere shadow of their ambition. Though heated at times, the Jacksonian era debate over slavery and the status of free blacks yielded little more than a reluctant acceptance of the status quo in the Upper South.

By contrast, few in the Lower South doubted that slavery was anything but the single best passport to wealth and prosperity. Virtually no public figure in the Lower South seriously advocated or favored emancipation of any kind, including gradual and fully compensated emancipation. Even though many slaveholders and Jacksonian politicians in the Lower South still acknowledged that slavery was an evil, proposals for colonization of free blacks and small numbers of slaves voluntarily manumitted by their masters were crafted chiefly to strengthen the institution and better maintain public safety rather than as a modest first step toward a more sweeping emancipation. Ironically, exclusion as an ideology of racial control enjoyed currency in the Lower South during the Jacksonian era but as an approach to the "problem" of the region's substantial Native-American population. As Jim Ronda's essay demonstrates, a large majority of whites in the Lower South showed a singular determination to guarantee that their "white man's country" was not red, even when tribes like the Cherokees appeared to be strong supporters of slavery.³¹

In the Lower South, subordination prevailed as the preferred ideology of control for whites over blacks, but in pursuing their desired aims, subordinationists often disagreed sharply among themselves over strategy. Some Lower South subordinationists worried about the problems inherent in the presence of free blacks in a slaveholding society. Some favored removing as many free blacks (through colonization or expulsion) as possible, some preferred tight restriction on the activities of free blacks, especially concerning their interaction with slaves, while still others favored cultivation of a caste or cohort of socially respectable free blacks who might serve as a buffer between whites and black slaves. Subordinationists also fretted over both the absolute size and the proportion of the black population in the region even as faith in slavery as an economic benefit remained strong. Some subordinationists yearned to restrict the number of slaves allowed to enter their region as part of an effort to manage the region's racial demography; others thought slave labor so

³¹ See James P. Ronda, "'We Have a Country': Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory," in this issue.

essential to the flourishing of the staple economy and upward social mobility among white southerners that no state should be legislatively or constitutionally deprived of the slaves it needed to prosper. Hence subordinationists often clashed among themselves over the regulation of the interstate slave trade. Thus, in the cotton South, where slavery seemed crucial to the continued economic prosperity of the region, the Jackson debate over slavery and race-related issues centered not on whether the region's peculiar institution should survive but over how best to manage its future.

Along the cotton frontier of the Old Southwest, dramatic increases in the slave population and concomitant fears of slave insurrection often prodded state legislatures into fits of action. In Jacksonian Louisiana, legislators viewed the rapid growth of their slave population with alarm. In 1826, the state approved a two-year moratorium on the interstate slave trade (excluding the importation of slaves by residents and immigrants) in an effort to control the growth of its slave population and slow the outflow of private capital. In 1829 Louisiana tried to insure itself against becoming a dumping ground for the troublesome slaves from older staple-growing states by establishing a "character" test for imported slaves. But the ongoing demand for slave labor on the cotton frontier rendered such restrictions unpopular and difficult to enforce.³² As one Louisianan observed, the "situation of the Country" being "one in which we have to depend altogether on the labour of the Slaves for a support" led many to believe it "impracticable" to ban their introduction into the state.³³

In the fall of 1831, news of the Turner insurrection and a bad crop year momentarily shifted planter opinion. A special session of the Louisiana legislature, eager to protect the state's white population against insurrection, again banned the activity of professional slave traders, allowing only citizens and immigrants who intended to settle permanently in Louisiana to bring slaves into the state and requiring even these to appear before parish judges to explain their intentions in detail.³⁴ Planter J. S. Johnston applauded the new restrictions not only because they provided safeguards against slave incendiaries, but also because they encouraged the retention

³² The restriction on slave importation was repealed in 1828, a full year before its specified expiration. H. E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Antebellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, NJ, 1972), 285-315; Joe Gray Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1963), 21-58; Garry B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge, 1977), 192-217; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 108-32.

