

ABSTRACT

According to the standard view of Southern history, there was a strong antislavery tradition in the South until the 1830's when the militant abolitionist attacks upon not only slavery but also slaveholders forced Southerners into a defense of their peculiar institution. This view overlooks, however, the strong proslavery tradition that also existed in the South from 1790 to 1830. This study is an attempt to re-examine this period and consider the proslavery arguments that did exist in the early United States.

Examining sources primarily from the public forum, such as speeches, newspaper articles, and pamphlets, this study focuses upon the proslavery positions presented in the early republic. It looks at not only the actual statements but also the rationale behind them. The defenses used ranged from Biblical sanction and historical precedent to "scientific" evidence, from constitutionalism and economics to social considerations and racism. In each instance, proslavery advocates justified the institution of black slavery, and the way of life based on it, as not only necessary but also beneficial for both whites and blacks.

Proslavery sentiment, however, was not a monolithic

and unchanging creed during the period, but rather a fluid pattern of belief very much affected by other events of the period, such as the debates over ending the slave trade, the Missouri controversy, Denmark Vesey's attempted insurrection, and the efforts to get federal funding for emancipation and colonization. What did exist was a series of disjointed but interconnecting arguments which formed a disparate combination of special pleadings and appeals.

Initially, in 1790, the majority of Southerners either quietly accepted the institution of chattel slavery or else were apologetic about it. This posture changed with the expansion of the institution and the attacks upon it. Whether fully accepted by everyone or not, by the Revolutionary period the institution of black slavery was an integral part of the Southern way of life. Both economically and socially many Southerners regarded slavery as necessary, and saw attacks upon it as attacks upon their way of life; thus, they rushed to defend slavery and slaveholding. By 1830, with repeated assertions and elaborations, the earlier disjointed arguments had been welded into a fairly comprehensive proslavery defense which lay a firm foundation for the later militant "positive good" theory of slavery.

In retrospect it seems that in the early republic slavery's advocates were as proslavery as they needed to be to defend the institution. Proslavery postures were so muted in these early years because the institution was basically accepted and proponents felt no real need to

justify that which was so little questioned. However as the attacks upon the institution became more aggressive and pointed, so too did the defense and justifications for slavery. In the final analysis, the difference between the pro-slavery sentiment of the early republic and that of the post-1830's was not the degree of the acceptance or commitment to black slavery, but the degree of the public acknowledgement and emotionalism attached to that commitment.

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PREFACE

The South of the early republic was scarcely co-extensive with the states of the later Confederacy. The two were separate entities with only a few common characteristics. The most obvious difference was territory: many of the states which formed the Confederate States of America were not in existence, not even a part of the territory of the United States, in 1790. Likewise, some states of "the South" in 1790 remained loyal and a part of the Union in 1860. It is thus imperative that the Confederate States of America not be read backwards to the South of 1790.

The South of 1790 had a population of about 1,960,000, primarily in the tidewater-piedmont areas of the six states of Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. By 1830 this population had grown to about 5,850,000 in twelve states and two organized territories. In 40 years the "settled" area of the South had nearly tripled its area to a little over 630,000 square miles. This expansion of the South, and with it plantation agriculture and the institution of Negro slavery, was one of the most important developments of the early national period.

Regardless of any geographical distinction historians

may care to draw, "the South" remains an elusive quality that presupposes a sectional consciousness, a sectional feeling among the various members of the region. It is highly questionable, however, that such a consciousness existed in 1790.

Few historians of the South have seen such a strong sectional consciousness existing in the eighteenth century.¹ At best, it appears that in 1790 there was localism and provincialism. People tended to think of themselves first as Virginians or South Carolinians and then only as Southerners or Americans. In 1790 either of the latter two categories could come just as easily. A Federalist merchant of Charleston, for example, undoubtedly felt closer to New Yorkers of the same type occupation than to Republican planters in Virginia.² In other words, in 1790 there was no particular self-consciousness of being Southern. Even slavery was a "national" institution in 1790; of the estimated nearly three-quarter million slaves in the country in 1790, over 11 per cent were held in northern states.³

¹John Alden, The First South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961) posited a "first South" that behaved as a section before 1790 but few others have picked up his suggestion.

²See for example, Jackson T. Main, The Antifederalists (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), especially chapters 1-3; and also The Social Structure of Revolutionary America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

³John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom (3rd ed.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 145.

However, the fact that this percentage was so small, and constantly shrinking, pointed to the development of slavery as a peculiarly Southern institution during the period of 1790-1830. Significantly, slavery thus became one of the primary means of distinguishing the South from the rest of the country. It was also evident that slavery gave to the South a social system and civilization distinct from the rest of the country, a civilization that had its own economy, ideology, and set of psychological patterns increasingly linked to slavery. Very rapidly many Southerners thus began to perceive an attack upon slavery as an attack upon the whole Southern life style.

In many respects the contest over statehood for Missouri in 1819-20 was a key event in the development of both a Southern self-consciousness and the proslavery argument. Richard H. Brown in his article on the Missouri conflict attempted to delineate the connection between slavery, sectionalism and states rights. He stated that in Jefferson's time the connection between these was "implicit," but after Missouri it was "explicit."⁴ Glover Moore in his study of Missouri tied the controversy directly to the diminishing of liberalism in the South. Moore claimed that the troubles

⁴Richard H. Brown, "The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LXV (Winter, 1966), p. 58.

over Missouri brought Jefferson and his generation "as close to the smoke and battle of the Civil War as they would ever get, and it is significant that they reacted to the situation not as liberals, not as apostles of the Enlightenment, but as Southerners."⁵ Moore may have overstated the case, but it is important to realize the significance of the Missouri controversy in the development of a conscious Southern sectionalism.

Debates over slavery restriction in Missouri were also of crucial importance in terms of slavery sentiment itself. The debates over restriction combined with the public comment on them soon made it clear that most Southerners no longer looked to eventual emancipation and the ultimate extinction of slavery, but had come to regard the institution as necessary and even beneficial. Although it was the Virginians who were most upset about the final Missouri Compromise itself, people from all areas of the South had defended the institution of slavery during the debates.

Furthermore, in the years immediately following the controversy, the slavery question was never far beneath the surface of other issues. Denmark Vesey's attempted insurrection in Charleston in 1822 was attributed by many South Carolinians to Rufus King's speeches on the Missouri question,

⁵Glover Moore, The Missouri Controversy 1819-1821 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), p. 256.

and was proof to Southerners of the danger of outside interference with slavery. In the years 1823-1825, Southerners were highly suspicious of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams's attempts to work out a convention with Great Britain to prevent the slave trade. The Ohio Resolves of 1824 to use proceeds from the sale of public lands to pay for emancipation, and Attorney General William Wirt's decision in 1824 that South Carolina's Negro Seamen's Act was unconstitutional also served to keep the issue of slavery, and the federal government's position in regard to it, before the public.⁶ Adams was even accused of giving away Texas in the 1819 Florida treaty with Spain in order to limit the growth of the South.⁷

Thus by the 1820's the issue of slavery was becoming of critical importance to most Southerners. In the early years of the nation, the slavery issue had rarely impinged on other areas of concern; it was an issue of its own, unconnected to other problems and it entered politics only where directly involved, such as in the fugitive slave law and the debates over ending the foreign slave trade. By the mid-1820's, however, such a separation no longer existed. Southern concerns over defending the institution of slavery began to have an effect in other areas, even foreign affairs as in

⁶Brown, "Missouri Crisis," pp. 65-66.

⁷Ibid.

the debates over sending delegates to the Panama Conference demonstrate. Increasingly, accretions of federal power were opposed because they might represent the "entering wedge" of precedent needed for an interference with slavery. By 1830, then, Southerners for the most part no longer looked to eventual emancipation and the ultimate extinction of slavery, but had come to regard the institution as not only permanent but also necessary for their existence, and they were justifying the institution in those terms.

Just as the South of 1790 differed from that of 1830, and 1860, so too did the institution of slavery. The stereotyped image of Southern black slavery, painted so romantically by the "moonlight and magnolias" school of novelists, is that of a gang of slaves, hoes on their shoulders, shuffling off to the cotton fields, laughing and singing all the way while in the background sits the huge Georgian mansion. Unfortunately, the image was far different from the reality. Slavery was not a monolithic institution; it differed not only from place to place but also from time to time.

William Scarborough in his study of the plantation overseer divided the South into four areas, based on its particular staple crop, with each area having its own type of plantation routine and management. He delineated these areas as the tobacco and grain regions of the Upper South, the rice coast of South Carolina and Georgia, the Louisiana sugar parishes, and the cotton belt of the Lower South.⁸

These divisions were probably adequate for discussing the role of the overseer but they fail to cover all areas where slavery was used. Scarborough left out, for example, the hemp regions of Kentucky and Missouri, slavery in the cities, and the "indentured servants" in Indiana and Illinois.

Basically, however, Scarborough did delimit the major types of Southern plantation slavery. Evidently, of these types of slavery, that in Kentucky and Missouri was the mildest. Slavery in these areas was much more a domestic than a commercial institution. Family servants constituted the bulk of ownership and few families owned more than one family of Negroes. In such cases the differences between master and slave were minimized; they usually worked side by side, dressing and eating similarly, often even living under the same roof. The majority of the slaves were used as personal servants or in general farming under the direct supervision of the master. The great plantations with the overseer and gangs of driven blacks were uncommon in both Kentucky and Missouri.⁹ The historian of slavery in Kentucky, J. Winston Coleman, claimed that Kentucky's slavery was a "patriarchal type" and that furthermore it was more than

⁸William K. Scarborough, The Overseer (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. xiv.

