

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Antebellum Period

By **Dorothy Denneen Volo and James M. Volo**

The federal capital at Washington was highly valued as a symbol by 19th century Americans. Carefully laid out in a district allocated from within the boundaries of Maryland in order to salve the pride of the South, the nation's capital city had been under construction since the turn of the century. Americans pointed proudly to the imposing structure of the Capitol building, as well as the General Post Office, the Bureau of the Treasury, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Executive Mansion, as representative of a vigorous young nation preparing to take its place among the leading countries of the world.

Unfortunately, Washington was also symbolic of other things. The plans for the city, like the basic founding concepts of the nation itself, were as pretentious as they were visionary, and in 1860 both lay unfulfilled and disordered. The Capitol building lay unfinished with its original dome removed—scaffolding and a towering crane representative of restructuring and rethinking. The statue of Armed Freedom, approved at the insistence of Jefferson Davis rather than that of Liberty with her olive branch and liberty cap, would not grace the dome until late 1863. The wings of the building were "stretched bare and unfinished, devoid even of steps." The imposing obelisk of the Washington Monument lay as a mere foundation. Blocks of marble, lumber, cast iron plates, and the tools of workmen strewn about the district gave quiet testimony to the fact that the plan for the nation's first city, like the social and political plan for the American nation itself, was incomplete and open to revision.¹

At the head of the James River, one hundred miles south of Washington and in sharp contrast to it, was Richmond, Virginia. As the third largest city in the South, Richmond had proven an elegant state capital with fine buildings and traditional architecture. Although the city was cultivated and cosmopolitan, it was also the center of Virginia's economy, with mills, railways, and trading establishments. In 1861, Richmond was the finest city in the South and one of the better places in which to live in the entire country. Within a few months of secession, though, Richmond had been made the capital of the new Confederate nation, and its tenor changed dramatically. In a mere four years the once

¹ Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 5-6.

stately city would be a ruin comparable to the broken hulk of Berlin at the end of World War II, its people so pale and thin that it was "pitiful to see."²

The War of Southern Secession, a civil war, had come to America. It would be one of the most tragic events in the nation's history, resulting from a dispute among its citizens over just what the new country should look like. For four years the country passed through a traumatic military and social upheaval that touched the lives of its people in many ways. Such matters have sent historians delving in the depths of old newspaper columns, official records, letters, and memoirs to unearth the details of constitutional pressures, agricultural and industrial production, social development, and political evolution, thereby producing over the intervening decades an enormous and ever-growing body of printed work.

Amid all the printer's ink and historical speculation, the Antebellum Period (approximately 1820-1860) has largely been ignored until recently. More than 100,000 volumes have been written concerning the four years of active warfare, but many fewer have been done concerning the four decades that led to it. Well-educated adults are often unsure of the meaning of the term "antebellum" or relegate the entire pre-Civil War era to Margaret Mitchell's images of Clayton County, Georgia in *Gone With the Wind* (1936) with its magnolia-scented plantations, hoop skirts, and flirtatious southern belles.³ The great flaw in much of the work of historians of the Antebellum Period was that they could not explain how the widely separated geographic sections of the nation could share so many important historical, cultural, and political characteristics and still be mutually antagonistic to the point of shedding blood in an era when their residents rarely met face-to-face or communicated verbally.

It is not possible in an essay of this size to enumerate all the possible circumstances that defined the Antebellum Period, nor did every characteristic of the period lead directly to war. This essay concerns the effect of partisan journalism on the American nation during the Antebellum Period. It can be argued that during the Antebellum Period the professional members of the print media, both North and South, failed in their intrinsic obligation to truthfully inform the people by being biased to the point of being fraudulent. Nonetheless, a brief survey of the journalistic output of the period can reveal much about American society and culture at this time.

The ancient Greek writer (4th century B.C.), Thucydides, urged historians to embrace skepticism in their analysis of great events and to look to personal or national self-interest rather than publicized grievances and high-sounding intentions when writing history. Whenever a conflict breaks out in American history, its own generation of historians often rushes forward to record it with preconceived theories that often require for their support facts that are not in evidence while ignoring some of the so-called "realities on the ground" that might confound their pet hypotheses. The actual causes of the secession

² James H. Croushore, ed., *A Volunteer's Adventure, by Captain John W. De Forest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), 35.

³ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: MacMillan, 1936).

crisis are complex and multidimensional, and any discussion along these lines inevitably remains totally academic. It is clear, however, that the nation did not go to war simply because of slavery any more than it did over disputes involving temperance, urbanization, poverty, politics, public education, or economics. Yet slavery became the precipitating issue of each recurring crisis between North and South. Possibly historians should look to the cumulative effect of all these various disputes as reported in the media of the day as a cause of the war.

From the opening of the 19th century Northerners persisted in an effort to portray the American Republic in idealistic terms that reflected openness, unpretentiousness, and ease of ascent. Even though the reality was far from the ideal, America continued to be viewed as a Zion for the world, and the non-utopian inconsistencies, most evident in Northern urban life, were excused as temporary problems with which the nation would come to terms in time. Socially conscious Americans declared that the United States was the archetype of the perfect nation, with its expansive borders, rich and prolific soil, abundant raw materials, citizens blessed with industry and enterprise, and institutions and forms of government more free and equal than any in Europe.

Belying this view, a privileged planter class, whose elite lifestyle was maintained at the expense of the rest of society, led the agrarian South. This planter aristocracy relied on its kinship networks and hierarchal social status as means to personal success. Outsiders saw southern culture and institutions as backward, inefficient, and harmful to the American nation as a whole. Failing to acknowledge the good in Southern society because it was tied to slavery, Northern reformers made no attempt to hide their universal disapproval of all things Southern. They became increasingly acrimonious, alienating, and violent in their rhetoric as the war approached. These social reformers were widely viewed as interventionists, fanatics, anarchists, or worse by the Southern population.

A Century of “isms”

Contemporary observers of the 19th century noted the prevalence in American speech, writing, and publications of a wide variety of “isms.” Modernism seems to be the catch-all term used by historians today when referring to the period, but urbanism, abolitionism, a nascent form of feminism, humanitarianism, reformism, and other “isms” filled the consciousness of the 19th century public. The ideals of traditional Americanism and Nativism seem to have come to loggerheads with the shifting patterns of political republicanism and social pluralism in mid-century over the prospect of increasing immigration and the expansion of slavery. With the Civil War prominent among the pivotal historical events of the century, abolitionism, sectionalism, racism, radicalism, and ultimately secessionism are commonly thought to have prevailed; but southern nationalism, militarism, extreme evangelicalism, expansionism (i.e. Manifest Destiny), and partisan journalism were equally influential in forming the character of the period.

Remarkably, many of the persons considered to have been on the “correct” side of antebellum issues from a modern moral perspective were not very nice people. It seems certain that different individuals and groups manipulated these “isms” for a variety of

reasons, but the fact that large segments of the antebellum population believed in them and chose to follow through on them suggests that the “isms” had real meaning. Dedication for or against certain reform “isms” tended to polarize the population of the nation and strike metaphorical sparks; while others were greeted with a more general acceptance or were viewed in the light of an irrepressible inevitability. A virulent culture war had begun in America.

Authoritarianism

How did the nation come to such an impasse? Historians have long held that part of the answer may lie in the questions about the nature of the American nation that had been left undecided by the Founders. Of these questions, the continuation of slavery and the political relationship between the state and national governments had resisted resolution. The crux of the slavery issue revolved around the question of whether the United States had been founded as a free republic that allowed slavery or as a slaveholding republic with pockets of freedom. The question of "states' rights" held at issue whether the state or the national government was ultimately sovereign. Since both situations had existed simultaneously for decades, which was the aberration?

In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), Thomas Jefferson had warned that if government were allowed to set the limits of its own power, despotism would surely follow. In 1821, he expressed concern over the increasing presence of government at all levels of American life. In just 40 years, many of his worst fears were being realized. By mid-century political opponents were being refused charters or licenses and were hounded by the minions of the controlling party, while the delinquencies of political allies were often overlooked. At the same time that state funds were stretched to the limit and local credit was less readily available, many state-supported enterprises were poorly run or did not live up to expectations. Governments began spending beyond the level of revenue, and the public debt increased everywhere. Few observers at the time thought that the questions raised concerning the fundamentals of American society and government would come to be "settled only at the cannon's mouth."⁴

The Mexican War of 1846, in particular, had not been popular in the North engendering vehement antiwar resentment and producing outspoken critics like Henry David Thoreau, Wendell Philips, Henry Ward Beecher, and William Lloyd Garrison. The pen of Thoreau generated the first truly intellectual justification of antiwar principles in America. Although a simple and somewhat quixotic man, Thoreau's essay "On Civil Disobedience" (1849) was written to protest the use of tax money to prosecute the Mexican War, a conflict he considered unjust and blatantly aggressive.⁵ Thoreau believed the purpose of the war was to extend American slavery into new territories at the expense

⁴ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787); Calvin Colton, ed., *The Private Correspondence of Henry Clay* (Cincinnati: 1856), 313. From a letter written by former President John Quincy Adams to Clay.