³³ Thomas A. Scott to William S. Hamilton, Feb. 8, 1830, William S. Hamilton Papers (Louisiana State University); Alexander Barrow to William S. Hamilton, Jan. 25, 1830, *ibid.*

³⁴ Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*, 41-47.

of capital. Prior to the passage of such restrictions, Johnson complained, Louisiana was “every year drained of our Capital for the purchase of mere Negroes.” Restrictions on the activity of slave traders, Johnston believed, ensured that slaves would “now be brought by actual settlers and our money returned to the country.”³⁵

In neighboring Mississippi, the perception that slavery, however profitable, remained a necessary evil rather than a positive good prevailed in the cotton-rich Natchez region. In 1831, Natchez attorney Sargent S. Prentiss summed up this view when he observed, “that slavery is a great evil, there can be no doubt—and it is an unfortunate circumstance that it was ever introduced into this, or any other country. At present, however, it is a necessary evil, and I do not think admits of a remedy.”³⁶ Earlier in 1828, popular Governor Gerard Brandon complained that Mississippi had become a “receptacle for the surplus black population of the Middle States” and received a “vast number” every year which “excited uneasiness in the minds of many of our fellow-citizens.” To remedy the problem, Brandon advocated closing the interstate slave trade.³⁷

³⁵ J. S. Johnston to Thomas Butler, Mar. 12, 1832, Butler Family Papers.

³⁶ George Lewis Prentiss, *A Memoir of S.S. Prentiss* (2 vols, New York, 1856), I, 107. That same year, spurred by news of Nat Turner’s failed rebellion, the citizens of Natchez and Adams counties, where over one-third of all Mississippi’s free people of color lived, petitioned the legislature for “the absolute and unconditional removal of free Negroes from the state.” The legislature proved unwilling to enact such a draconian measure, but it agreed that the state needed better mechanisms for controlling its free black population and limiting its growth. Thus the legislature approved sweeping new legislation which required all free people of color to leave the state within ninety days on pain of being sold into slavery for five years. But Mississippi’s lawmakers included a carefully conceived loophole in their otherwise bold measure. Free persons of color who could prove themselves of good character and not “a Class of undesirables” could receive a license to remain in the state indefinitely. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Mississippi* (1831), 7; Charles Sydnor, “The Free Negro in Mississippi,” *American Historical Review*, 32 (July 1927), 769-88.

³⁷ Brandon quoted in Charles Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (1933; rep., Gloucester, MA, 1965), 161-62. Mississippi’s original state constitution, adopted in 1817, guaranteed immigrants the right to bring slaves into Mississippi but gave the state legislature “full power to prevent slaves from being brought into this State as merchandise.” During its first fifteen years of statehood, however, Mississippi chose to regulate and tax the interstate trade rather than prohibit it. In 1822, the legislature approved a “character test” for imported slaves, requiring either the slave traders or prospective buyers to procure character references for the slaves in question from two freeholders in the slaves’ previous state of residence. Designed to slow the work of slave traders, this regulation did not apply to either Mississippi residents or immigrants who intended to settle permanently in the state. In 1825, the legislature imposed a tax of 2.5 percent on all slaves purchases at auction. The following year, however, the legislature promptly lowered the tax to one percent in response to a

In 1832, with slaves flooding into Mississippi and concerns about slave insurrections and an intensified abolitionist campaign running high, a state constitutional convention considered the regulation or prohibition of the slave trade. A coalition of Natchez area planters and piney woods' whites approved a clause prohibiting the introduction of slaves "as Merchandise" after March 1, 1833.³⁸ The new provision guaranteed Mississippi citizens and immigrants the right to import slaves for their own use until at least 1845. Grounded in the assumption that slaves who accompanied their owners and slaves purchased by Mississippi masters were of better character and less likely to incite rebellion, the constitutional ban on the activity of interstate slave traders emerged from a desire to prevent impecunious or alarmed planters in other states from "dumping" troublesome slaves on Mississippi. Yet by diminishing the supply of slaves, the constitutional provision also rendered the capital of Natchez area planters more valuable and gave these planters a protected market in which to sell their own surplus slaves.³⁹

Popular opposition to the constitutional ban on the interstate slave trade surfaced immediately as demand for slave labor in the newly opened Choctaw and Chickasaw lands of northern and central Mississippi intensified. Instead of supporting the constitutional prohibition on the slave trade with statutory penalties at its 1833 session, the Mississippi legislature proposed an amendment repealing the new constitution's prohibition on the interstate slave trade and submitted the amendment for popular approval at the fall elections. Though formerly an opponent of the trade, the conservative *Natchez Courier* endorsed the amendment because the ban on activity of professional slave traders ensured that "the rich may still import" while "the poorer class," who cannot afford to travel, "must either submit to the extortions of the wealthy or rest content with what they

vigorous public outcry, and, as new lands in central and northern Mississippi opened for settlement, the demand for slaves grew. See Winbourne Magruder Drake, "The Framing of Mississippi's First Constitution," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 29 (Apr. 1956), 79-110; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, 162-65; Edwin A. Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill, 1960), 41-42; Oscar B. Chamberlain, "The Evolution of State Constitutions in the Antebellum United States: Michigan, Kentucky, and Mississippi" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1996), 89-123.