⁹J. Winston Coleman, Jr., Slavery Times in Kentucky (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940). Harrison A. Trexler, Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1914).

likely "the mildest that existed anywhere in the world."¹⁰ Other historians support Coleman in his view of the mildness of the institution in the Upper South. James Ballagh in his monograph on Virginia slavery also viewed the system as patriarchal in Virginia, and one where "bad treatment was the exception rather than the rule."¹¹

It seems clear, then, that this upper tier of southern states, the hemp-tobacco-grain producing areas, possessed the mildest form of slavery, representing the institution at its most humane. However, slavery in this region did pose one serious disadvantage to the slave. Slavery in this area was so "mild," so much more domestic than commercial, that it developed a surplus of slaves. Thus very early a domestic slave trade began from the Upper to the Lower South, especially after the post-1815 cotton boom.¹² Clearly, all this surplus was not fully due to the mildness of the institution; Coleman, for example, charged that some slave owners in the border states actually went so far as to breed slaves for the Southern markets.¹³

¹⁰Coleman, Slavery in Kentucky, p. 15.

¹¹James C. Ballagh, A History of Slavery in Virginia (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1902), pp. 100-102.

¹²The best study of the domestic slave trade is still Frederic Bancroft, Slave-Trading in the Old South (Baltimore: J. H. Furst Company, 1931). Also see Lewis C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1933), especially Vol. II, Chapter XXVIII.

By far the largest percentage of slaves in the United States was used on cotton plantations in the Lower South. The production of cotton provided one of the most advantageous uses for slave labor because at almost every stage of its cultivation the entire slave force might be used in some capacity. Furthermore, the cultivation of cotton required less skill in handling compared to other staples.¹⁴

Several monographs have been written on slavery in the cotton states; one of the best of these state studies is Charles Sydnor's Slavery in Mississippi. Sydnor found that the institution in Mississippi, like most of the rest of the southwest, was "an offshoot of the same institution in the older slave States rather than an indigenous growth."¹⁵ Sydnor found, not surprisingly, that as cotton production rose so did the demands for slave labor; there was a direct connection between the increase in the number of slaves and the profitability of cotton. In every one of the decades between 1800 and 1830 the slave population of Mississippi

¹³Coleman, Slavery in Kentucky, pp. 143-44. Bancroft, Slave Trading, p. 68, called attention to the high number of slave advertisements that used the term "breeding" in them.

¹⁴Ralph B. Flanders, Plantation Slavery in Georgia (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1933), pp. 62, 84.

¹⁵Charles S. Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933), p. viii.

doubled.¹⁶ Indeed, in Mississippi, like the rest of the southwest, the supply of slaves seldom equaled the demand. Thus in direct contrast to the Upper South, the Lower South was primarily a slave-buying area.

Louisiana, Georgia and South Carolina each had its cotton producing areas and a slavery system similar to that of Mississippi and the rest of the cotton belt. Each of these states, however, also had its own particular form of slavery. In Louisiana it was the sugar plantations; in lowland Georgia and South Carolina the rice plantations.¹⁷ Both areas had a reputation of being extremely hard on slaves: the rice region because of the health and working conditions of the low lands, the sugar plantations because of the danger and overwork during the harvesting season. Joe Gray Taylor, in his study of slavery in Louisiana, however, suggested that this "frightening legend" may have been encouraged by the planters in other states to keep their own slaves in line because of the fear of being "sold down the river." Taylor claimed that most slaves on the sugar plantations actually looked forward to the harvesting season.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁷Flanders, Slavery in Georgia. Taylor, Slavery in Louisiana. William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

¹⁸Joe Gray Taylor, Negro Slavery in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana Historical Association, 1963), p. 77.

Although there were these regional differences in the institution of slavery, the actual treatment of the slave was more dependent on the size of the plantation than on the region. Generally, the larger the plantation the less likely to have direct planter-owner supervision, and the more likely to experience harsh treatment. This was especially true in the instances where the planter was an absentee owner.¹⁹

Just as slavery differed from region to region and from owner to owner in the South, so too did it change from the liberalism of the American Revolution. Winthrop D. Jordan claimed that the reaction set in as early as the 1790's and pointed to the more stringent state requirements for manumission to prove his point. This early, he contended, the system began to assume the qualities of the familiar antebellum institution, especially in the areas where slavery was most viable.²⁰ Sydnor's observation about the institu-

Coleman claimed that the "mere threat to 'sell South' or 'down the river' was often an effective correction for the most unruly slave." Slavery in Kentucky, p. 173.

¹⁹H. M. Henry, The Police Control of the Slave in South Carolina (Emory, Virginia: [n.p.,] 1914), p. 53; Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi, pp. 69, 192; Chase C. Mooney, Slavery in Tennessee, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), pp. 100, 180-83; Coleman, Slavery in Kentucky, pp. 15, 45.

²⁰Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 405. At another point he asserted that slavery was ameliorated after the Revolution but it was hard to determine how much. This amelioration could also produce some negative results, see below. Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp. 206-07, also remarked on the "reverse trend toward in-

tion in Mississippi applies with equal force to the rest of the South. He asserted that when slaves were few in number the slave code could be simple, exceptions could be made, and benevolence and liberalism shown; however, when the slave population grew large, a more detailed code was developed, exceptions were frowned upon, paternalism gave way to a more systematic government with slavery becoming a more fixed institution.²¹ Taylor contended that in Louisiana the "letter of the law indicate[d] that the position of the bondsman became more hopeless with the passing of time."²² Ralph Flanders tied the change into the shifting economic picture, contending that "whatever liberality" had existed during the Revolutionary period disappeared "as the cotton belt was developed and slave prices rose."²³ Even in Virginia, Ballagh claimed, as the nineteenth century advanced, planters took a less paternalistic view of their slaves and began to be

creasing restrictions" after the "generation of liberalization following the American Revolution."

²¹Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi, p. 247. Andrew E. Murray, Presbyterians and the Negro - a History (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), pp. 64-65 agreed with Sydnor but approached the issue from the other end. Murray claimed that slaveholding became more concentrated on fewer and fewer large plantations so that by 1830 the "old patriarchal form was giving way to a more highly organized form."

²²Taylor, Slavery in Louisiana, p. 195.

²³Flanders, Slavery in Georgia, pp. 248-49.

concerned with the "speculative value of the property element in the slave."²⁴

Aiding this collapse of liberalism was the fact that there were some successes during this period against the worst abuses of the institution which, paradoxically, only served to strengthen the system and weaken antislavery. As such recognized evils of slavery as branding were eliminated, people increasingly accepted the institution itself.²⁵ The best example of this circumstance at work was the agitation over the foreign slave trade. With few exceptions, nineteenth century Americans could unite in excoriating this aspect of slavery. However, under threats from South Carolina and Georgia, the Constitutional Convention had allowed the states to keep control of slave importations for twenty years.²⁶ As the time approached when the national government could act, most of the country united behind this action. By

²⁴Ballagh, Slavery in Virginia, p. 98.

²⁵For a discussion of how this process worked to change the criminal trials of slaves, see Daniel J. Flanigan, "Criminal Procedure in Slave Trials in the Antebellum South," The Journal of Southern History, XL (November, 1974).

²⁶Article I, Section 9, Clause 1. "The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year One thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person." As has been observed by others earlier, note the care taken in not using the term "slave."

outlawing such clearly inhumane practices, the acceptance of the institution of slavery itself was strengthened. As Winthrop Jordan observed in his work on white attitudes toward Negroes, "the humanitarian impulse helped make slavery more benevolent and paternal and hence more tolerable" Referring specifically to action against the slave trade, Jordan claimed it "salved the nation's conscience that something was being done about slavery."²⁷ Thus, ironically, such small successes made the ultimate extinction of slavery even harder.

Slavery was not a dying institution in the years 1790-1830. Indeed, this was one of the periods of its greatest expansion. In addition to slavery's strong push into the southwest during this period, there was even a lengthy attempt to overthrow the Ordinance of 1787 so that slavery could be introduced into Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.²⁸ It is true

²⁷Jordan, White Over Black, pp. 368, 373. Merton L. Dillon, Benjamin Lundy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), p. 12, claimed that even the antislavery leaders who, in a telling phrase, "remained true to their earlier convictions" had resigned themselves to the conclusion that with abolition in the North and the ending of the foreign slave trade "all readily attainable antislavery goals have been reached" and further victories would not come in their life times.

²⁸For the full story on the slavery agitation in Indiana and Illinois, see Jacob P. Dunn, Jr., Indiana, A redemption from Slavery (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905); and John D. Barnhart, Valley of Democracy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), chapters 9, 11-13.

that by 1820 the free states had a larger population, but the slave states controlled many more square miles of territory. If the three organized territories of Missouri, Arkansas and Florida are included, then the South had over twice as much territory: Over 630,000 square miles to the North's 300,000 square miles.

As new lands to the west were opened and the cotton market continued to boom, the demand for Negro slaves continued to increase. For example, in each decade between 1800-1840 the slave population of Mississippi more than doubled from less than 4,000 in 1800 to over 195,000 in 1840.²⁹ From 1810 to 1830 the slave population of Louisiana increased from less than 35,000 to nearly 110,000.³⁰ This same process was also going on in the older states. In 1790, whites outnumbered blacks in South Carolina by over 30,000; however, by 1820, although the white population had nearly doubled, it was outnumbered by blacks.³¹ In just the four years that the slave trade was legally open in South Carolina from 1803-1807, 39,075 slaves were imported directly from Africa.³²

²⁹Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi, p. 186.

³⁰Taylor, Slavery in Louisiana, p. 37.

³¹Alfred G. Smith, Jr., Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1958), pp. 4-5.

³²Figures come from William Smith's speech in Congress. Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 76-77 (December 8, 1820).