⁵ Henry David Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience" in Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, ed., *Aesthetic Papers* (Boston: The Editor/New York: G. Putnam, 1849).

of its weaker neighbor. Northerners had not been bred to the employment of arms, and in many Northern states the military profession was treated with derision rather than respect. An observer noted, "The martial spirit [there] was well-nigh extinct. Men knew little of military exercises, except such ideas as had been derived from the old militia system." Southerners, trained in the use of firearms and raised under the strictures of the *code duello*, did not attempt to conceal their contempt for their Northern counterparts, and feigned to believe that north of Mason and Dixon's line lived a race of cowards.⁶

Congress had long struggled to balance the interests of pro- and anti-slavery forces without resorting to any principled convictions. The Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Great Compromise of 1850 and the corresponding Fugitive Slave Law established "dubious democratic procedures" for capturing runaway slaves in the free states, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 established equally dubious barricades to the expansion of slavery in the territories.⁷ These measures were politically popular among Southerners, but their passage ultimately caused a split in the Democrat party and destroyed that of the Whigs. Moderates in the North felt betrayed. The events that later characterized Bleeding Kansas were set into motion when Congress attempted to implement the concept of popular sovereignty with its unintended violent consequences. In response, moderates in the South began to harden their position and seriously consider disunion. With the next election cycle in 1856, it became obvious that the "Slave Power" forces had reached their peak. The Dred Scott Decision of the Supreme Court (7-2) was handed down on March 6, 1857, just two days after proslavery James Buchanan's inauguration as president. Outraged, Northern voters began to speak of the existence of a "slave power conspiracy."

Historians have observed that a widespread popular participation in politics almost certainly added to the furor for war. The concept of states rights was clearly a separate issue from that of slavery in the minds of the Founding Fathers. Although Southerners frequently invoked states rights as a symbol in their turmoil over slavery, the concept was first elaborated in the tariff nullification crises of the 1820s and 1830s—a dispute concerning revenue not slavery. Nonetheless, states rights advocates seem to have been able to keep the two questions of sovereignty and slavery distinct. In much of the North, however, the questions of states rights and the continuation of slavery became a single issue on which it was impossible to have divergent views without endangering one's social prominence. In like manner, southern politicians periodically ran out the threat of secession as a political expedient that might energize the electorate and garner votes.

During the Antebellum Period, politics became a great national pastime, almost a hobby, shared by both the North and the South. This interest crossed many of the old social and economic lines to engage devotees from many classes, with sharp debates resulting on an almost daily basis. Remarkably, during the Antebellum Period, the voting franchise was widely extended, at least among white males, in all sections of the country.

James Harvey Kidd, *Personal Recollections of a Cavalryman With Custer's Michigan Cavalry Brigade in the Civil War*, (Iona, MI: Sentinel Printing, 1908), locations 184-189, Kindle edition.

⁷ William E. Freehling, *The South vs. The South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35.

By mid-century adult white males could vote in every state in the Union, and election turnouts often rose above 70 percent of the eligible voters. Unfortunately, restraint and non-partisanship were conspicuously absent from the political process of the period. Many encounters would have been comical had the underlying issues not been so serious. Intemperate and abusive language or even fisticuffs increasingly characterized politics, especially when the subject turned to inflammatory issues such as slavery or secession. When Senator Charles Sumner, a man of "wicked tongue" and "intemperate language" with regard to slavery, was beaten with a cane by proslavery Congressman Preston Brooks in the Senate, the blows were struck not only in the halls of government, but in the barbershops, parlors, and taverns of every small town and city. Moreover, left out of the political cartoon of the incident published in 1856 was the image of Brooks' friend, Congressman Lawrence Keitt of South Carolina with a drawn pistol leveled at the horror-struck witnesses who were trying to assist Sumner.⁸

Antagonists on all sides assailed their opponents with arguments taken from the law, the Bible, literature, pamphlets, election speeches, and the press. When unable to rebut these arguments on an equal footing, opponents often resorted to ridiculous remarks and unsupported allegations. A Southern observer wrote of the period: "The hot headed politician and preacher seemed to be molding public opinion without any regard to the country as a whole ... proving, from their point of view, the righteousness of their positions by resorting to both the Bible and the Constitution."⁹ Radical secessionists began to call for disunion as the best means of protecting sectional interests and abolitionists for a divinely inspired armed crusade. "Both North and South seemed to be swayed by the demagogue," observed William Fletcher, who would go on to fight as a Rebel private.¹⁰ Under the perceived weight of "accumulated wrongs and indignities," the South was swept up in a reckless euphoria for secession and the establishment of the Confederacy.¹¹

Partisan journalism

The guardian of civil liberties in America has always been the free press. Thomas Jefferson in his second inaugural address noted that the press has an obligation to oversee for the public just what the government is doing if despotism is not to displace democracy. Throughout American history, the free press has been no less unrestrained and partisan than during the Antebellum Period. The reports and images they produced created false cultural attitudes and affected the prosecution of the secession crisis.

⁸ John S. Bowman, ed., *The Civil War Almanac* (New York: Bison Books, 1983), 383-384.

⁹ William A. Fletcher, *Rebel Private: Front and Rear 1997 Meridian ed.* (Beaumont, TX: Press of the Greer Print, 1908), 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Carlton McCarthy, *Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865*, 1993 University of Nebraska Press ed. (Richmond, VA: Carlton McCarthy, 1882), 3. Originally printed in 1882, this is one of the most readable Confederate accounts of the daily life of the soldier. For a more detailed discussion of the disunion debate in the South, see Sewell, 68-78.

The importance of the printed word in 19th-century America cannot be overestimated. Literacy was quite high in antebellum America. In the South, at least 70 percent of the white male population could read, and in the North the ability to read may have run as high as 90 percent among native-born Americans. It has been observed that America's greatest authors were born during the first two decades of the 19th century.¹² Certainly the list could be lengthened to include the authors, male and female, who produced the bulk of the printed work enjoyed by the common population of American readers; but it does indicate that America was not ready to produce its own literature until its spirit of democracy and nationalism had had time to coalesce and take root. Sidney Smith, an eccentric Scottish clergyman, wrote in 1820 in the *Edinburgh Review*: "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American Play?" Prior to 1820, English texts, less expensive and more fashionable, had almost closed the literary market to American authors, but this was quickly changing. The emergence of a new popularity of reading and writing among the American middle class underpinned a new national interest in publishing and professional authorship. This circumstance was further fostered by the need for news, information, and entertainment.¹³

Most newspapers in the early 19th century cost just pennies and were distributed through subscriptions that cost about four dollars a year. James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* added a new dimension to penny press newspapers in 1835 through the introduction of paid observers—so-called "special correspondents" who made personal interviews to provide stories with details and authenticity. Newspapers were often read aloud to groups of concerned citizens engendering conversation and debate, and helping to solidify the opinion of the local community.¹⁴

During his visit to America in 1842, Charles Dickens found Americans omnivorous readers of newspapers, novels, and literary magazines. Hidden herein—disguised, if you will—was a good deal of propaganda and demagoguery. "I yet hope to hear," noted Dickens, "of there being some other national amusement in the United States, besides newspaper politics ... I do know that I have never observed the columns of the newspapers to groan so heavily under a pressure of orations ... having little or nothing to do with the matter in hand." These types of reading informed the cultural, social, and political landscapes of Antebellum America in ways more powerful than modern observers today might think.¹⁵

Escapism

¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804), Edgar Allan Poe (1809), Henry David Thoreau (1817), Herman Melville (1819), and Walt Whitman (1819).

¹³ Sidney Smith, "Who Reads an American Book?", *Edinburgh Review*, January 1820. See also Great Epochs in American History. URL: <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/topic/preservation/epochs/vol5/pg144.htm>

¹⁴ David Kaser, *Books and Libraries in Camp and Battle: The Civil War Experience* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 3. In 1830 Alexis de Tocqueville reported that he did not find a man in Connecticut who could not read.

¹⁵ Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1842), location 4250, Kindle edition. See also Charles Dickens, *Speeches: Literary and Social* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1870), locations 1179-1182, Kindle edition.

Beginning in the second decade of the 19th century, the novel, the most popular form of escapism, was found to have a growing acceptance and appeal among the general reading public. It will be seen that the novel was a powerful mechanism by which both the romantic image of the agrarian South and the disgraceful filth and impoverishment of the urban North were defined for most Americans. Both agrarianism and urbanism were largely overstated stereotypes because most Americans lived neither in cities nor on plantations. The vast majority of Americans worked beside their children and grandchildren (without slaves) on small farms in an idyllic, if not mechanically efficient, simplicity that has come to characterize the *agrarian ideal*.