³⁸ Natchez (MS) *Courier*, Nov. 9, 1832.

³⁹ Largely isolated from staple agriculture, piney woods yeomen supported the ban to forestall the "blackening" of the state and preserve the value of their own labor. Winbourne Magruder Drake, "The Mississippi Constitution of 1832," *Journal of Southern History*, 23 (Aug. 1957), 354-70.

have.”⁴⁰ When ballots were cast in November 1833, the amendment reopening the slave trade won a strong plurality of those voting on the question (4,531 in favor and 1,093 against), but it failed to receive the required majority of all votes cast in legislative elections. The unexpected failure of the amendment left Mississippi policy towards the interstate slave trade confused and uncertain. The next legislature failed to muster the votes needed to resubmit to the voters an amendment repealing the ban, renewing instead a 2.5 percent levy on the gross sale price of slaves, despite the constitutional prohibition on the trade. Thus while the supreme law of Mississippi prohibited the importation of slaves as merchandise after March 1, 1833, the legislature imposed no sanctions on violators and taxed the illicit trade.⁴¹ Between 1833 and 1837, with no statutory penalties in place, slaves poured into Mississippi in record numbers. Finally, at the legislative session of 1837, a full four years after the constitutional prohibition was slated to take effect, the Mississippi legislature passed a bill imposing a system of fines and penalties for those who sold or purchased slaves imported solely for the purpose of sale or hire.⁴²

This prolonged controversy over the slave trade revealed the fundamental contradictions and concerns of the cotton South during the Jacksonian era. Even as many Lower South whites yearned for enough slaves to bring cotton riches to themselves and their fellow citizens, they also fretted over the drain of capital to the Upper South and, more importantly, over the potential dangers of a large black population. As a result, they pondered ways to modulate their region’s ever-volatile racial demographics. Within the emerging subordinationist consensus in the Lower South remained very substantial room for maneuver and internal disagreement; only external challenge inspired unified denunciation.

If the debate in the Upper South indicated that the momentum given the exclusion argument by the circumstances of the early 1830s could not overcome the power of entrenched proslavery interests, the experience of

⁴⁰ Natchez *Courier*, Aug. 23, 1833. The *Courier* also doubted that the legislature could draft an “effective” law that would be “respected” by citizens. A similar ban on the interstate slave trade in neighboring Louisiana, it noted, was “either evaded or openly violated.”

⁴¹ Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, 164-71; Natchez *Courier*, Nov. 15, 1833.

⁴² One contemporary estimate placed the growth of the slave population between 1830 and 1837 at 74,000, a substantial portion of which entered Mississippi through the activity of slave traders, and the same observer claimed that the debts incurred by Mississippi slaveholders to slave traders between 1832 and 1837 totaled over three million dollars. *United States Reports*, 1841, 15 Peters (40), 449-517, esp. 481-89; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, 164-70.

the Lower South suggested that even where subordination reigned, hegemonic issues related to slavery and race still held significant divisive potential, a potential that both Jacksonian era parties in the region feared and manipulated over the next two decades. But in the Middle South, exclusionists and subordinationists of varying stripes debated an issue central to defining the relationship of race and citizenship: the question of free black suffrage.

A vigorous debate erupted over free black voting at the Tennessee constitutional convention of 1834. Tennessee's original 1796 constitution granted the suffrage to all "freemen" who met minimal freehold or residency requirements, and thus permitted a rather small number of free blacks who were freeholders or long time residents of a particular county to vote.⁴³ In 1834, however, egalitarian reformers who pushed hard for the extension of suffrage to all whites also complained bitterly about the state's practice of allowing propertied free black men, otherwise considered "outside the social compact," to vote. Contending that white Tennesseans "reprobate and abhor" black voting, western delegate G. W. L. Marr declared that the "political fabric of Tennessee denied citizenship to all people of color, slave or free," and argued that the "supposed claim" of free blacks "to exercise the great right of free suffrage" should be "prohibited." Marr insisted that the United States Constitution's phrase "We, the People" meant "we the free white people of the United States and the free white people only."⁴⁴ Another western delegate, William H. Loving, labeled it "an evil example to our slaves to allow free Negroes to exercise the right of suffrage."⁴⁵ Egalitarian Terry Cahal worried that free black suffrage threatened to transform Tennessee into "the asylum for free Negroes and the harbour for runaway slaves."⁴⁶ Defending the 1796 provision, Robert Allen, a delegate from counties north of Nashville, opposed the blanket disfranchisement of free blacks, noting that many free blacks had "exercised it [the suffrage] for thirty-eight years . . . without any evil

⁴³ Mooney, "The Question of Slavery and the Free Negro," 487-509; Francis N. Thorpe, *Federal and State Constitutions*, Colonial Charters and Other Organic Laws of the State, Territories, and Colonies . . . (7 vols., Washington, DC, 1909), VI, 3426-44.