Throughout the early decades of the republic thousands more were smuggled into the country illegally. Numbers alone indicate how greatly slavery increased. Despite the thousands of slaves that were either carried off by the British, or escaped to them during the War of 1812, the number of slaves in the United States between 1790-1830 still increased by over one and a half million, an increase of slightly over 200 per cent. Significantly, slaves were increasing at a faster rate than were free blacks. It is also a reflection of the increasing acceptance of slavery that free blacks in Slave States increased at a slower rate between 1810-1830 than they had between 1790-1810, indicating that manumissions were falling off. Furthermore, despite the increased population, the price of slaves, though fluctuating, tended to increase.³³

All of these developments did have an effect on the pro-slavery argument. In the years between 1790 and 1830 the very terms of the public slavery defense changed. In 1790 most Southerners were still referring to the evils of slavery, and publicly, still looking forward to its eventual end. By 1830, however, most Southerners were rather openly accepting slavery with little apology for it. Various forces in these forty years had moved the majority of Southerners from

³³For a succinct look at slave prices in four different markets from 1795-1860, see Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), chart opposite page 370.

an alleged emancipationist sentiment to an acceptance and defense of slavery as beneficial and essential for the Southern way of life. So rapid a change in attitude very likely could not have taken place unless there was at least some ambivalence about slavery and its benefit in the early period. There were those who were clearly militant defenders of slavery even during the height of the Revolutionary sentiment. There were also those in the late eighteenth century whose apologetic tones for slavery were really a mask for their actual proslavery sentiment. By 1830 developments had so altered the South that an antislavery facade was no longer needed to cover proslavery beliefs.

Available evidence also indicates that the proslavery position was influenced not only by time but also by region. Not surprisingly, the Lower South was always more firmly committed to slavery, its defense, and its continuation than was the Upper South. A clear example of such proslavery sentiment was the efforts by delegates from South Carolina and Georgia in the Constitutional Convention to keep the foreign slave trade open. H. M. Henry in his monograph on slavery in South Carolina claimed that even if the South Carolina legislature had allowed emancipation, it was "probable" that such manumissions would have been lower in South Carolina than many of the other states because of the general acceptance of slavery.³⁴ In his studies Henry found nothing to indicate

³⁴Henry, Police Control in South Carolina, p. 176.

that in South Carolina there was ever any movement or even "serious discussion of the advisability of abolishing slavery or devising any plan that would eventually lead to it."³⁵

Ralph B. Flanders, writing on slavery in Georgia, went so far as to propose that the laws in the Lower South against the domestic slave trade were really influenced by proslavery leanings. The people of this region did not want to depopulate the border states of slaves and thus help the abolition sentiment in those states. He also claimed that planters were opposed to the domestic trade because of their own avarice; they did not want to diminish the price of the slaves they already held.³⁶

It is clear that the issue of slavery was of critical importance to the South. Even those who were initially anti-slavery maintained that the problem was a Southern problem and should be left to those who understood it. No Southerner would tolerate any form of outside interference with the institution. In the period 1790-1830 slavery was not the focus of every issue as it was to become on the eve of the Civil War; however, it is also clear that slavery was involved

³⁵Ibid., 191.

³⁶Flanders, Slavery in Georgia, p. 253. Bancroft, Slave-Trading, pp. 272-73 and Taylor, Slavery in Louisiana, pp. 44-45, also saw no real antislavery thrust behind these laws although it was clear that whatever antislavery sentiment there was did support the ban. Both Bancroft and Taylor also point to the fear of getting rebellious blacks from the Upper South as being part of the rationale for the prohibition.

with, and was a part of, many of the crucial events and decisions of these years. As one historian cynically noted about the Revolutionary era: it "began with the deletion of Jefferson's condemnation of the slave trade in the Declaration of Independence, and ended with a clause written into the Treaty of Paris for the return of stolen or escaped slaves."³⁷ Slavery was of critical importance throughout the period. Slavery and slave representation patently were involved in the Constitutional Convention; the three-fifths ratio was to be a constantly recurring problem. It also seems quite clear that Southern fears for slavery lay at the heart of much of their concern over expanding federal power, whether legislative or judicial. The slavery issue even affected foreign policy considerations such as the Panama Conference, co-operation to end the slave trade, and even formed the basis for some of the discontent with Jay's Treaty. While not always in the open, the slavery issue is of critical significance in an understanding of these four decades.

Thus, the years 1790-1830 are crucial ones for slavery in the United States because it was during this period that slavery was established so deeply in the South that eradication would create a traumatic upheaval regardless of how accomplished and also because it was during this period that

³⁷Melvin Drimmer, "Was Slavery Dying Before the Cotton Gin?," in Drimmer (ed.), Black History (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 102.

the philosophical justification for slavery was formulated. William S. Jenkins, in his early study of proslavery thought, labeled this period the "Period of Quiescence."³⁸ If this is true, it is true only in a relative sense to the more militant 1840's and 50's. Proslavery sentiment was far from quiescent during the period. The post-1830 proslavery argument was simply a building upon, a refining of, the arguments used during this formative period. Every justification used after 1830, from Biblical sanction to economics, from science to race adjustment, had all been used in the earlier period. Southerners were able to respond quickly and vehemently to the militant abolitionism of the midcentury because of this earlier foundation.

³⁸William S. Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), p. 48.

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| | Preface. | ii |
| I. | Introduction | 1 |
| II. | Religious Defense. | 30 |
| III. | Historical and Philosophical Defense | 60 |
| IV. | Racial Defense | 92 |
| V. | Scientific Defense | 120 |
| VI. | Constitutional Defense | 158 |
| VII. | Social Defense | 195 |
| VIII. | Economic Defense | 236 |
| IX. | Conclusion | 261 |
| | Bibliography | 270 |

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In October, 1827, Benjamin Lundy, the abolitionist Quaker editor of The Genius of Universal Emancipation, published the claim that there were "about" 106 antislavery societies with 5,150 members in the slave states compared to only 24 such societies with 1,475 members in the free states.¹ Despite Lundy's disclaimer of total accuracy, these figures have all too frequently been used by historians to prove that there was a strong antislavery movement in the South prior to the concentrated abolitionist attacks of the 1830's.² According to such theories, it is in reaction to this attack on slavery and slaveholding that Southerners, in self-defense, began to defend the institution of slavery and thus themselves. Proponents of this thesis point with particular pride to the

¹The Genius of Universal Emancipation, October 14, 1827 as quoted in H. Shelton Smith, In His Image, But . . . (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972), p. 70. Lundy's actual words were: "It appears that the number of antislavery societies, together with their members, are about as follows."

²For example, see Alice Dana Adams, The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America, 1808-1831 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1908); Mary Stoughton Locke, Anti-Slavery in America 1619-1808 (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965), Reprint of 1901 edition; Stephen B. Weeks, Southern Quakers and Slavery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1896).

antislavery pronouncements of the Southern Revolutionary generation to support their claims.

Unfortunately, this idea of a "retreat from liberalism" bears little relationship to the actual situation.³ Gordon Finnie, for example, in his study of the antislavery movement in the upper South covered each state of the region showing the weaknesses of the abolition sentiment, convincingly showing how tenuous the societies were and how small the number of people involved. Furthermore, each society usually lasted only a few years. He referred to the "dubious claim" of a "widespread antislavery movement in the upper South before the so-called 'Great Reaction of the 1830's'".⁴ Robert McColley in his study on slavery in Virginia asserted that this early generation was "most often defending slavery while denouncing it, for unlike Southerners of later generations, they could command the sympathy of outsiders simply by showing

³In recent years several studies have been particularly critical of this view of a strong antislavery tradition in the Revolutionary South. See, for example: Robert McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); Donald L. Robinson, Slavery in the Structure of American Politics 1765-1820 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971); Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968); William Cohen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problems of Slavery," The Journal of American History, LVI (December, 1969); Smith, In his Image.

⁴Gordon E. Finnie, "The Antislavery Movement in the Upper South Before 1840," The Journal of Southern History, XXXV (August, 1969), p. 342.

the right attitudes."⁵ McColley clearly believed that there was little of substance behind these denunciations. H. Shelton Smith in his work on racism in southern religion carried Finnie's work one step forward pointing out that of Lundy's 106 societies, not a single one was in the lower South, where "proslavery sentiment was overwhelming." Moreover, even in the upper South, those societies were confined primarily to the areas of limited slaveholding, and were led predominantly by small pietistic sects like the Quakers, and thus were not the spokesmen of the large slaveholding denominations.⁶

It would appear that in the South the majority public opinion had always supported slavery, even during the post-Revolutionary period. It is true that Revolutionary sentiment had had an effect on slavery. Many did see the inconsistency of fighting for their liberty while holding others in bondage. It is also during this period that gradual emancipation came to the North; however, it is a moot point whether this emancipation would have been possible if Northerners had held as many slaves as Southerners, or if slavery had been economically as viable an institution. Despite the humanitarian zeal coming out of the Revolution, many in the North fought to keep their slaves. Some New Jersey citizens, for example, held slaves into the 1840's; a number of people

⁵McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia, p. 114.

⁶Smith, In His Image, pp. 70-71.

in Indiana and Illinois, despite the Northwest Ordinance, also held slaves well into the nineteenth century.⁷ Slavery in the South obviously survived the Revolutionary era and its natural rights philosophy without ever having been seriously threatened. Antislavery forces in the South had been so weak that emancipation proposals had not even come up for a full public discussion. The very fact that anti-slavery sentiment was so unsuccessful indicates that a large part of the people of the South, or at least those who were making the decisions, accepted the institution of slavery enough so that no real efforts were made toward emancipation in the South.