Persons of the middle and upper class have long been recognized as the chief consumers of the novel, but members of the lower classes were also widely exposed to themes and characters from popular works. So great was the popularity of the novel that it drew criticism. In sharp contrast to librarians today, who generally rail against any form of censorship, library associations in the 19th century commonly regarded censorship as an obligation. As late as 1856 the Code of Public Instruction for the state of New York recognized the "necessity" of excluding from all libraries "novels, romances and other fictitious creations of the imagination, including a large proportion of the lighter literature of the day." The code also expressed an "obvious" disgust for works dealing with "pirates, banditti and desperadoes of every description." Unfortunately, for those who wished to ban the novel as a literary form, these were the very characteristics that made novels popular.¹⁶

Notwithstanding warnings to the contrary, the potency of this form of literature to govern the mind of readers proved to have not been underestimated by its would-be censors. Fictional characters possessed a remarkable ability to influence 19th century readers. Uncle Tom, Topsy, Ivanhoe, Hawkeye, Hester Prynne, and Ebenezer Scrooge were deeply familiar characters to a society that read as much as 19th century Americans did. These characters often seemed to become nearly as real and as influential to the reader as actual friends and relations.¹⁷

Reformism

The American people appear to have had an unlimited faith in their ability to perfect the human condition and provide a model social setting for all. This optimism, somewhat misplaced in light of future events, placed a heavy burden on the social elite to ease the sharpening contrasts between the ideal American community and the realities of social misery that were becoming more visible in the city streets. Throughout American history social reformers have experimented impartially with religion, education, criminal codes, temperance, capital punishment, socialism, and many other issues. It did not help these reform causes that their proponents were sometimes wildly extreme, comically impractical, or fiercely uncompromising. The pillars of reform in America have long

¹⁶ V. M. Rice, *Code of Public Instruction* (Albany: State Printing Office, 1856), 325.

¹⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mother of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 154.

relied on a form of communitarianism (i.e. community organizing) for their foundations. Whereas classical liberal reformism can be viewed as a reaction to centuries of authoritarianism, oppressive government, and overbearing and rigid religious dogma, 19th century communitarianism was a reaction to excessive individualism with its emphasis on self-sufficiency and personal rights, which were thought to lead persons to become selfish or egocentric. Birth and blood, wealth and tradition were thought to separate people from the community. America's first social reformers, the Pilgrims, had abandoned their plans for communal ownership and utopian sharing in Massachusetts in the 1620s when they found themselves starving and their community on the verge of collapse; yet in the Antebellum Period, it was said that there was rarely found "an educated man who did not have his own plan for a utopian community in his waistcoat pocket." Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1840, "We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform."¹⁸

The works of the English novelist and social commentator Charles Dickens were widely read in America. In Dickens' very popular works both sections of the country found some character, situation, or condition that seemed to bolster the very divergent views of modern society Americans held. Many social reformers, like Dickens himself, championed the cause of the poor. Nonetheless, Dickens was generally unconcerned with the economic aspects of social reform, choosing rather to deal with an increased appreciation of the value of being human, even if the masses remained very poor humans. Ignorance, for him, was the great cause of human misery. In 1843, he gave a speech in the English city of Manchester in which he pleaded for a heightened sense of humanitarianism and an improvement in the system of public education in Britain. In contrast to the "ragged schools" that had been set up by well-meaning but untrained volunteer teachers to give England's poor children the rudiments of an education, Dickens proposed that the surest improvement in the nation's future was tied to a public investment in education sponsored by the government.

Dickens' stories emphasized the need to change traditional ways of thinking. But many in the South misread Dickens' message and saw the misfortune, destitution, and disease that fills his works as characteristic of all urban life. Southerners were largely skeptical of public education, and modern urbanism was the great evil haunting the romantic domains of the Southern imagination. Dickens' novels mirrored the inevitable bleak future of America if Northern concepts of social progress continued to be implemented as English ones had for decades without noticeably improving society.

Although thoroughly English in its setting and personalities, *A Christmas Carol*, first published in 1843, seemed to embody the very limitations of modern society in mid-century in the interactions of Scrooge with the other characters.¹⁹ The story portrays a secular rather than a traditionally religious attitude toward the holidays. Ironically, Dickens was one of the first authors to take "Christ" out of Christmas. The person of

¹⁸ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *American Men of Letters*, 1891 ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1885), 40. Holmes attributed the comment to Emerson (1840).

¹⁹ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843).

Christ, or Jesus never appears in the text even in passing reference. The spirits and ghosts of Christmas are remarkably worldly in their appearance and temporal in their outlook. The awakening of a social conscience in Scrooge is their chief endeavor. Ultimately, it is the specter of an unlamented death, a topic of great concern in the 19th century that brings Scrooge redemption.²⁰

A popular book, *A Treatise of the Vocations* written by William Perkins in the 17th century circulated widely in 19th century America.²¹ Herein, Perkins expounded an elaborate doctrine connecting heavenly salvation to diligent labor at some honest trade or vocation. American Protestants strongly countenanced Perkins' gospel of work, today often referred to as the "Protestant Work Ethic." Thomas Bacon, who would found a charity school for the offspring of the poor, noted, "Ignorance and indolence among the lower class of people ... are no less prejudicial to the common interest, or dangerous to the [physical] constitution, than popery [i.e. Catholicism] and idleness." Concepts like these led to the establishment of workhouses and orphanages with their enforced regimes of labor.²² Dickens noted that in his own country "the workhouse and the jail, have come, not unnaturally, to be looked upon by the poor rather as a stern master, quick to correct and punish, than as a kind protector, merciful and vigilant in their hour of need." He considered it a principle "that a Public Charity is immeasurably better than a Private Foundation, no matter how munificently the latter may be endowed." A group of New England philanthropists was assured in 1843 that the almshouse was "a place where the tempted are removed from the means of their sin, and where the indolent, while he is usefully and industriously employed ... is prepared for a better career."²³ Notwithstanding these assurances, the almshouses failed to relieve the problem of prolonged poverty or its symptoms. Social reformers in this period commonly discriminated between the deserving poor, who were victims of circumstances, and those who were chronically impoverished due to their own fault or chosen lifestyle. This disparity of need seemingly continues today.²⁴

When Dickens visited America in 1842, thousands of wide-eyed Americans turned out to greet him. Yet he was aghast at the conditions he found in America: hideous tenements, loathsome prisons, and squalid taverns—a foul growth upon America's utilitarian society. He was particularly critical of the American press and the sanitary conditions of American cities. He wrote merciless parodies of American manners including several focused on rural conversations and the practice of spitting in public. Moreover, he could not forgive the continued existence of slavery, and the final chapters of his *American Notes* were devoted to a criticism of the practice.

²⁰ Tim Halliman, *A Christmas Carol Christmas Book* (New York: IBM, 1984), 111.

²¹ William Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men with the Sorts and Kindes of Them and the Right Use Thereof* (Cambridge: John Legat, Printer to the University of Cambridge, 1605).

²² Quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *Gentleman's Progress, The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), xix.

²³ Attributed to Dr. Walter Channing. As quoted in David J. Rothman, "Our Brother's Keepers," *American Heritage*, December 1972, 42.

²⁴ Dickens, *American Notes*, 543.

Apologists for the Southern way of life retorted that Scrooge's treatment of Bob Cratchit in Dickens' pages emphasized the abuses possible in an age governed by the "work for wage" system that so lacked a sense of personal involvement and family dedication. Southerners despised such ambiguous social remedies as the poorhouses and the workhouses that filled Dickens' works. The debtors' prison of Little Dorrit and the orphanage of Oliver Twist were obviously not sufficient to solve the social ills of an urban society. Southerners were left with a portrait of cities, like those of the North, veritably teeming with the exploited and impoverished masses from which they chose to be separated. The personal responsibility many Southerners felt toward their neighbors, their workers, and even their slaves seemed noble in contrast to the socially anonymous caretaking for the unfortunates found in Dickens' novels. As late as 1911, Southern religious ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina were still defending "the beautiful patriarchal life on the Southern plantations previous to 1865."²⁵

Romanticism

Southern intellectuals of the prewar period were also widely read in the literature of European romanticism, and they used romantic allusions freely in their writing. Southern newspapers spoke of heroics and crusades in reference to the southern cause. Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels were immensely popular. Their theme of the Scottish struggle to throw off the dominance and oppression of their English overlords served as an analogy for the position in which the South saw itself with respect to a Federal government increasingly dominated by Northern reformers. Scott's use of romantic characters, lords and ladies, knights in armor, and grand estates was particularly resonant with the Southern image of itself. So familiar was Scott's work to Southerners that in later years Mark Twain only half-jokingly blamed Scott for causing the Civil War.