⁴⁴ *Journal of the Convention of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1834), 107.

⁴⁵ *Nashville Republican and State Gazette*, July 5, 1834.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, July 10, 1834.

growing out of it."⁴⁷ Ultimately, however, the convention disfranchised all free blacks, including freeholders, by a vote of 33 to 23.⁴⁸

The question of voting rights for free blacks proved even more contentious when debated at North Carolina's constitutional convention of 1835. The use of the term "freeman" in the suffrage clause of North Carolina's constitution of 1776 opened the door to voting rights for free blacks who met the constitution's freehold or taxpaying requirements.⁴⁹ Eligible free blacks voted regularly and with comparatively little controversy in most locales during the first three decades of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰ When the convention met in Raleigh in June 1835, however, James Bryan of Carteret County led a charge for the disfranchisement of free blacks, baldly declaring that the United States was "a nation of white people—its offices, honors, dignities, and privileges, are alone open to, and to be enjoyed by, the white people."⁵¹ Nathaniel Macon, the venerable former speaker of the United States House, agreed, insisting that free blacks were "no part of the then political family" in 1776 and that free black suffrage in North Carolina rested on a flawed interpretation of the state's old constitution.⁵² Treading carefully around the state's racial sensibilities, defenders of free black suffrage argued that respectable free blacks served as a valuable buffer between whites and slaves. Piedmont delegate John Giles urged retaining the suffrage for propertied free blacks as a "mode of raising them from their present degradation." Giles also believed that allowing free blacks to retain the suffrage "might attach them

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1834.

⁴⁸ To further define blacks out of the body politic, the convention excluded them from militia service and excused them from paying the poll tax required of whites. See *Journal of the Convention of the State of Tennessee*, 209-14.

⁴⁹ Harold J. Counihan, "The North Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1835: A Study in Jacksonian Democracy," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 46 (Oct. 1969), 335-64; John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill, 1943), esp. 108-20; Thorpe, comp., *Federal and State Constitutions*, IV, 2787-94.

⁵⁰ Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 107-08; Stephen B. Weeks, "The History of Negro Suffrage in the South," *Political Science Quarterly*, 9 (Dec. 1894), 676; John H. Bryan to Ebenezer Pettigrew, July 27, 1832, Pettigrew Family Papers (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

⁵¹ *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North Carolina Called to Amend The Constitution of the State* (Raleigh, NC, 1836), 62-69; *North Carolina Standard* (Raleigh), June 19, 1835.

⁵² *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North Carolina*, 69-70; *North Carolina Standard*, June 19, 1835. For an earlier but very similar statement of Macon's views, see Nathaniel Macon to John H. Bryan, Apr. 20, 1832, William S. Bryan Papers (Southern Historical Collection).

to the white population.”⁵³ Presenting a consistent Whig ideology for protecting property and promoting uplift, jurist William Gaston, the most respected figure at the convention other than Macon, offered an eloquent defense of free black suffrage. “Let them know they are a part of the body politic,” Gaston pleaded, “and they will feel an attachment to the form of government and have a fixed interest in the prosperity of the community, and will exercise an important influence over the slaves.”⁵⁴ Judge Joseph Daniel of Halifax, an eastern district with the largest free black population in the state, proposed raising the property and taxpaying requirement for free-black voting to a freehold of \$250. Such a substantial property requirement would allow “all colored men of good character and industrious habits” to vote and thus “conciliate the most respectable portion of the colored population” by giving them “a standing distinct from the slave population.” Daniel contended that voting rights would “cultivate an inclination to protect the community against disorders” among propertied free blacks.⁵⁵ Gaston supported Daniel’s proposal and warned the convention against leaving the respectable free black “politically excommunicated,” with an “additional mark of degradation fixed upon him, solely on account of color.” Prominent Whig planter John Morehead also warned that disfranchising free blacks might “close the door entirely against this unfortunate class of our population,” and hence encourage them to “light up the torch of commotion among our slaves.”⁵⁶