Historians have consistently overvalued the antislavery sentiment that did exist in the South because it came from the outspoken declarations of the great "liberals" of the period, such as Thomas Jefferson. It should be recognized, however, that this antislavery sentiment existed side by side with proslavery sentiment in the early republic. Even in the years immediately following the Revolution, there were those Southerners who regarded chattel slavery as not only necessary but also natural. A recent study of eighteenth

⁷William W. Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," The American Historical Review, 77 (February, 1972), p. 86. The 1820 Census showed over a thousand slaves in Indiana and Illinois. Jacob P. Dunn, Jr., Indiana, A Redemption from Slavery (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), pp. 406, 443. Dunn also pointed out that many slaves were kept in the old northwest as "indentured servants," pp. 314-16, 329-30.

century Virginia petitions against an emancipation act discovered that the Revolutionary rhetoric had even fortified the proslavery defense. The tone of these petitions was not one of guilt and defensiveness, but a strong assertion of their own liberty and property rights while denying the Negro's humanity. It is clear that these petitioners saw slavery as both necessary and right.⁸ Floyd C. Shoemaker in his examination of slavery in Missouri found that the political and economic strengths of the institution were so powerful that they overcame any moral opposition there might have been.⁹

To many Southerners slavery was simply a part of their environment, and accepted as such, with little or no guilt feelings on their part. In his study of Burke County, North Carolina, Edward Phifer discussed the acceptance soon given slavery by new immigrants. He wrote of the Scotch-Irish and Germans:

Having known only hard labor and grinding poverty and now engaged in the struggle to make their way on the frontier, they gave first priority to the acquisition of wealth. Property was paramount; they had a fanatical respect for it. Slavery appeared to them as a bonanza, and a pseudo-salutary freedom from sentimentality permitted them to accept

⁸Fredrika Schmidt and Barbara Wilhelm, "Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia," The William and Mary Quarterly, XXX (January, 1973), p. 136.

⁹Floyd C. Shoemaker, Missouri's Struggle for Statehood 1804-1821 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1916), p. 111.

it as such. There was little time for contemplation in their lives, nor did abstractions tempt the unlettered mind. Besides, these comparatively recent arrivals had found slavery a well-established institution in America. . . . [They] turned to legalism, already a component of their thought process, to justify the institution of slavery. . . . For their purposes, legality was synonymous with morality. If the idea ever occurred to them that laws were human instruments and therefore imperfect, they rejected it. Slavery did not make of them a guilt-ridden people.¹⁰

Such was the attitude of most Southerners, whether new immigrants or old settlers.

Several recent studies of the proslavery argument have maintained that the real motive of proslavery writers was to convince the slaveholders themselves of the morality of holding slaves.¹¹ Since slavery could not be blended with liberalism and Christianity, according to these writers, the South was plagued with doubts which were internalized as guilt; thus, the proslavery defense was an attempt to justify

¹⁰ Edward W. Phifer, "Slavery in Microcosm: Burke County North Carolina," in Allen Weinstein and Frank Otto Gatell (eds.), American Negro Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 79-80.

¹¹ Probably the best statement of this thesis is Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "The Travail of Slavery" in Sellers (ed.), The Southerner as American (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960). Also see Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941). William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) sees the same forces at work in South Carolina during the nullification crisis, as does Ronald Takaki in the agitation to reopen the slave trade in the 1850's, A Pro-Slavery Crusade (New York: The Free Press, 1971).

slavery to themselves. In one of the most recent studies on the proslavery argument, David Donald claimed that such a guilt thesis "tells us more about our own age of guilt and anxiety than it does about the pre-Civil War generation."¹²

The biggest attack on this idea of guilt, however, came from Eugene D. Genovese who labeled this thesis "guilto-mania." "Did substantial numbers of slaveholders feel guilty about holding slaves?" he asked. "There is no evidence that they did, especially during the nineteenth century, and it is difficult to see why they should have."¹³ Genovese later admitted that there might have been a few guilty-feeling Southerners, but very few. He concluded:

Unthinking acquiescence and the unconscious supposition that the social system is both natural and permanent ("part of the pattern of life") represent two major marks of a triumphant ideology. There is no reason to believe that for every guilt-stricken, inwardly torn slaveholder there were not many who went about their business reasonably secure in the notion that they did not create the world, that the world existed as it existed, and that their moral worth depended on how well they discharged the duties and

¹²David Donald, "The Proslavery Argument Reconsidered," The Journal of Southern History, XXXV (February, 1971), 8. Donald, Dealing primarily with the 1840's and 1850's, contended that the proslavery arguments were really very similar to other rhetoric of the Jacksonian persuasion: they were celebrations of the past as it was thought to have existed, a pleading for the "restoration of community," a "search for social stability in a rapidly changing world," (pp. 17-18).

¹³Eugene D. Genovese, The World the Slaveholders Made (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 144-46.

responsibilities defined by the world in which they, not someone else, lived.¹⁴

Representative John Weems, a slaveholder from Maryland, was one who boldly declared: "God forbid, sir, that I should be found practising that which I cannot fully justify to myself . . ."¹⁵

The question remains then, if Southerners were not bothered by guilt feelings, why the effort in nearly all their proslavery pronouncements to justify their morality? The question is somewhat analogous to the interrogation "Do you still beat your wife?" Southerners were damned however they responded. If they ignored the charges of being immoral, it could be claimed they had no answer; hence they were immoral. Yet by seeking to answer the charges, they have been accused of feeling so guilty about slavery that they went out of their way to justify their slaveholding. As Donald has indicated, perhaps our own moral outrage over slavery has caused us to read into Southern actions implications far different than what they intended or believed.

It is probably true that many of the Revolutionary generation sincerely hated slavery and hoped that in due time it would disappear. However, it is also true that throughout the early decades of the republic, Britain was

¹⁴Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁵Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., p. 185 (January 7, 1829).

still being blamed for "entailing" the system of slavery upon America. It seems clear that this latter comment was used more and more as a defense of American honor and morality. In other words, Americans were looking for some reason to excuse their own behavior. They could claim to hate slavery yet at the same time deny any responsibility for the institution by pushing the blame onto someone else. Since most Southerners intended to continue using slaves, this was one manner of salving their own consciences. As one British traveler observed,

Whenever I conversed with persons in America on the subject of slavery the answer I almost invariably received was, "we are indebted to you for it," and this seemed quite sufficient in their eyes to exculpate them from any guilt in continuing it.¹⁶

It is also true that many Southerners, during these years, continued to deprecate the "evil" of slavery. However, it appears that most of those doing so were not referring to a moral evil, but a particular economic or political evil they saw. In the First Congress, for example, William Loughton Smith of South Carolina claimed that if slavery were a moral evil then "it is like many others which exist in all civilized countries, and which the world quietly submits to."¹⁷

¹⁶[Isaac Candler], A Summary View of America (London: T. Cadell, 1824), p. 256.

¹⁷Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1560 (March 17, 1790).

Donald Robinson in his study of slavery and early American politics concluded that even those who regarded slavery as evil felt that the situation was "irremediable" and they should proceed toward national development, believing the problem of slavery could be solved later.¹⁸ In other words, Robinson believed that there was no real commitment to ending slavery. At best, it was regarded as a minor problem that could be worked out later. Such postponement of the problem helped entrench slavery ever deeper into the Southern psyche. Moreover, it could be argued that these statements were voiced because they were expected, almost a ritualistic affirmation given to make everyone feel better. Senator Walter Lowrie of Pennsylvania, for example, picked up this paradox when he questioned how Southerners could claim slavery was an evil yet at the same time contend it was a blessing to extend the system to the western territory.¹⁹

Evidently, in the early years of the United States, the opponents of slavery, even in the South, were more vocal, but the defenders of slavery, or at least those who accepted it, were more numerous. Such a condition helps explain why there were so many statements in the late eighteenth century deprecating the existence of slavery and so few defending the in-

¹⁸Robinson, Slavery in American Politics, p. 425.

¹⁹Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 207 (January 20, 1820).

stitution. The underlying strength and acceptance of slavery, however, is shown by the fact that despite the numerous statements against the institution of slavery so few steps were taken towards eliminating it in the South. This very strength and acceptance of the institution could also help explain the limited number of proslavery declarations in the early republic. Most slavery advocates saw their opponents as so visionary and the institution of slavery so accepted and necessary that there was little need to be particularly defensive. Black slavery was, after all, the accepted pattern of life in the early republic. In 1786 Jefferson himself appraised the weakness of Southern antislavery sentiment. "The disposition to emancipate them is strongest in Virginia. Those who desire it, form, as yet, the minority of the whole State, . . . In Maryland and North Carolina a very few are disposed to emancipate. In South Carolina and Georgia, not the smallest symptom of it."²⁰ In his study of slavery and Methodism, Donald Mathews called attention to the fact that long before militant abolitionism, emancipation had never been popular in the South, pointing to all the early laws against not only emancipation but even antislavery preaching.²¹

²⁰Quoted in L. C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Vol. II (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1933), p. 617.

²¹Donald G. Mathews, Slavery and Methodism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 284.

The strength of slavery's support can be seen too by the fact that whenever the institution was attacked, supporters rose to its defense, such as in the debates over the slave trade in the Constitutional Convention and first Congress, and over restriction in Missouri in 1819-20. It seems clear that slavery had defenders whenever defenders were needed to preserve the system. Few stronger statements in support of slavery can be found than the speech of William Loughton Smith of South Carolina given in Congress in March 1790.