Second only to Scott's in popularity were the American adventure novels of James Fenimore Cooper. Although American readers poorly received his first novel, largely because it imitated the British form, Cooper's second work, *The Spy*, published in 1822, was an outstanding success.²⁶ Cooper's subsequent novels emphasized American manners and scenes as interesting and important. Cooper found that there was a great demand for adventure tales derived from the Revolution, and his writing was sufficiently manly and moral to find acceptance by a wide audience.²⁷

Like Scott, Cooper promoted a social vision of a stable and genteel society governed by its natural aristocracy, "perpetuating property, order, and liberty" as represented by a reunited American gentry. That this view resonated with the Southern image of itself would have upset Cooper, with his very Northern attitudes. *The Pioneers*, Cooper's third book, was dedicated to the proposition that the American republic, poised on the verge of "demagoguery, deceit, hypocrisy, and turmoil," could be transformed into a stable,

²⁵ Lowery, Irving E. (2009-07-15). *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days; or, a Story Based on Facts* (Columbia, SC: The State Co. Printers, 1911), locations 42-43, Kindle edition.

²⁶ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (London: G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1822).

²⁷ Alan Taylor, "Fenimore Cooper's America," *History Today* 46, no. 2 (February 1996): 21-27.

prosperous, and just society.²⁸ Although the theme of "reconciliation ... on conservative terms" was almost three decades old, Cooper's novels were very popular with men, mainly because of their masculine adventure themes, and were often found among their most prized possessions. Dog-eared copies circulated widely and were often read aloud in the parlor or around the campfire to eager audiences.²⁹

One of the most picturesque and romantic figures in America before the war was John C. Frémont, first Republican candidate for president in 1856, known as the "Great Pathfinder," whose "narrative of his explorations," in the fifties, was read by boys with the same avidity that they displayed in the perusal of the romantic tales of King Arthur's Roundtable.³⁰ In the presidential race, the Republicans championed the slogan "Free Speech, Free Press, Free Soil, Free Men, Frémont and Victory." Frémont may have been made a national hero for his role in mapping and exploring the West, but he was an unacceptable presidential candidate in the South because he threatened the institution of slavery. Governor Henry A. Wise warned that if Fremont won the 1856 election, Virginia would secede. James Buchanan of Pennsylvania won the election.

Sensationalism

No discussion of Antebellum era literature or writing is complete without special mention of the abolitionist press and slave narratives. The first examples of writing in the formal genres by black Americans were seen in the 1820s. Some marginal works appeared as poetry, but the slave narratives that began to be published in the 1830s had the greatest effect and popularity. While the influence of antislavery editors was clearly visible in some narratives, others were clearly the work of the avowed author. Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave Written by Himself* (1845) has perhaps garnered the most lasting fame.³¹ William Wells Brown—America's first black novelist—Josiah Henson, and Henry "Box" Brown penned other significant works. *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), the story of Solomon Northup, a born free New York man dragged into slavery in Louisiana, was dedicated to Harriet Beecher Stowe.³² Slave narratives sold very well in the North supplying sensationalism and sentimentality to an audience who relished both. Certain aspects of these stories, often written by abolitionist "ghost" writers, have been questioned because they matched the conventions and expectations of the slave narrative too closely.

²⁸ James Fennimore Cooper, *The Pioneers; or, the Sources of the Susquehanna* (New York: E.B. Clayton for Charles Wiley, 1823).

²⁹ *Life of John Charles Fremont* (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1856).

³⁰ John C. Frémont, *Narrative of the exploring expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year 1842, and to Oregon and north California in the years 1843-44.* (Syracuse: Hall & Dickson, 1847).

³¹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, No. 25 Cornhill, 1845).

³² Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave -- Narrative of Solomon Northup, A Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, From a Common Plantation Near the Red River, in Louisiana* (Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1853).

In this regard in 1854, Rev. Nehemiah Adams, pastor of the Union Congregational Church in Boston took a trip to the American South to see slavery for himself, and he wrote a book entitled *A South-Side View of Slavery* (1854). Adams was a member of the American Tract Society and the American Board for Foreign Missions.³³ His conclusions were remarkable and upsetting. “The duty, it seemed to me ... we at the north owed to the subject of slavery and ... to the colored race ... [was] not to draw upon fictitious scenes and feelings ... There was one thing which I felt sure that I should see on landing, viz., the whole black population cowed down.” This was not what Adams observed. “How could it be other wise, if slavery be such as our books, and sermons, and lectures, and newspaper articles represent?” The book caused a great sensation because it went against the grain of common expectations, and Adams received much hostile criticism especially from abolitionists for its perceived moderation. Yet Adams conclusions were more widely held in the North than most observers were willing to admit existed there.³⁴

In January 1868, *The Nation* published an article by a Federal war veteran and author, distinguished before the outbreak of hostilities, John W. De Forest entitled "The Great American Novel," which began the never-ending quest of nearly every American fiction writer to follow. De Forest considered that most early American writers (Irving, Cooper, Hawthorne) "wrote about ghosts, and the ghosts have vanished utterly." Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was for him “the closest thus far.”³⁵ The book, De Forest wrote, had "a national breadth ... truthful outlining of character, natural speaking, and plenty of strong feeling."³⁶

Uncle Tom's Cabin was first released in America and Britain as a newspaper serialization like many other works of the period. When Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, the book sold 300,000 copies in America and Britain in one year. Stowe's work was one of total fiction; it stressed the evils of slavery and presented a picture of total brutality. Stowe had no personal knowledge of slavery. The factual basis for the story was Theodore D. Weld's radical abolitionist tract entitled *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, which was published in 1839.³⁷ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was immensely more effective in preaching the antislavery message in the form of a novel than the earlier tract had ever dreamed of being. Writing and speech making on the subject of slavery in particular—and of the Southern culture in general—were becoming increasingly stereotypical, and the stereotypes, even when presented in novels, were taking on a reality in the minds of the people.

³³ Nehemiah Adams, *A South-Side View of Slavery; or Three Months in the South* (Boston: T.R. Marvin/B.B. Mussey, 1854).

³⁴ ———, *Ibid.*, locations 2-7, Kindle edition.

³⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852).

³⁶ Croushore, *Volunteer's Adventure*, 130-131; See “De Forest: The Great American Novel,” *The American Literary Blog*, <http://americanliteraryblog.blogspot.com/2011/01/de-forest-great-american-novel.html>.

³⁷ Theodore D. Weld, *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839).

Stowe's sister, Catherine Beecher, famous in her own right as an educator and author of *American Woman's Home*, was also steeped in the antislavery issue.³⁸ In *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, With Reference to the Duty of American Females* (1837) Catherine Beecher wrote that it was "unwise and inexpedient for ladies of the non-slaveholding States to unite themselves in Abolition Societies ... I do not suppose there is one person in a thousand, at the North, who would dissent from these principles. They would only differ in the use of terms and call this the doctrine of *gradual emancipation*, while Abolitionists would call it the doctrine of *immediate emancipation* ... Most persons in the non-slaveholding States have considered the matter of Southern slavery, as one in which they were no more called to interfere, than in the abolition of the press-gang system in England, or the tithing system of Ireland." Catherine Beecher was born during a period when the "cult of domesticity" was the accepted doctrine for women. She was unusual in that she supported herself by writing, and she also organized the Ladies Society for Promoting Education in the West. The Beecher sisters and other domestic advisors advanced women's status by arguing that women's domestic responsibilities were just as important as men's political and economic responsibilities.³⁹

Extreme Evangelicalism

Not all of the protestant religions in America were considered legitimate by the society in general because many minor sects espoused doctrines that were on the fringe of traditional Christian belief. In 1844, Robert Baird, a Presbyterian minister, published a study entitled *Religion in the United States of America*, one of the first interpretive studies on the subject of religious freedom in American history.⁴⁰ To illustrate the country's religious vitality, Baird provided an exhaustive (and somewhat biased) study of the nation's churches, but even a man that was trying to illustrate the success of religious freedom in America found it necessary to divide the common denominations into "evangelical" and "unevangelical" categories—the second of which he found to be "a blight on America's religious landscape." Lumping together Roman Catholics, Jews, Shakers, Unitarians, Mormons, Universalists, Deists, and many fringe religious sects, Baird condemned them all for rejecting the true Christianity of the dominant evangelical churches: Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, and Methodists. It was these mainstream religions that he hoped would form a great Protestant empire in America. For Baird, freedom from the imposition of a government established church was one thing, but acceptance of religious diversity (especially if it strayed too far from orthodox Protestant thought) was too much to tolerate. In particular, Baird considered Mormons "a body of ignorant dupes," and Roman Catholics heathens who had buried

³⁸ Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes*. (New York: J.B. Ford, 1869).

³⁹ Catherine Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism With Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia, Perkins, 1837).