Leading a spirited attack on the “respectability” argument advanced by Daniel, Gaston, and Morehead, eastern delegate Jesse Wilson opposed any compromise based on property-holding or character in favor of a sweeping disfranchisement of all free blacks. “Color is a barrier which ought not to be broken between the classes,” Wilson argued. “If you make it your business to elevate the condition of the blacks,” he contended, “in the same proportion . . . you degrade that of poorer whites.”⁵⁷ Piedmont delegate Hugh McQueen concurred, arguing that “white portion of the population of this country constitutes the proper depository of political power” and

⁵³ *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North Carolina*, 73-74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 79; on Gaston’s standing at the convention, see James W. Bryan to John H. Bryan, June 7, 1835, Bryan Family Papers (Perkins Library, Duke University).

⁵⁵ Daniel praised the actual voting record of free blacks, noting that based on his observations of “their conduct for the thirty years” during which free blacks had “uniformly voted for men to represent them of the best character and talents.” See *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North Carolina*, 60-62.

⁵⁶ *North Carolina Standard*, June 19, 1835.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

complaining that "the exercise of the right of suffrage by free blacks was repugnant to public feeling in the State."⁵⁸

After vigorous debate, the North Carolina convention approved a constitutional provision depriving all free persons of color by the relatively narrow margin of 67-62. A strong sectional component appeared in the voting. Seventeen of the twenty-five counties whose delegates voted against disfranchisement lay in the Piedmont and Mountain regions, while nineteen of the twenty-six counties whose delegates voted entirely in favor of disfranchisement lay in the heavily slaveholding East. There was also a crude relationship between party alignment and convention votes on the black disfranchisement. The heavily Whig Piedmont and mountain regions tended to oppose disfranchisement and the generally Democratic East tended to favor it.⁵⁹ With the constitutional decisions of Tennessee and North Carolina in 1834 and 1835, the last vestiges of political rights for people of color disappeared from all parts of the future Confederacy. The southern body politic had become an exclusively white preserve.

Out of the Old South's vigorous but varied debates over issues related to slavery and race during the Jacksonian era, complex patterns of racial thought emerged. In the Upper South, exclusionists seeking to lead the political economy of their region toward that of the free-labor North through gradual emancipation and colonization faced intractable, if sometimes apologetic, opposition from defenders of slavery who admitted "slavery in the abstract" an evil and who themselves often sought a whiter Upper South through the colonization of free blacks and the steady sale of slaves to the cotton South. In the Lower South, with its still burgeoning cotton economy and proportionately large black population, full-fledged exclusion was rejected long before the advent of Jacksonianism, and public opinion increasingly equated almost any interference with slavery, including colonization efforts, with abolition.

If subordination emerged as a hegemonic racial ideology in the Lower South, significant disagreement remained over which policies best promoted subordination, and concern over how "white" the cotton South should remain persisted. In the Middle South, open opposition to slavery proved decidedly weaker than in the more northern portions of the Upper

⁵⁸ *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North Carolina*, 75-79.

⁵⁹ Of the thirteen counties whose delegations split on the issue, seven lay in eastern North Carolina and six in the western portion of the state. Analysis based on information provided in Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina*, 112-16. See also Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics in North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens, GA, 1989); and Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1983).

South. Yet the status of free blacks in these slaveholding societies became a pressing issue during the Jacksonian era. Neither exclusionists nor subordinationists could fully agree on whether the removal of free blacks through expulsion or colonization was essential or even desirable, and even sharper disagreements emerged over the question of whether or not free blacks could serve as a valuable buffer between white citizens and black slaves. Self-styled conservatives and paternalists in the Middle South, though aware of the poverty and social ostracism experienced by many free blacks, tended to believe that social and moral uplift might raise a portion of the area's free black community into a respectable class whose service to society would prove valuable; white egalitarians tended to insist on drawing a strict racial line between freedom and slavery, between citizenship and bondage, between independence and dependence. Even though many in the Middle South remained unconvinced that subordination served whites best, arguments for subordination prevailed over Whiggish notions of paternalism and uplift in these lower reaches of the upper South, although not without a struggle, and, in some instances, only by relatively narrow margins. Thus the Middle South stood as a middle ground; in North Carolina and Tennessee exclusion seemed impractical and garnered less support than in the more northern reaches of the Upper South, but subordination never gained the consensus support it eventually enjoyed in the cotton South.