William L. Smith was one of the most outspoken of the early defenders of slavery. He came from an old established South Carolina family. Smith happened to be studying in Europe when the American Revolution broke out, and did not return to South Carolina until 1783. Although accused of being a Tory, he still managed to get elected to the South Carolina legislature in 1784. Running for the First Congress, he had the dubious distinction of surviving the first contested election under the new Constitution when Dr. David Ramsay challenged Smith's election on the grounds that he was not an American citizen. Winning this challenge, Smith was later elected to Congress for four more terms. He became one of the South's leading Federalists, writing anonymous pamphlet attacks on Jefferson's presidential ambitions in 1792 and 1796. Smith finally resigned his House seat in 1797 to become minister to Portugal, where he remained until September, 1801, when he was

relieved of that post by President Jefferson. It was not until 1803 that Smith began adding his mother's maiden name as his middle name in order to distinguish himself from the other William Smith of South Carolina, then serving as a Senator.²²

In March, 1790, William Loughton Smith spoke against Congress's receiving an antislavery petition. His speech was the most thorough defense of slavery heard in Congress until the Missouri debates. In his speech he touched upon most of the arguments used later to justify slavery, ranging from Biblical authority and historical precedent to the nature of the Negro. Smith claimed that emancipation would lead to either a mixing of the races with the resultant degeneration of the whites, or else a war of extirpation between the races. He insisted that slavery was an intricate part of the Southern way of life and it would cause more harm than good to remove it. Smith concluded by complaining about even discussion such topics because he felt that such a discussion, by itself, would create unrest among the slaves and endanger Southern white society.²³

As Robinson has pointed out, this speech was doubly significant. In the first place it provided an insight into

²²For the latest biography of William L. Smith, see George C. Rogers, Jr., Evolution of a Federalist (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962).

²³Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1453-64 (March 17, 1790).

slavery and its future by a shrewd observer from the deep South. Secondly, the speech was given before either the invention of the cotton gin or the slave revolt in Santo Domingo -- two events which historians often point to as being responsible for arresting the decline of slavery in the United States.²⁴

The antislavery liberals of the early republic were also often those who were in a position of power to do something about slavery, yet little was accomplished because of the entrenched nature of and the support for the institution of slavery. The degree of such support is evidenced by the fact that Jefferson did not want his Notes on Virginia published in the United States because he feared the reaction of his neighbors to his views. Likewise it is significant that his 1784 amendment for emancipating Virginia's slaves did not even accompany the Bill Pertaining to Slaves when it was sent to the legislature because, as he phrased it, "The public mind would not yet bear the proposition."²⁵ Robert McColley in his work on slavery in Virginia is highly critical of Jefferson, yet he does admit that Jefferson probably "went as far in attacking and limiting slavery, as an elected representative of Virginia could go, while retaining the suf-

²⁴Robinson, Slavery in American Politics, pp. 308-09.

²⁵Quoted in Cohen, "Jefferson and Slavery," p. 510. For a discussion of Jefferson and various emancipation plans, see Ibid., pp. 507-10.

frage and confidence of the effective majority in that state."²⁶ It thus seems clear that slavery's acceptance was not declining in Jefferson's Virginia. If such was the public attitude during the height of the "liberal age," no wonder antislavery programs failed in the South.

This is not to claim that the South was all of one mind during this period. The exodus of many Southerners to the Northwest Territory is clear proof of the absurdity of such a claim. Many, especially among the pietistic sects, left because they were upset over the institution of slavery. Certainly there were several factors involved; however, the very fact of their leaving illustrates the despair they felt over the chances of changing or eliminating the institution itself. So well entrenched was the acceptance of slavery that possibilities for change seemed virtually nonexistent. The exodus of these people with such antislavery views served to further solidify the opinion of those that remained.

Alfred G. Smith, Jr., in his study of South Carolina in the early 1800's challenged somewhat the idea of this exodus for antislavery reasons. He contended that the Quakers were essentially the only ones who left because of their dislike for the institution of slavery; others left because of economic pressures. Significantly, Smith pointed out that of those who left, more moved to the southwest than the north-

²⁶McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia, p. 131.

west, thus indicating that a dislike for the institution of slavery could not have been the primary motive for relocation.²⁷ Admittedly such migration in large part was due to farm experience on a given latitude, but the fact remains that had these people been violently antislavery, they could have moved to the Old Northwest as many of the Quakers did.

Historians, in their efforts to trace the development of either proslavery or antislavery sentiment, have basically overlooked the ambivalence that existed in the Southern mind, both collectively and individually, towards the institution of slavery. In psychological terms, there existed a real approach-avoidance conflict; Southerners were both attracted to, yet repelled from, holding black slaves. They were attracted to slaveholding because it represented status and wealth, because slaves were needed as a labor force, and because slavery was perceived as being the only way to organize the already existing biracial society. Yet, at the same time, they were repelled by the practice of slaveholding because of moral-humanitarian concerns and their belief in the value and needs of freedom and liberty. Such ambivalence was personi-

²⁷ Alfred G. Smith, Jr., Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1958), p. 36. John D. Barnhart, Valley of Democracy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 19, also pointed out that there was a host of reasons for this exodus. He referred to such items as the lack of franchise, unequal representation, property qualifications, a whole gamut of issues which he called the "right of the people to establish a democratic society."

fied in Thomas Jefferson. At the very time he was writing that all men were created equal, he held approximately 180 slaves and believed that blacks were probably inferior; he wrote that slavery was immoral and unjust, "an exercise in tyranny," yet made no moves, or even preparations, to free his own slaves.²⁸

It would appear that in 1790 the negative half of this ambivalence held balance. At least publicly more Southerners deprecated slavery as an evil than supported the institution. It must be questioned, however, how much of this sentiment was genuine and how much was simply there for public consumption, voiced because it was expected to be voiced, but given with little conviction or intention of doing anything about the institution. St. George Tucker, for example, in his Dissertation on Slavery, referred to "Those who secretly favor, whilst they affect to regret, domestic slavery, . . ."²⁹

Regardless of how genuine the sentiments in 1790, by 1830 the balance of the ambivalence had switched toward emphasizing the beneficial nature of slavery. Several factors had been at work in this forty year period to influence this change. These causes ranged from political and social to

²⁸For a full discussion of this aspect of Jefferson, see Cohen, "Jefferson and Slavery," and Jordan, White Over Black, Chap. XII.

²⁹St. George Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of it, in the State of Virginia (Philadelphia: printed for Mathew Carey, 1796), p. 88.

economic forces, all of which will be covered in later chapters.

Whatever the underlying reasons, certainly by 1830, and probably by 1820, most of this ambivalence was gone. This changing sentiment toward slavery is exemplified in the attitude of John Holt Rice, a Virginia Presbyterian minister and journalist. As editor of the Christian Monitor, in January, 1817, Rice demanded immediate action to remove the evil of slavery from Southern society. Two and a half years later, though, in July 1819, he referred to slavery as "a subject of great delicacy and difficulty," and he warned against rushing into "measures equally ruinous to ourselves and our bondsmen." In another two years, after the bitter Missouri debates, he wrote, "We freely confess that it is beyond our powers to point out the way of deliverance from this evil." By December, 1825, his attitude had changed enough that he claimed: "immediate emancipation would be madness. It would be turning loose on society fifteen hundred thousand lawless, ignorant and depraved beings. . . . Gradual emancipation would mend the matter but little . . ." By 1827, just ten years after his call for immediate emancipation, Rice argued that it was a mistake for preachers even to discuss the slavery question; they should confine themselves to Christianizing masters and slaves and leave the issue of slavery itself entirely to the state.³⁰

³⁰Quoted in Smith, In His Image, pp. 67-68.

Such an abrupt reversal undoubtedly was rare, but it appears certain that such a reevaluation of slavery was taking place in the early nineteenth century South. Moreover, many of the older generation, like Washington, were dead, and others were inclined to accept, even defend, slavery. Note, for example, the different actions Jefferson took in working to prohibit slavery in the Northwest Territory in 1784, but supporting slavery for Missouri in 1820. William Plummer, Jr., a Congressman from New Hampshire, noticed this generational difference and claimed that on the second Missouri debate "The hot & hasty tempers, & the young men particularly, took the lead, & dragged the rest after them."³¹ It was this younger generation that had not been exposed to the full force of the Revolutionary rhetoric and sentiment that now not only had little ambivalent feelings about slavery, but also began to emphasize it as a beneficial and desirable part of the Southern way of life.

In some ways this generational difference represented one critical distinction in the contrast between Jeffersonians and Jacksonians. The former for the most part, belonged to the old school which saw slavery as a necessary evil, and at least claimed to look forward to its extinction; the latter,

³¹Everett S. Brown (ed.), The Missouri Compromises and Presidential Politics. 1820-1825 (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1926), p. 27.

on the other hand, started to defend slavery as advantageous to the South for various reasons. Charles Sydnor, for example, claimed that the "defense of slavery became popular" in Mississippi when the old "aristocratic" planters of southwestern Mississippi lost their "political dominance" to the "political leaders of a new democracy."³² T. P. Abernethy observed a similar phenomenon in Alabama.³³ Thus, as Sydnor suggests, the Jacksonians served, in several ways, as a bridge between the views of slavery as an evil, and the militant positive good theories of the 1850's.³⁴

Furthermore, such events as the exodus of antislavery Southerners to the Northwest Territory, the opening of new lands in the southwest, the failure of Colonization, the Missouri debates, and Negro insurrections at home and abroad had worked to the advantage of those defending slavery. They had been able to convince most Southerners that slavery and the Southern way of life were mutually dependent. The fact

³²Charles S. Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933), p. 248.

³³Thomas Perkins Abernethy, The Formative Period in Alabama (2nd ed., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965), p. 151.