⁴⁰ Robert Baird, *Religion in the United States of America: or an Account of the Origin, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States: With Notices of the Unevangelical Denominations* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844).

truth “amid a heap of corruptions.”⁴¹ The views of Baird and other respected mainstream religious writers, fed into the negativity of the Nativist groups who believed that the flood of Catholic emigrants from Europe were hostile to American ideals. Real Americans were Protestant, and real Protestants were main line Protestants.⁴²

The father of Harriet and Catherine, Reverend Lyman Beecher, had thirteen children, most of whom became prominent in their own right. Famed as a leading evangelical figure in the Second Great Awakening (1810-1830), Lyman Beecher frequently equated Protestantism with republicanism, and the office of Protestant minister to that of an elected official. As president of Lane Theological Seminary, he was faced with the rising controversy over the issue of slavery, which caused some students dedicated to abolition to rebel and seek academic asylum at Oberlin Collegiate Institute, which school became a citadel of abolitionism. Beecher's turbulent tenure at Lane came at a time when a number of burning issues, particularly concerning slavery and the propriety of Unitarianism, threatened to divide the Presbyterian Church.

Religious incendiaries, including Reverend Charles Grandison Finney (president of Oberlin) and Lyman Beecher, himself, provoked less thoughtful followers of mainstream American Protestantism to also take up the rhetoric of the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic Nativists, who created and published salacious rumors and anecdotes that distorted the beliefs and activities of many minority religions. Beecher's anti-Catholic sermon on this subject in 1834 sparked the burning of the Catholic Ursuline sisters' convent in Boston. Beecher took an active part in these theological controversies which ultimately led to a schism in the national Presbytery in 1837. Lyman's son, Henry Ward Beecher, ultimately replaced his father as the most influential Protestant minister in the United States. Historians generally agree that Lyman Beecher's family was among the most influential of 19th-century American families.

The Second Great Awakening spread new religious sects through America like a wildfire spread embers. Campbellites, Shakers, Rappites, Fourierists, and other minor religions popular in the North espoused theories of associative communism and utopian socialism by making provisions for the correction of inequalities of temporal possessions among their members. Many members gave up all their wealth or placed it at the disposal of the congregation. Northern evangelicals were not simply conflicted social conservatives lashing out at what they considered to be fringe religions and cults. Their optimism about the progressive potential of the young country and their pessimism about its moral stability under slavery reflected the concerns of many evangelicals. “Christianity is a radical principle,” wrote one evangelical abolitionist. “A Bible Christian cannot be a conservative.”⁴³

⁴¹ Volo and Volo, *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Daily Life* (Vol. II, 2008), 195, 202-203.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 465.

⁴³ William Jason Wallace, *Catholics, Slaveholders, and the Dilemma of American Evangelicalism, 1835–1860* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2010), 27, <http://www3.undpress.nd.edu/excerpts/P01417-ex.pdf>

The published writings and private correspondence of the ministers at this time suggest disagreements over the role religious convictions should play in a free society. Central to these debates were the proper relationship between church and state in a country where there was no established church and where Christianity itself had, in effect, become democratized. In a lecture intended to inspire lukewarm northerners to consider taking up arms against the South, Henry Ward Beecher reminded his audience, “the North is the nation, and the South is but a fringe.” New England is “that part of this nation which has been the throne of God.” It “has been the source of all that is godlike in American history.”⁴⁴

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, known as Mormons, was viewed with particular animosity and actively persecuted from its establishment in 1823. Mormonism, which had grown substantially during the period, was described as a “local ulcer” and a form of “ecclesiastical despotism.” Its detractors felt free to describe Mormonism as a strange and unusual cult, its followers as irrational or insane, and Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, as a delusional megalomaniac. Ominously, the militaristic and aggressive Nauvoo Legion in Illinois (essentially a Mormon armed militia) had grown to a quarter of the size of the regular U.S. Army at the time. Other issues of contention included polygamy, freedom of speech, and the anti-slavery and pro-Indian (Native American) views expressed during Joseph Smith’s abortive campaign for US President in 1844. Imprisoned along with the Nauvoo City Council in 1844, Smith and his brother Hyrum were killed in an Illinois jail by an anti-Mormon mob. Brigham Young led the church, thereafter, and moved its focus to a remote region in Utah. The Nauvoo Legion carried out the so-called Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857, in which most members of an emigrant wagon train were killed. An investigation, temporarily interrupted by the Civil War, resulted in nine indictments and one conviction in 1874.⁴⁵

The 1834 meeting of the General Association of the Congregational Church of Massachusetts adopted a resolution that urged its ministers to actively confront the degrading influence of Popery. In 1842, the American Protestant Association had formed representing more than four-dozen Protestant clergymen from Pennsylvania. Its objective was to alert the public, through lectures, publications, and revivals, to the dangers of Popery and Roman Catholicism. Catholicism was considered part of a widespread foreign conspiracy to subvert America. The association gained added attention through the lectures of an ex-priest, Father William Hogan, who spread incredible tales about the Catholic Church after leaving it.

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, southern slaveholders, like Catholics, found themselves attacked in the northern evangelical press. Denominational journals such as the *Downfall of Babylon*, *Zion’s Herald*, the *New York Evangelist*, the *New York Observer*, the *Christian Watchman and Examiner*, and the *Oberlin Quarterly Review*, all

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Walter A. Norton, “Comparative Images: Mormonism and Contemporary Religions as Seen by Village Newspapermen in Western New York and Northeastern Ohio, 1820–1833” (PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1991), 13.

voiced a deep hostility toward both Catholicism and slavery. Albert Barnes, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, published a number of caustic treatises on subjects such as prohibition, abolition, and the threat of Catholic immigration. Between 1832 and 1853, he published an eleven-volume theological tome that blasted both popery and slavery entitled *Notes, Explanatory and Practical*, which sold over one million copies.⁴⁶ This alone is suggestive of the commonality of anti-Southern, anti-Catholic bias.

Rhode Island Baptist Francis Wayland was a prolific writer whose 1835 textbook on moral philosophy, *The Elements of Moral Science*, went through several editions in the United States and in England.⁴⁷ He was quick to address political concerns, and he chastised evangelical Christians who failed to vote, or who argued that politics should be of no concern to religious ministers. As a New Englander, Wayland found a natural political enemy in the slaveholding South. His efforts resulted in two celebrated works in 1837, *The Elements of Political Economy* and *The Moral Law of Accumulation*.⁴⁸

When northern evangelical leaders challenged the place of proslavery southerners in the republic, they responded. In 1835, mailbags full of pamphlets with titles such as *Human Rights*, the *Anti-Slavery Record*, the *Slaves' Friend*, and *Thoughts on African Colonization* arrived at the post office in Charleston. The postmaster quickly determined that the literature had been sent to South Carolina courtesy of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and he decided that this mail could not constitutionally be delivered to the citizens of Charleston. That night a crowd of almost 3,000 proslavery supporters seized the offending papers, and the mail served as tinder for a large public bonfire on the parade grounds of the city.

Nativism

Separated somewhat from an abhorrence of the Irish immigrant, a virulent anti-Catholic sentiment was rife among Nativists supported by a malicious and fraudulent press. Rebecca Reed was a young Episcopalian woman from Boston who had attended the Ursuline school in 1831 as a charity scholar, but she left the convent after only six months. In 1835, she produced a gothic novel, *Six Months in a Convent*, which described the convent as a virtual prison, where young girls were forced into the Roman Catholic religious orders, with grotesque punishments for those who refused.⁴⁹ This fraudulent book, along with a growing number of protestant propaganda magazines including the

⁴⁶ Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical*, 11 vols. (New York: Harper, 1832-1853), note that each volume has a different subtitle, not included in this footnote.

⁴⁷ Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science* (New York: Cooke & Co., 1835).

⁴⁸ ———, *The Elements of Political Economy* (New York: Leavitt, Lord, 1837); ———, *The Moral Law of Accumulation; The Substance of Two Discourses Delivered in the First Baptist Meeting House, Providence, May 14, 1837* (Providence, RI: John E. Brown, 1837).

⁴⁹ Rebecca Theresa Reed, *Six Months In A Convent, Or, The Narratives Of Rebecca Theresa Reed, Who Was Under The Influence Of The Roman Catholics About Two Years, And An Inmate Of The Ursuline Convent On Mount Benedict, Charlestown, Mass., Nearly Six Months, In The Years 1831-32*. (Boston: Russell, Odiorne & Metcalf, 1835).

Christian Watchman and Examiner and the *Boston Recorder*, stoked the fires of anti-Catholicism in Boston and the surrounding area.