In sum, racial modernism in the Jacksonian South wore several faces, all of them forbidding to blacks and supportive of white supremacy in some form. In nearly all of its southern guises, however, racial modernism viewed race as biologically determined and looked no further than skin color for the determination of racial categories. Except for paternalists increasingly on the defensive, character, reputation, and property made less difference than skin color in the public life of the Old South. Some diehard conservatives, like Virginia's William Colquhoun, openly scoffed at the supposed triumph of such *herrenvolk* egalitarianism, ridiculing the notion that the "mere animal man, because he happens to wear a white skin" was entitled to full and exclusive privileges of citizenship.⁶⁰ But across the Jacksonian South as a whole, such occasional conservative laments proved no match for the racial *esprit* and entitlement expressed and claimed in a

⁶⁰ William S. Colquhoun to John Mason, May 10, 1851, Mason Family Papers (Virginia Historical Society).

young Mississippian's enthusiastic declaration upon coming of age that he was "*free, white, and twenty-one*."⁶¹

Thus in the Jacksonian South, as in the rest of Jacksonian America, the reconsideration of race produced an accommodation that enshrined whiteness as the standard measure of citizenship and racial entitlement. Proof of personal independence and public virtue deemed essential to republican citizenship no longer rested in the ownership of productive property, but instead hinged simply on "whiteness." To be sure, shared racism hardly united the Jacksonian South any more than it united the Jacksonian North. In the Upper South, belief in the permanent racial inferiority of nonwhites created a strong and continuing preference for racial exclusion, for a "whiter" society, one less dependent on slavery and characterized by a dwindling black population. Whites in the Lower South generally accepted slavery as an institution essential to the region's continued prosperity and agreed that the thorough subordination of blacks best served their society's interests. But even the cotton South's apparent consensus left considerable room for disagreement among whites over the status of free blacks, the regulation of the domestic slave trade, and the preferred racial balance of the population.

Yet despite these on-going disagreements, the Old South's contested decisions to emphasize whiteness at the expense of wealth, property, and character, choices most explicitly debated in the Middle South, revealed an important aspect of the great accommodation that held planter and plain folk in delicate political equipoise throughout the late antebellum era. However scornful of such claims in private, the slaveholding elite had to accept white equality, the spirit of *herrenvolk* democracy, in the public realm to ensure white solidarity in the coming stand against antislavery. Reluctant egalitarians to be sure, perhaps even hypocritical ones, the slaveholding elite of the Old South accepted the public creed of white equality as the price of broad support for slavery. At the same time, common whites found in the privileges of whiteness a social entitlement and a source of leverage they could employ with great effect in political debate. Lacking wealth but boasting numbers, white egalitarians used the ideological imperative of whiteness to wrest meaningful political concessions, if not outright control, from wealthy elites at key moments. Put another way, common whites in the Jacksonian South defined their whiteness as "property," as evidence of the requisite independence and virtue, and thus forged a southern *herrenvolk* republicanism, much in the

⁶¹ Powhatan Ellis, Jr., to Mrs. Charles Ellis, June 21, 1850, Mumford-Ellis Family Papers (Perkins Library, Duke University).

same way that artisans and journeyman defined their skill as a sort of surrogate property and used it to forge artisanal republicanism in the urban North during the same era. In turn, by accepting, even tacitly, the legitimacy of slavery and the material inequalities it sustained, white egalitarians left the wealth and economic power of the planter elite secure.⁶²

Thus the triumph of whiteness allocated valuable privileges, including voting and legal equality, solely on the basis of skin color, or at least on cultural perceptions and definitions of skin color, leaving race rather than class the key social divide in the public realm.⁶³ And that sense of white racial entitlement has proven tenacious indeed, surviving not only the collapse of slavery in the 1860s, but also (albeit in altered and sometimes disguised form) the dismantling of segregation a century later. By linking “whiteness” so closely to the prerogatives and rights of citizenship and political participation, the Jacksonian construction of racial modernity defined not merely the South but the entire American nation-state as a “white man’s country.” Thus racial modernity shaped a powerful national self-definition which would grudgingly sacrifice its gender dimension well before the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century mounted a successful challenge to the claims for “whiteness” that lay at its very core.

⁶² For comparative purposes, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984), esp. 61-63.

⁶³ An intriguing parallel, suggested in Jim Ronda’s essay in this issue, emerges from the efforts of the Cherokees to prevent whites and blacks from becoming citizens of the Cherokee nation. See also the essays by Lois Horton, James Brewer Stewart, and Joanne Pope Melish in this issue.