³⁴As much as possible, Jacksonians tried to down-play the slavery issue for the sake of party unity. For a full discussion of the role of slavery in the formation of the Jackson coalition, see Richard H. Brown, "The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LXV (Winter, 1966).

that the demand for abolition, when it came in the 1830's, came from the North served to solidify this frame of mind. It helped set up a "we versus they" situation that played right into the hands of slavery's advocates. As John Randolph exclaimed: "These Yankees have almost reconciled me to negro slavery. They have produced a revulsion even on my mind, what then must the effect be on those who had no scruples on the subject."³⁵ For various reasons, it seems evident that since the 1780's, Southern antislavery sentiment had been ebbing, while proslavery sentiment grew.

Similarly, it could also be charged that despite the rhetoric of these antislavery spokesmen, they did little personally toward ending slavery.³⁶ At the same time they were condemning it, they continued to use it themselves. Despite their protestations against it, few freed their slaves. Jefferson himself, for example, emancipated only five slaves in his will, consigning all the rest to his heirs. Patrick Henry was very outspoken in his antislavery opinions yet kept his own slaves because of the "general Inconvenience of living without them."³⁷ Admittedly George Washington freed his

³⁵Hugh Garland, John Randolph as quoted in Glover Moore, The Missouri Controversy 1819-1821 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), p. 347.

³⁶For a more favorable assessment of the Revolutionary generation and slavery, see Freehling, "Founding Fathers and Slavery."

³⁷Patrick Henry to Robert Pleasants, January 18, 1773 as quoted in Smith, In His Image, p. [23].

slaves at his death; however, it is significant that they were to remain slaves until Martha's death too. In other words, both were to have them for their own use and comfort until death, and only then were the slaves to be emancipated. The same applies to John Randolph: he did not free his slaves until his death. It may also be significant that neither Washington nor Randolph had any immediate heirs.

With such actions from the outspoken slavery critics, it is understandable why most Southerners, who accepted slavery anyway, offered little support for emancipation. Of the slaves freed, it appeared that very, very few were freed in their master's lifetime; nearly all those who were freed were freed in wills.³⁸ Such actions again underscore the ambivalent feelings of some Southerners toward slavery. They opposed slavery enough to free their slaves, but only after they had enjoyed full use of them during their own lifetime. Patently, the owners wanted the benefits and convenience of slavery for their own use for as long as possible.

This study, then, is concerned with the actual proslavery argument, the defense or justification of slavery that

³⁸H. M. Henry, The Police Control of the Slave in South Carolina (Emory, Virginia: [n.p.,] 1914), p. 171, claimed that the "most common circumstances" of emancipation came in wills. It seems reasonable to conclude that circumstances were similar in the rest of the South. However, Joe Gray Taylor, Negro Slavery in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana Historical Association, 1963), p. 162, contended that the "predominant reason" for manumission in Louisiana was "concubinage and the resulting blood relationship."

did exist before 1830, that is, before any concentrated abolitionist attack. It attempts to examine each type of argument used, from Biblical sanction and historical precedent to scientific evidence, from economics and politics to social considerations and racism. It is obviously artificial to categorize these arguments; the categories clearly overlap and are connected to each other. Such divisions do, however, indicate the directions that various individual proslavery arguments were heading. From the beginning, the proslavery defense was a dynamic argument, changing to meet the new circumstances, new challenges. In the early nineteenth century, the proslavery defense was not really an established theory as much as it was a series of disjointed but inter-connecting arguments. Slavery's advocates used whatever defense met their own needs; they were interested in meeting a particular challenge at a given time, and not in creating a unified, cohesive philosophical system. The result of all this was a disparate combination of appeals and justifications. All were used to show that slavery was natural, acceptable, and right.

This is not strictly a chronological study, tracing the development of the proslavery argument over a period of time, but instead looks at the period 1790-1830 as a whole. However, particular emphasis is given to the differences in the argument that did exist at the terminal dates of 1790 and 1830, and to the crucial events that occurred during this period that effected change in the argument.

Neither is this study interested in the institution of slavery per se, but the ideology of its justification. By the very nature of the topic, this study is interested in the public argument; as such, sources were limited primarily to those in the public forum: Congressional debates, petitions, books, pamphlets, and newspapers.

Under these circumstances, this study is interested in two basic elements: the nature of the proslavery argument and the rationale behind it. The key to the argument, however, lies in the reasons behind it. The crucial element is not so much how but why were Southerners defending chattel slavery. The answer is basically threefold: economic power, political power, and societal values. As slavery became more firmly rooted in the economic, political, and social life of the people, it was accepted more and more as both natural and necessary. Slaves did, after all, provide the labor force and were believed to be necessary to maintain a profitable plantation system. Freed blacks were regarded as unreliable, and free laborers unavailable. It was impossible, for example, to entice free laborers, black or white, into the low country rice swamps and cane fields.

More importantly, however, slavery and the "Southern way of life" became indissolubly linked together in the Southern mind. To understand the Southern mind in the early republic it must be remembered that they were talking not just about slavery, but about black slavery. Racism was a

critical factor in their view of the blacks. There were constant comparisons between Roman slavery and the Negro slaves of the South. Roman slaves, once freed, could take their place in society since they were of the same color; Negroes, on the other hand, must always remain in a degraded position because of their color.³⁹ In the midst of the Missouri debates, Charles Pinckney of South Carolina went so far as to claim that the Negroes were so inferior that the Romans would not even enslave them.⁴⁰ Dutee J. Pearce, Congressman from Rhode Island, charged that as far as Southerners were concerned, any Negro, regardless of his status, was "negra facie a slave."⁴¹ This is not to say that Negro prejudice and proslavery sentiment were the same thing. It was certainly possible to be a racist abolitionist. Nevertheless, this racial element was of crucial significance in the proslavery argument. For many Southerners slavery was seen as the only way to organize a biracial society, to maintain control of an inferior class in that society. The few suggested

³⁹See, for example, St. George Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery; [Joseph Blunt], An Examination of the Expediency and Constitutionality of Prohibiting Slavery in the State of Missouri by Marcus (New York: C. Wiley & Co., 1819); Richmond Enquirer, December 7, 1819; speech of John Sergeant of Pennsylvania reported in Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1211 (February 9, 1820).

⁴⁰Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1137-38 (February 13, 1821).

⁴¹Congressional Debates, 21 Cong., 1 sess., p. 825 (April 27, 1830).

plans for emancipation in the South were nearly always linked to some type of colonization plan.

Increasingly, slavery was regarded as being right for the South, as necessary for the Southern way of life. Most Southerners accepted the idea that slavery was necessary for the continued prosperity of the South, and thus was also important for their own economic security. The degree of this acceptance is exemplified by Elias Fordham, a British traveler who settled in Illinois. Regarding the slavery struggle in Illinois, he declared that he would not have "upon my conscience the moral guilt of extending Slavery over countries now free. . . . But, if it [passage of new constitution permitting slavery] should take place, I do not see why I should not make use of it."⁴² There were thousands in the South like Fordham: since slavery was already there, they were going to make use of it, and most of them saw nothing immoral or unnatural about doing so. The maintenance of slavery was perceived, both consciously and unconsciously, to be related to the survival of traditional attitudes which sheltered and protected most of the customs and institutions inherited from the past. Merton Dillon, in his biography of the Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lundy, claimed that by the 1820's pro-

⁴²Elias Pym Fordham, Personal Narrative of Travels in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky; and of a Residence in the Illinois Territory: 1817-1818, ed. Frederic A. Ogg (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), p. 210.

slavery sentiment was becoming "ever more strident because "both the ambitions and the anxieties of many southern whites had become irretrievably entangled with the Negro and his status as a slave." Moreover, he asserted that abolitionists found it impossible to reach either "the minds or the hearts" of most Southerners because they found slavery "profitable, convenient, and satisfying."⁴³

In many respects militant abolitionism came when it did out of pure frustration on the part of those working toward emancipation. Proslavery did not come in the wake of militant abolitionism; instead, militant abolitionism developed as a response to the more open proslavery defense, and because gradual emancipation was making so little headway in the South. Admittedly there was a cyclical pattern of stimulus-response between the development of militant abolitionism and militant proslavery sentiment; however, it seems clear that militant abolitionism came in the 1820's partly because antislavery was making so little progress. New Jersey, in 1804, had been the last Northern state to free its slaves; since then there had been little progress toward emancipation. Indeed, it was evident that the institution of black slavery was stronger in the South than it had been in 1790. Both Merton L. Dillon and David B. Davis have contended that the antislavery movement shifted from gradual to immediate abolition in the 1820's because of the

⁴³Dillon, Benjamin Lundy, p. 109.

refusal of slaveholders to take any action whatsoever.⁴⁴

In the past it has been claimed that the proslavery argument was really a class argument, a conscious appeal to the lower class to support the slave aristocracy.⁴⁵ Such interpretations, however, assume a Southern class system more rigid than it was in actuality. Especially in the early national period, membership in the aristocracy changed very rapidly. With the great expansion of slavery into the rich cane and cotton areas of the southwest, fortunes were being made within a single life. The lower classes, thus, identified with the aristocracy and its values because they fully expected soon to be part of it. Such class conflict theories also overlook the high number of connections, economic and familial, which existed between the various classes in the South. Ralph Flanders, in his study of slavery in Georgia, declared that the "traditional idea" of great "manorial lords" and "poor whites" could not be "substantiated." "The large number of professional men and merchants prevented the exclusive ranking of individuals by the criterion of land and

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 108; David B. Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (September, 1962) pp. 226-27.