Reed's book was soon followed by another—the bestselling and clearly fraudulent exposé, *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (1836) by Maria Monk.⁵⁰ Herein it was claimed that a convent in Montreal served as a virtual brothel for Catholic priests, who murdered any resulting children after baptism and buried them in the cellars. The immediate success of the publication brought out the identities of the real authors of this fabrication in a dispute over the division of the profits. Remarkably, several of these were Protestant ministers. The Reverend John Jay Slocum had written the book with the assistance of other anti-Catholic radicals. The book sold 300,000 copies before the Civil War.

Philadelphia was a focus of anti-Catholic protest, second only to Hartford Connecticut in the amount of anti-Catholic materials published. Editor Lewis C. Levin made the *Philadelphia Daily Sun* the main organ for attacks against Catholicism and Irish immigration in the city. The Philadelphia Nativist Riots took place in spring and summer 1844. The Nativists put the Irish community to the torch. Those Irish who fled were shot or beaten leaving 20 dead and 100 injured. Two Catholic churches burned to the ground, along with several blocks of houses, stores, a nunnery and a Catholic school. Catholics were asked to offer no resistance and to wait for the law to deal with the rioters. Martial law was declared, arrests made, and the all non-Irish and non-Catholic juries acquitted every Nativist and convicted every Irish Catholic brought before them.⁵¹

In 1849, a nativist society called the Order of the Star Spangled Banner was founded in New York City. Members of this secretive society were called Know Nothings because they refused to say anything about its inner workings when questioned. The Nativists formed the American Party in 1854 winning several local elections. The party also included many ex-Whigs who ignored its nativism for the benefit of political expediency. During the 19th century, more than 100 nativist newspapers were published in the United States to oppose the surge in immigration and to preserve fundamental American values during a time when many people feared that those values were being eroded.

The nativist attacks produced a reaction among the Catholic population. In 1833, (Bishop) John Hughes started *The Catholic Herald*, the first long-lived diocesan paper in Philadelphia. The newspaper would become the mouthpiece for the campaign to end Protestant proselytizing in the public schools. Hughes, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church, would later gain notoriety as Bishop of New York and founder of the Catholic school system there. As archbishop, Hughes took an unquestionably militant stand in defense of his Church. He rallied the largely Irish Catholic congregations in the city in defense of Catholic institutions, and surrounded churches, convents, and schools with

⁵⁰ Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures Of Maria Monk, As Exhibited In A Narrative Of Her Sufferings During A Residence Of Five Years As A Novice, And Two Years As A Black Nun, In The Hotel Dieu Nunnery At Montreal* (London: W. Nicholson & Sons, 1836).

⁵¹ Ironically, Levin was the first US Congressman of the Jewish faith.

armed guards after anti-Catholic, anti-Irish rioters attacked his own house. Hughes also fought to have anti-Catholic books and the King James Version of the Bible banned from the public schools. Catholics, and specifically the Irish, were openly vilified in the official curriculum of the New York public schools. Based on the principle of freedom of conscience, Catholics could not accept any system of education that ignored, undermined, or opposed their faith.

In 1841, Hughes made an inflammatory speech supporting the alteration of school funding to inhibit the commingling of religious and public monies, and New York Governor William Seward authorized the use of state money “for the establishment of separate schools for the children of foreigners, and their instruction by teachers of their own faith and language.” The public outcry that followed this decision was as immediate as it was massive. Seward, who would be Secretary of State under Lincoln and Johnson, was faced with the partisan charge of trying to curry favor with the Irish Catholics. The final result of the New York controversy was the elimination of all Bibles and Bible reading from the tax-supported schools—an unexpected and early consequence of the novel theory of separation of church and state. Before Hughes’ death in 1864, the New York Diocese contained 150 priests, 85 churches, 3 colleges, 50 schools and academies, and over 400,000 Catholic parishioners.⁵²

The German speakers among immigrants avoided a great deal of tension with the Nativists because they tended to form their own isolated rural conclaves, mostly in Pennsylvania and central New York, rather than assimilating into English speaking communities. By their self-imposed isolation, the Germans achieved a far greater social solidarity than many other groups in America. Most Germans were highly educated and literate in their own language. Frank Leslie introduced a number of newspapers to these readers such as the *Illustrated Zeitung*, a German-language edition aimed at the German immigrant population of the North. A subculture formed among the German speaking peoples, founded in those commonly held religious principles that were derived from the Protestant Revolution. “These religious principles were applied to their daily lives, further shaping the form of the subculture and dictating the values by which these hardy people lived.” This was particularly true among adherents to the Anabaptist and German Pietist movements.⁵³ A decade into the Antebellum Period, many communities founded by German-speaking immigrants in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania “still spoke German, married other Germans, went to German churches, and lived near or next to German neighbors.”⁵⁴

Urbanism

⁵² William Jason Wallace, *Catholics, Slaveholders*, 27, <http://www3.undpress.nd.edu/excerpts/P01417-ex.pdf>

⁵³ Alvin E. Conner, *Sectarian Childrearing: The Dunkers, 1708-1900* (Gettysburg, PA: The Brethren Press, 2000), 1.

⁵⁴ Aaron Spencer Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717-1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 12.

The lower classes of the Northern cities were exceedingly poor and were composed largely of immigrants. Many of the poorest immigrants were Irish Catholics. The Irish were the first truly urban group in America, living in crowded slums rife with crime and disease, and experiencing severe religious prejudice at the hands of the Protestant majority. Observers noted the Irish immigrants at the time for building shanties—structures that were virtual shacks. They were the first immigrants to come into the cities in large numbers, generally during the Irish Potato Famine of 1845–1849. They were also the only immigrant group in which females outnumbered males. Some 19th century social observers noted that many of these were so-called “redundant women,” those without husbands or families with the means to support them.

Many established Americans saw these developments only in prejudicial terms and blamed the slum-like conditions in which the Irish lived on the Irish themselves, ignoring the anti-Irish bigotry of employers and landlords. In addition to being the victims of social prejudice, the Irish were also accused of voting illegally, of selling their votes to unscrupulous politicians, and of engendering crime and immorality. Help wanted advertisements often stated, “Irish need not apply.” The Irish as a group were also accused of undermining the wages and employment opportunities of other Americans. Some of these accusations were technically true, but the circumstances under which they occurred did not justify the reactions of the Nativists.

In eastern cities, employment as a domestic servant paid fairly well—sometimes nearly twice that of factory work. Antebellum society turned more and more for domestic service to women who would not have been considered appropriate as “help” in the 1790s. These included blacks and immigrant women (predominantly Asians in the West after 1850, and the Irish in the East after 1820). Black “house slaves,” both male and female, had sufficed as domestics for generations on Southern plantations, and they continued to do so right through the Civil War and, after emancipation, up to the end of the century. It has been estimated that the Irish in New York City alone sent home over \$20 million to their families in Ireland in the single decade before the Civil War.⁵⁵

The Irish came to be the group most closely associated with employment as urban domestics outside the South. In 1825 in New York, 59 percent of women employed as domestic servants were identified as Irish, 17 percent black, and 24 percent native-born whites. Irish servants were hotly derided in a series of cartoons that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in 1856 and 1857 under the title of “The Miseries of Mistresses.” However, the Irish, being white, were less visibly offensive to the social and political sensibilities of the sometimes-hypocritical upper-class Protestant households that employed domestics but did not want to interact with persons of another race. Even if the Irish were mostly Papists, Catholicism didn't show through a service uniform; and the Irish unlike other immigrant groups could speak and take directions in English. Nonetheless, some of the

⁵⁵ Sean Wilentz, *Chants, Democratic, New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 249.

discrimination toward domestics came to be identified with “Bridget” and her Irish sisters who became characters in popular discussions of the “servant problem” in the press.⁵⁶

Irish-Catholic immigrants continued to experience severe prejudice at the hands of the Protestant majority throughout the century, but as the century progressed beyond the Civil War, the Irish—as an ethnic group—gained some standing in the community because of the great bravery they exhibited on the battlefield especially at Fredericksburg. In this action, the Irish Brigade suffered its most severe casualties of the war with its fighting force reduced from over 1600 to only 256. It was in this action that the 69th New York Regiment received its sobriquet: The Fighting Irish. Among the war-orphaned children of the Northeast region were a large number of Irish, indirect casualties of the brave stands made by the poor immigrant Irishmen who had joined the Union army in an effort to gain acceptance in American society.

Abolitionism

There had been a growing recognition throughout the 19th century especially in the North, that slavery was a great moral and social evil that must be ended. But it was also true that slavery had become uneconomical for the smaller planters leaving it largely the realm of politically influential and wealthy planters. As early as 1816, several Southern states, Virginia, Georgia, Maryland, and Tennessee included, had asked that a site for colonization by freed blacks be procured, and they had jointly petitioned the federal government for financial aid to offset the monetary loss involved in emancipating their slaves. The British government had successfully indemnified its slave-owners for their loss when the slave trade was ended in 1808 (and slavery was outlawed in 1832), but a similar arrangement was not possible in antebellum America, either financially or politically.

In 1817, the American Colonization Society was formed to encourage free blacks to return to Africa. The organizational meeting was held in no less a prestigious place than the chambers of the House of Representatives. Among its founders were Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, James Monroe, and Francis Scott Key. The society drew its initial support from all sections of the country and from both slavery and anti-slavery advocates. Colonization societies outnumbered abolition societies in America right up to the opening of the war. Within two decades of its founding, more than 140 branches of the American Colonization Society were formed in the Southern states. In the North, approximately 100 societies were formed—radical abolition seemingly stealing some of the colonialists' thunder. Unquestionably, the intervention of Northern moralists into the evolution of anti-slavery at this point provided a "fateful check" to any hope of abolition without considerable turmoil.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Susan Strasser, *Never Done, A History of American Housework* (New York: Henry, 1982), 165-166.

⁵⁷ Adams, *South Side View*, 105, 107. Data taken from the table on p. 106.

In 1820, the American Colonization Society began sending black volunteers to the so-called Pepper Coast of West Africa to establish a colony for freed American blacks. These free African Americans developed a culture infused with American notions of both racial supremacy and political republicanism. In 1847, the settlers promulgated a constitution based on the political principles found in the US Constitution. A minority of free blacks espoused great interest in their African homeland, yet a larger number were interested not in Africa, but in other areas outside the United States. Several prominent free blacks, such as poet James Monroe Whitfield, the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, and Dr. Martin Robison Delancy, called for an emphasis on Black Nationalism and militant black unity. It was feared that in the United States freed blacks could always expect to be crawling in the dust at the feet of their former oppressors.⁵⁸

Colonization was very popular as a political expedient. At the time, it was estimated by the proponents of colonization that slavery could be abolished by 1890. Northern abolitionists, unlike prior generations of northern antislavery activists, could not find common ground with colonization or with gradualist white southerners. Of great concern to white southern evangelicals, in the mid-1840s, the two largest religious denominations in the nation, the Baptists and the Methodists, both split geographically over the issue of slavery. White southerners found the mission to the slaves ideologically useful in the escalating conflict with northern antislavery evangelicals. It seemingly validated white evangelicals' conviction that slavery and Christianity could go hand in hand.⁵⁹

In 1854, Reverend Nehemiah Adams seemingly lauded slavery as beneficial to what he termed "the Negroes' religious character." With some evident embarrassment, he wrote: "A wholesome restraint is laid upon the colored population. The moral and religious character of the colored people at the south owes very much to this restraint ... How to say enough of preconceived notions respecting slavery, so as to compare subsequent impressions with them, and yet not enough to give southern friends room to exult and say that we all have false and exaggerated notions about slavery, is somewhat difficult."⁶⁰

During the debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858, Lincoln had expressed both support for colonization and a belief in an inherent inequality among the races. He disclaimed any hopes for "social and political equality of the White and Black races," and disavowed any plan to make "voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people." Most important, he pledged his support for colonization of freed slaves, saying, "There is a physical difference between the White and Black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality." True to his word, in 1862, one year before the

⁵⁸ John W. Blassingame, *The Clarion Voice* (Washington: National Parks Service, 1976), 18.

⁵⁹ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), location 2470, Kindle edition.

⁶⁰ Adams, *South Side View*, Locations 2-7, Kindle edition.

Emancipation Proclamation, the president signed a congressional appropriation of \$100,000 for the purpose of encouraging black colonization.⁶¹

Anti-Constitutionalism

The abolitionists demanded immediate, unreimbursed emancipation and integration of freed blacks into white society, not gradualism and separation. For them the Constitution was “a covenant with death and an agreement with hell; involving both parties [North and South] in atrocious criminality, and should be immediately annulled.” No price, including war and disunion, was too great to pay in the cause of ending slavery and racial prejudice. The rhetoric of Wendell Phillips, a leading abolitionist in Massachusetts, provided an example to the South, and all of America, of just how far the radicals were willing to go when he suggested “trampling the laws and Constitution of the country” to gain their ends. Such rhetoric was seen as a call for civil disorder, even violence, on a massive level. A magnificent orator, Phillips was the most popular public speaker at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society meetings.⁶²

Antislavery as a principle was far more than just the wish to limit the extent of slavery. Most Northerners recognized that under any theory of law slavery existed legally in the South and that the Constitution did not allow the federal government to intervene there. In the 1850s after the publication of *The Unconstitutionality of Slavery* by Lysander Spooner, the abolitionist movement split into two camps over the *abolition and replacement* of the Constitution itself! In his pamphlet, Spooner argued that none of the state constitutions of the slave states specifically authorized slavery and that the US Constitution contained several clauses that could be construed as contradictory with slave-owning. Many radical abolitionists like Phillips (and Garrison) welcomed the formation of the Confederacy because they thought it would end the Slave Power stranglehold in the United States Senate and Supreme Court. This extra-constitutional position was rejected by many others including Abraham Lincoln, who insisted on holding the Union together while gradually ending slavery. The Republican Party wanted to achieve the gradual extinction of slavery through market forces rather than by legislation that could be overturned in the courts. Disappointed with Lincoln's slow reaction to abolition, despite the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, Phillips actively opposed his reelection in 1864.

Appointed editor of the *National Philanthropist* in Boston in 1828, William Lloyd Garrison became associated with Benjamin Lundy, who in 1815 had organized an antislavery association called the Union Humane Society and printed circulars addressed to the people of the United States urging the formation of antislavery societies. In 1824, Lundy attended the American Convention for the Abolition of Slavery held in Philadelphia and met some of the leaders of the movement from the older states. Among them was Reverend Lyman Beecher, who promised, “to flood the country with abolition tracts.” The radicals among the abolitionists berated the gradualists and the colonialists as

⁶¹ Ibid., locations 18-20, Kindle edition.

⁶² Douglass, *Narrative*, xvii.

being less than completely dedicated to the cause of emancipation. “Denunciation, sneers, and public rebuke, were bestowed indiscriminately upon the conductors of the enterprise, and of course they fell upon many sincere, upright, and conscientious men, whose feelings were harrowed by a sense of the injustice, the indecorum, and the unchristian treatment, they received,” noted Catherine Beecher in a published essay to South Carolina firebrand abolitionist Sarah Grimké. “Compare this method of carrying a point, with that adopted by [William] Wilberforce and his compeers, and I think you will allow that there was a way that was peaceful and Christian, and that this was not the way which was chosen.”⁶³

For decades the Park Street Church in Boston played a significant role in the American abolitionist movement. In 1829, organizers invited Garrison to speak. In what was Garrison’s first public address, he eagerly accepted the invitation and delivered a monumental speech from the pulpit. Referring to the words of the Declaration of Independence, Garrison assaulted America as shamefully hypocritical for celebrating the notion that “all men are born equal” while keeping two million slaves in “hopeless bondage.” Afterwards, he established his own anti-slavery newspaper, the *Liberator*. A commentator noted of Garrison, “He slept with his armor on, and was ready to do battle without strategy or negotiation. This program was absolutely devoid of qualification or allowance for circumstances of time or inherited conditions. *Immediate emancipation* was early blazoned on his standards.”⁶⁴

In *Thoughts on African Colonization* (1832), Garrison went so far as to suggest that the gradualists and colonialists were actually covert supporters of slavery, allowing slave-owners to “sell their slaves south” to the West Indies, thereby recouping their considerable investment in slave property. Radicals among the abolitionists seem to have harbored a desire to punish Southern slave-owners through the enforced loss of their “investment” even if the South was willing to end the practice. They, thereby, made the possibility of a peaceful end to slavery as an institution more remote. Garrison argued that colonization would make Americans “abominably hypocritical.”⁶⁵

Garrison was never restrained in his criticism of any topic he considered iniquitous or unjust. Although he did not, in any real sense, lead the American anti-slavery movement, he was possibly the most conspicuous of the radicals. In 1845, he wrote in the highly idealized style typical of the movement: “Be faithful, be vigilant, be untiring in your efforts to break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free. Come what may—cost what it

⁶³ Catherine Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism Addressed to Miss A.D. Grimké* (Philadelphia, Perkins, 1837).

⁶⁴ Lindsay Swift, *William Lloyd Garrison* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1911), 17.