⁴⁵William B. Hesseltine, "Some New Aspects of the Pro-Slavery Argument," The Journal of Negro History, XXI (January), 1936); Ralph E. Morrow, "The Proslavery Argument Revisited," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVIII (June, 1961); Frank F. Mathias, "Slavery, The Solvent of Kentucky Politics," Kentucky Historical Society Register (January, 1972).

slaves. There was no rigid social system in antebellum Georgia."⁴⁶ Abernethy reached the same conclusion for early Alabama.⁴⁷

This forty year period, 1790-1830, saw the development of an increasing self-awareness on the part of Southerners that they were a minority with the Union. Much of this self-consciousness clearly centered around their peculiar institution. The old ambivalence soon disappeared. Certainly by 1830, and probably at least a decade earlier, proslavery advocates had been able to convince most Southerners that slavery and the Southern life style were mutually dependent. It was also during this time that the South truly began to retreat from liberalism by shutting off dissent on the question of slavery. By 1830 therefore, there was an essential consensus throughout Southern society on the subject of slavery. The debate, if it could really be called that, over slavery in the South was over. The Virginia debates of 1831-32 merely confirmed what most Southerners already recognized: There was to be no emancipation, slavery was too vital to the Southern way of life. The abolitionist attack, especially since it now came from outsiders, thus simply mobilized Southern opinion and pride behind a decision already reached.

⁴⁶Ralph B. Flanders, Plantation Slavery in Georgia (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1933), p. 128.

⁴⁷Abernethy, Formative Period in Alabama, pp. 132, 169.

CHAPTER II: RELIGIOUS DEFENSE

The cornerstone upon which the proslavery argument was built was the scriptural defense of slavery. Nearly every proslavery pamphlet, or article, or speaker made at least some reference to a Biblical sanction of slavery. The reason for such a position should be clear. From the very beginning much of the attack upon slaveholding had always been upon moral grounds. Opponents of slavery claimed that it was a sin to hold slaves; the principle of right and wrong involved with slavery became fundamental to the argument. The South's use of the Bible to defend slavery and the master-slave relationship was thus an attempt to erect a moral defense of slavery. The emphasis from proslavery defenders was always upon a literal reading of the Bible; slaveholding was not only justified but also moral because it was recognized as such in holy scripture. Slavery's defenders relied on this literal reading as a response to the emphasis upon the "principles of Christianity" used by those opposed to slavery. Proslavery advocates continually contrasted the rightness of their position, based on such a literal Biblical reading, to the open-ended interpretive religion implied by those opposed to slavery. In 1820, for example, in the midst of the Missouri debates, the Richmond

Enquirer went to elaborate lengths in a long editorial to emphasize the literal truth of the Bible and its sanction of slavery. After a long section giving various scriptural sanctions, the article concluded by giving "a plain concise statement of certain propositions that we presume few faithful believers will controvert." These propositions were five in number:

I.

That the volume of sacred writings commonly called the bible, comprehending the old and new Testaments, contains the unerring decisions of the word of God.

II.

That these decisions are of equal authority in both testaments, and that this authority is the essential veracity of God, who is truth itself.

III.

That since there can be no prescription against the authority of God, what ever is declared in any part of the holy bible to be lawful or illicit, must be essentially so in its own nature, however repugnant such declaration may be to the current opinions of men during any period of time.

IV.

That as the supreme lawgiver and judge of man, is infinitely just and wise in all decisions, and is essentially irresponsible for the reasons of his conduct in the moral government of the world -- so it is culpably audacious in us to question the rectitude of any of those decisions -- merely because we do not apprehend the inscrutable principles of such wisdom and justice.

V.

That if one, or more decisions of the written word of God, sanction the rectitude of any human acquisitions, for instance, the acquisition of a servant by inheritance or

purchase, whoever believes that the written word of God is verity itself, must consequently believe in the absolute rectitude of slave-holding.¹

To these propositions most Southerners could only say "Amen."

The first element of this Biblical defense of slavery was the concept of divine decree, that is, through the curse of Canaan, God had decreed slavery before it had actually come into existence. The ninth chapter of Genesis, verses 20-27 tells the story of Noah and Ham. After the flood, Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard, eventually getting drunk from the wine produced. While drunk, he also became naked within his tent and was seen by Ham who told his brothers, Shem and Japeth. The latter two backed into Noah's tent in order to cover him without being seen. When Noah awakened he knew what Ham had done, and in the 25th-27th verses pronounced the curse which was to become the standard explanation for the origin of slavery.

25 And he said, Cursed be Canaan [the son of Ham]; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren

26 And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

27 God shall enlarge Japeth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

This particular proof of the divine sanction of slavery was

¹The Richmond Enquirer, February 15, 1820. The Biblical defense of slavery was commonly used throughout the Missouri controversy. For an elaborate defense from the Missouri territorial newspapers, see Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, February 18, 1820.

quoted extensively in the proslavery literature.²

In 1823 Frederick Dalcho, a South Carolina Episcopal clergyman, wrote an elaborate explication on this portion of the Bible. According to Dalcho, the inspiration for Noah's curse was divine because otherwise the "future condition of his idolatrous and wicked posterity" could not have been known by him. "The prophecy of Noah," Dalcho continued, "was to be fulfilled, not in the individuals named, but nationally in their descendants. Canaan's whole race was under the malediction." Thus the descendants of Canaan, the Africans, were to be the "servants of servants," or as Dalcho explained "The lowest state of servitude, slaves," to the descendants of Shem and Japheth, the present day Jews and Christians. The pamphlet then delineated the different parts of the world inhabited by Noah's sons to prove that the prophecy had indeed come true.³

Finally, Dalcho called upon the authority of Bishop Newton in his Dissertation on the Prophecies to explain this curse. Newton saw the curse of Noah, according to

²For just a few of the examples, see [Frederick Dalcho], Practical Considerations Founded on the Scriptures, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina by a South-Carolinian (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823); Richard Furman, Exposition of the Views of the Baptists Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States (2nd ed., Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1833); Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 184-85 (January 7, 1829); The Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819.

³Dalcho, Practical Considerations, pp. 10-13; 15-17.

Dalcho, as "particularly implying servitude and subjection." Newton stated that the word "brethern" in Hebrew also meant more distant relations. "The descendants, therefore of Canaan, were to be subject to the descendants of both Shem and Japheth. . . . this is the burden of the prophecy."⁴

In Congress in January, 1829, John C. Weems of Maryland also gave considerable attention to the curse on Canaan, and the settlement of the different parts of the world by Noah's sons. Giving an excellent example of his own racism, Weems declared that the Indians were the descendants of Ishmael and thus half brother to Isaac and therefore "too nearly connected" to the whites to establish a Negro colony in the west among them, especially as this could lead to racial mixture.⁵

Weems is another good example of the younger generation of Southern slaveholders who were much less inclined to apologize for slavery. Indeed, in his short time in Congress, Weems seemed to go out of his way to justify the institution of slavery and defend the slaveholders themselves.⁶

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁵Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 184-85 (January 7, 1829).

⁶John C. Weems was first elected to the Nineteenth Congress to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Joseph Kent. He was reelected to the Twentieth Congress, but then returned to his plantation in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. No detailed biographical information is available on Weems, but a sketch is given in Biographical Directory of American Congress (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 1789. It is interesting that

An article in the Richmond Enquirer carried the consequence of Noah's curse even further. Commenting on Newton's Dissertation, the writer explained that since the Africans were the descendants of Canaan and "their slavery an accomplishment of Noah's prediction," which was "divinely inspired," then "the present condition of the African is inevitable; all efforts to extinguish black slavery are idle, . . ." Ultimately, Dalcho reached this same conclusion. The Bible had also said, he pointed out, that the Jews would be exterminated as a nation and dispersed over the earth, but finally would be restored. However, nowhere in the Bible was there a prophecy which removed the curse of slavery from the descendants of Ham and Canaan.⁷ The obvious implication therefore was that slavery was to continue indefinitely.

The other major defense of slavery taken from the Old Testament was the justification found in Mosaic law, the argument of divine sanction. Throughout the patriarchal period of Israel, it was claimed, God had tolerated, even ordained, the practice of holding slaves. Leviticus 25: verses 44-46 was quoted even more extensively in proslavery speeches and tracts than was the Curse on Canaan.⁸ The

Weems, a Maryland planter, was as vehement in his defense of slavery as nearly anyone from the Deep South.

⁷The Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819; Dalcho, Practical Considerations, pp. 19-20.

⁸Besides the sources in note #2 above, also see [Richard

verses relied upon so heavily read:

⁴⁴Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids,
which thou shalt have, shall be of the
heathen that are round about you; of them
shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids.
⁴⁵Moreover of the children of the strangers
that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye
buy, and of their families that are with you,
which they begat in your land: and they shall
be your possession.
⁴⁶And ye shall take them as an inheri-
tance for your children after you, to inherit
them for a possession; they shall be your
bondmen for ever. . . .

Obviously such a passage was frequently quoted; it had everything: not only the sanction of slavery but also a reference to buying slaves, keeping them as a possession, and then passing them on as an inheritance forever.] As "An Inquisitive Slaveholder" wrote in a Virginia newspaper:

By this decisive, explicit, irrefragable authority of the written work of God, it is evident that servants . . . are commanded under the Mosaic law to be bought; and that when so bought of alien sojourners, that they and their issue become inheritable property.

Another newspaper correspondent referred to this passage and then insisted that the law of Moses was written "by the finger of the Almighty." This had to be believed or else

Nisbet], Slavery Not Forbidden by Scripture. Or a Defence of the West-India Planters from the Aspersions Thrown Out Against Them by the Author of a Pamphlet Entitled "An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America upon Slave-Keeping." By a West Indian (Philadelphia: NP, 1773); Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 269 (January 26, 1820); National Intelligencer, July 30, 1819.

"flatly deny the whole of the Bible."⁹ It is thus clearly implied that God Himself not only approved but commanded the possession and buying of slaves. Congressman Weems of Maryland insisted that this passage proved God recognized the "right of [slave] property by purchase."¹⁰ Genesis 17: 12-13, 27 with its reference to servants "bought with money" furthered this interpretation.