⁶⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African colonization, or, An impartial exhibition of the doctrines, principles and purposes of the American Colonization Society: together with the resolutions, addresses, and remonstrances of the free people of color* (Boston : Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 134.

may—inscribe on the banner which you unfurl to the breeze, as your religious and political motto—`No Compromise with Slavery! No Union with Slaveholders!'"⁶⁶

Frustrated in its attempt to convert Southern moderates, the abolitionist movement of the 1840s became closely focused on a Northern audience. The abolition leadership, however, disagreed among themselves over how best to proceed, and a serious rift developed over the question of tactics. Consequently, about half the membership of Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society split from the organization and formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society under the leadership of Louis Tappan, founder of the *Journal of Commerce* and his brother Arthur who was also an abolitionist. Louis Tappan was a significant antislavery activist. He financed the defense of the Africans from the slave ship *Amistad* in 1841, and was a founder with his brother Arthur of the American Missionary Association (1846), which opened many schools for black freedmen in the Midwest. The Tappanites had no objection to political activity supporting the Liberty Party and anti-slavery candidates from the major parties, but calls for extra-legal and un-constitutional tactics went too far. To his other brother Benjamin, a US Senator from Ohio, Lewis wrote that slavery "was the worm at the tree of liberty. Unless killed, the tree will die."⁶⁷

The Garrisonians tended to embrace religious views outside the evangelical mainstream. They tended to be Unitarians, Transcendentalists, or fallen-away Quakers who had seceded from their original meetings. Philosophical Unitarianism was thought by some to be more closely aligned with the members of certain regional utopian communities such as Hopedale, Northampton, or Brook Farm than with the goals of the wider evangelical reform community.

The followers of social architect Charles Fourier would be relatively unimportant except that they included a group of literary giants from New England known as Transcendentalists, who practiced a form of Christian humanitarianism at Brook Farm in Massachusetts. These literary giants included Ralph Waldo Emerson who helped to finance the community from his own pocket. The group sought to propagate the movement by buying a weekly column in Horace Greeley's *Daily Tribune* and by publishing their own literary work in *The Dial*. In *American Notes*, Dickens noted the "good healthy qualities" of the group. "If I were a Bostonian, I think I would be a Transcendentalist." Nonetheless, the movement was largely unsuccessful in sustaining itself, falling heavily in debt because of the lack of expertise exhibited by its adherents, who were much better at crafting essays and poems than furniture and textiles. Emerson later sued for the return of over \$500 in loans made to the community.⁶⁸

Although calls to violence were not characteristic of the abolition movement, the rhetoric of the outspoken radicals was couched in inflammatory and unambiguous terms

⁶⁶ Douglass, *Narrative*, xiv.

⁶⁷ Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶⁸ Dickens, *American Notes*, 1044.

aimed at ending slavery—"Law or No law, constitution or no constitution."⁶⁹ Abolitionists vowed to work with "invincible determination" regardless of the consequences. The radicals publicly disavowed the unsettling concept of slaves shedding the blood of their oppressors, but they recognized that there was "no neutral ground in this matter, and the time [was] near when they will be compelled to take sides."⁷⁰

Abolitionists (specifically the so-called Secret Six) endorsed John Brown's attempt to foment an armed slave rebellion in Virginia by attacking Harper's Ferry in 1858. Brown had traveled widely to raise funds for his enterprise, visiting Worcester, Springfield, New Haven, Syracuse and Boston. In Boston, he met with Frederick Douglass, Thoreau, and Emerson none of whom countenanced his idea. He received many pledges but little cash. In the call for a slave rebellion, the goal of which was "to attack the slave power in its most vulnerable point," the South perceived a very real physical threat. Against this background the writings and speeches of the radicals proved truly heavy rhetoric. Brown was arrested by troops under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee. He was tried for treason and hanged in 1859. The last official act of Governor Henry Alexander Wise of Virginia was to sign the death warrant. Wise went on to be a Confederate brigadier general.⁷¹

The so-called Secret Six were Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Samuel Gridley Howe, Theodore Parker, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Gerrit Smith, and George Luther Stearns. All six had been involved in the abolitionist cause prior to their meeting Brown, but each had gradually become convinced that slavery would not die a peaceful death. Of the six, only Smith and Stearns were truly wealthy. During and after his trial, the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald* began to link the names of the Secret Six with Brown's. Smith had himself confined to an insane asylum to escape prosecution, denying that he had been involved in supporting Brown. Howe, Sanborn, and Stearns fled to Canada temporarily to avoid arrest, and Parker was already in Italy convalescing from an illness that would cause his death in 1860. During the undeclared war in Bleeding Kansas, Parker had supplied money for weapons for the free state militias, which firearms were shipped in crates identified as Bibles. Henry Ward Beecher declared the 900 breech-loading rifles a greater moral agency for abolition than the Bible, and the weapons quickly acquired the sobriquet "Breecher's Bibles" in the press. Higginson never fled the country and actively raised money for Brown's defense. He later served as colonel of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, the first authorized black regiment recruited from among slaves for the Federal service in the Civil War, and thereafter he devoted much of the rest of his life to fighting for the rights of freedmen, women, and other disfranchised persons. Higginson is best remembered as a correspondent of and literary mentor to the poet Emily Dickinson.

⁶⁹ Garrison, *The Liberator* (Boston), December 15, 1837.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., May 31, 1844.

Disunionism

The legal bar of Fauquier County, Virginia was a hotbed of secession. According to attorney and editor of the *Richmond Whig*, John Scott, who as a member of the Virginia Black Horse Militia had attended Brown at his execution, the southern militia were “all young gentlemen of the first respectability, and were either themselves planters or sons of planters. The rank and file were composed of young men of the same social material with the officers.” Of the half dozen original officers of the Black Horse, only one was not a lawyer. Groups like the Black Horse patrolled the border regions making every effort to disrupt the activities of the abolitionists and their Underground Railroad. William Payne, once at Virginia Military Institute and graduated from the University of Virginia’s law school, wrote that they were “all disunionists *per se* before the war. As far back as '56, we used to confer over the approaching dissolution, which we then considered certain. The company was avowedly raised with reference to the war, which we ... believed would occur at the next election [i.e. 1860].”⁷²

South Carolina had promised to secede if Abraham Lincoln was elected president in November 1860, and with Lincoln president-elect, there was a rush of seven Southern states to form the Confederate States of America (CSA). Five Southern states had quickly followed South Carolina’s example: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana. In February, Texas came on board. At first it appeared that only these seven states would secede.

It had been an eventful winter (1860-1861) that preceded the outbreak of the Civil War. The salient feature of that time, apart from the palpable excitement of forming armed militias and the extravagant romanticism, was the uncertainty. A real shooting war seemed inevitable, yet the temporizing continued. For the first twenty-five days of its existence, the Confederate States of America had no officially approved flag, their attention being focused on creating a constitution that so embedded the rights of individual states and protected slavery that they could not be questioned. The new Confederacy went forward under a flag with seven stars seizing forts, plundering arsenals, terrorizing unionist supporters, and threatening the federal government. The arming of troops proceeded without check, and hostile cannon were defiantly pointed at federal installations.

The real intention of the Confederacy to be free of the Federal government had been revealed in its assault upon Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. By April, four more Southern states (North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas) joined the Confederacy in response to Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers to save the Union, or—depending on the point of view—to invade the South. Two more southern states—Missouri and Kentucky—were deemed to be under Northern occupation, and the Confederate flag was altered to exhibit thirteen stars, not accidentally the same number that had fought the Revolution.

⁷² Lynn Hopewell, *A Biographical Register of the Members of Fauquier County Virginia’s Black Horse Cavalry, 1859-1865* (Warrenton, VA: Black Horse Press, 2003), 17.

Northerners responded to the act of disunion in a variety of ways. A young woman wrote, "The storm has broken over us ... How strange and awful it seems." In the North the stock markets fell and banks began to call in their loans. Many businessmen, forgetful of their recent enthusiasm for abolition, panicked at the specter of near bankruptcy. Yet initially the majority of the people celebrated the coming of the storm with fervor and enthusiasm. "We have flags on our papers and envelopes, and have all our stationery bordered with red, white and blue," wrote another woman. "We wear little flag pins for badges and tie our hair with red, white and blue ribbons and have pins and earrings made of the buttons the soldiers gave us."

Secessionist sentiment pervaded the churches, the shops, and even the schools of the South. Southern women sewed and wore so-called "secession bonnets and aprons" in the mode of the new Confederate flag. Pro-secession radicals smashed unfriendly presses, banned books, and fought duels with Unionists. The fire-eaters turned every news article, pamphlet, sermon, and play into a propaganda piece for secession. Even minor confrontations with the Unionists, were declared crises upon whose immediate resolution rested the very survival of the South. Women gathered to sew uniforms in butternut and gray, and they made up "scrap lint and roll-up bandages" in the churches and the local courthouses.⁷³

The Antebellum Period was over. The young men seemed perfectly crazy to rush home and show off their uniforms, and one young woman wrote, "It seems very patriotic and grand ... for one's country to die." Both quickly repudiated the romance, the adventure, and the faded glory surrounding the war once the battle had been joined. Civil War had come to America.⁷⁴

⁷³ Caroline C. Richards, *Village Life in America, 1852-1872* (Gansevoort, NY: Corner Book, 1997), 130-131.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.