In the midst of the debate over Missouri, one proslavery Missourian used this passage to draw a parallel between slaveholders and the Israelites. The southern people, he wrote,

move like the patriarchs of old, at the head of their children and grandchildren, their flocks and their herds, their "bondmen" and "bond maids" to be an "inheritance for their children after them," to be "their bond men forever." They cannot go where they are to hold this property by an uncertain tenure.¹¹

To make certain no one missed the point, one pamphleteer explicitly linked the Mosaic law to the Africans. He contended that it was "highly probable that the Africans we enslave are descendants of the very same Heathen that were round about the Israelites." Since these Africans still remained unconverted and since the whites were "at least descended" from the Israelites, then the latter could enslave

⁹The Richmond Enquirer, February 12, 1820; The Maryland Republican quoted in National Intelligencer, July 30, 1819.

¹⁰Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 967-68 (January 10, 1828).

¹¹St. Louis Enquirer, April 29, 1820.

the former. "Will it be denied," he argued, "that we are entitled to the liberty of enslaving the Africans and the Heathen round about us also?"¹²

As far as the New Testament was concerned, the major passage Southerners found which accepted, indeed justified, slavery was the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon, sometimes referred to as the Pauline Mandate. Onesimus was the slave to Philemon; he ran away from his master and fled to Rome where he was converted by St. Paul. However, this conversion changed nothing; St. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon.¹³ One South Carolinian, writing in 1823, maintained that

All the sophistry in the world cannot get rid of this decisive example. Christianity robs no man of his rights, and Onesimus was the property of his master, under the laws of his country, which must be obeyed, if not contrary to the laws of God.

He went so far as to claim that this Epistle really sanctioned the fugitive slave law because "slaves should not be taken or detained from their master, without their master's consent."¹⁴

¹²Personal Slavery Established by the Suffrages of Custom and Right Reason. Being a Full Answer to the Gloomy and Visionary Reveries, of all the Fanatical and Enthusiastical Writers on That Subject (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1773, p. 11.

¹³See, for example, Dalcho, Practical Considerations: Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., p. 185 (January 7, 1829); The Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819.

¹⁴Dalcho, Practical Considerations, pp. 20-21. An

These three scriptural passages can be seen as the foundation for the Biblical defense of slavery. They were the basic argument; they were used most frequently and often in conjunction with each other. There were, however, also many other passages which were used as building blocks upon this foundation to erect a supposedly formidable wall around the South's proslavery position. One of the favorite of these building blocks was the sanction given to slavery, that "constant unrebuked practice," by the examples furnished by the patriarchs of Israel, "men admitted to direct intercourse with Heaven and under the visible protection of Jehovah."¹⁵

Clearly, the favorite example was Abraham, "this most faithful, obedient, humane, just, disinterested, righteous man," as one writer labeled him, "this spotless patriarch who constantly obeyed the voice of God -- kept his charge, his commandments, his statutes, and his laws, and moreover found such acceptance with him as to be admitted to familiar

article in the Richmond Enquirer argued along these same lines and asserted that the conduct of the Apostle should be deemed "by some persons [as] worthy of a little painful retrospection." The article continued with a little dig of its own: "There are people in ___ and in ___ & very pious people, too, who . . . act, in relation to runaway slaves, as if they had never heard [of] St. Paul, though his name is probably mentioned at every meeting, if it be not a silent meeting." Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819 quoting the National Intelligencer.

¹⁵The Richmond Enquirer, February 10, 1820.

conferences with Jehovah." Yet, among the deeds of Abraham is found "the transaction of buying bondsmen for money." However, not "the least intimation" is given "by any of the inspired writers that Abraham's conduct in making such bargains -- or afterwards as a slaveholder -- was even in the most distant manner discountenanced by any private admonition or public suggestion of God's displeasure for such contract or acquisition." This silence proved that "the usage of buying and holding menials to involuntary service was never by them judged any violation of the statutes of Jehovah." The author passionately concluded:

For how is it possible for a sincere believer to imagine, that consistently with the ideas that faithful Christians cherish concerning the essential rectitude of God in whom abides the plenitude of justice, that he would specially style himself the God of Abraham -- dignify him with the appellation of friend -- deign to declare that in his seed he would bless all nations; affirm that Abraham had obeyed his voice -- kept his charge, his commandments, his statutes, and his laws -- without exception -- or that the blessed Redeemer would have commended the works of Abraham without any restriction -- if Abraham's moral conduct in becoming a slaveholder had been deemed repugnant to any precept or clause in the code of the Supreme Lawgiver?

So powerful was the "inference" provided by God's acceptance of Abraham's slave holding that "it amounts to a positive sanction of this usage."¹⁶

God's sanction of Abraham's slave holding was further

¹⁶Ibid.

proven, Southerners maintained, by the case of Hagar (Genesis 16: 1-11). Hagar was an Egyptian "handmaid" -- which the South read as "slave -- to Sarai, the wife of Abraham. Sarai gave Hagar to Abraham but when the maid became pregnant Sarai dealt harshly with her and she fled. God sent an angel to Hagar and said "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." Proslavery advocates argued that God by this "very act of deputing the Angel on purpose to command this fugitive bondwoman to return home and be obedient to her lawful superiors -- pronounced that Hagar was Abraham's property -- pronounced the validity of such acquisition by contract" This "deliberate decision" by God "even were all other precedents wanting" proved, as far as most Southerners were concerned, "that buying African servants and holding them for a possession -- is warranted by the written word of God."¹⁷

Another patriarch whose precept was followed in holding slaves was Joseph. Genesis 47: 13-25 gives the story of Joseph buying the Africans. One Southern writer thus labeled Joseph "the most extensive purchaser of African slaves that ever existed. Joseph incontestably bought more African servants at one sale than belong to all the slave holders in this confederated empire." As with Abraham's slave holding, "Not a single sentence do we find in sacred writings that

¹⁷Ibid.

tends in the most distant manner, to disapprove of any one part of the conduct of this illustrious slave-buyer. . . ."18

Slavery advocates also pointed out that the "very first law" enacted by God himself after giving Moses the Ten Commandments dealt with the regulation of slaveholding (Exodus 21: 1-6).¹⁹ Later in this same chapter (verses 20-21) is the provision about punishment for killing a servant. This section ends: "if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his money." Richard Nisbet in Slavery Not Forbidden by Scripture argued that the words "his money" clearly conveyed the idea of property, just as if they were referring to an ox or an ass. Moreover, it was also clear, Nisbet asserted, that Moses did not regard the killing of a slave as a "capital offence" but merely one punishable by a "pecuniary fine." The Richmond Enquirer would not go quite as far as Nisbet, but did state that a slaveholder would not intentionally kill a slave because of the economic loss involved, and then quoted this passage as authority that "the economic loss alone might be sufficient punishment."²⁰

Other selections from the Old Testament were used

¹⁸Ibid. The impression is given that the writer is envious of Joseph's business acumen: This "prodigious speculation in bondmen was effected for the moderate consideration of one year's maintenance for each servant."

¹⁹Ibid., February 12, 1820.

²⁰Nisbet, Slavery Not Forbidden, pp. 4-5; The Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819.

intermittently too. At times it almost seems as if slavery defenders scoured the Bible, noted every place "servant" was used, then somehow worked this passage into their arguments. It was pointed out, for example, that under the Ten Commandments, one of the things not to be coveted was thy neighbor's manservant or maidservant. Jacob, another of the patriarchal leaders, possessed slaves (Genesis 30: 43); Solomon had them born in his house (Ecclesiastes 2:7). The Banishment of Hagar, the bondwoman (Genesis 21: 9-21), the blessing of Isaac upon Jacob, "Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee" (Genesis 27: 29), and the treatment to be accorded captive women (Deuteronomy 21: 11-14) were all used at one time or another as illustrations of the Biblical sanction of slavery.²¹ Joshua in his curse of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9: 23, 27), making them "hewers of wood and drawers of water" contributed what was to become a favorite phrase of the proslavery arsenal.²² "An Inquisitive Slaveholder" using the next chapter of Joshua discovered

²¹See, for example, "Petition to the General Assembly of Virginia from Brunswick County, November 10, 1785" in F. T. Schmidt and B. R. Wilhelm (eds), "Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia," The William and Mary Quarterly, XXX (January, 1973), pp. 143-44; The Richmond Enquirer, February 12, 1820.

²²For examples see The Richmond Enquirer, February 12, 1820; Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States (Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827), p. 20; Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, Vol. III (Edinburgh: Adell and Co., 1829), p. 154.

that God had fought against the Amorites to protect the Gibeonites, the "newly acquired servants of his slave holding people," and had even "disturbed the solar system [made the sun stand still] and wrought a miracle on purpose to secure for Israel the inheritance of such possession."²³

Slavery's defenders argued from the reverse side too.⁷ In addition to the myriads of positive sanctions, they also maintained that slaveholding also received negative sanction in the Old Testament in that no place was there a passage of scripture which condemned or opposed slavery. God had spoken through his prophets for over two thousand years and none of them had condemned or opposed the practice of holding slaves; therefore, slavery had to be acceptable to God.

This same type of sanction, only in stronger terms, was found in the New Testament too. Since Christ came to fulfill and not to destroy, the argument ran, he therefore sanctioned the institutions and relationships existing at the time which He did not expressly condemn. Since Roman slavery existed at that time and He said nothing against it, Christ obviously accepted the institution of slavery. Indeed, he even healed the slave of the Roman centurion without speaking one word about freedom (Luke 7:2-10).⁷ The Richmond Enquirer stated that since Christ had spoken nothing against the slavery existing under Mosaic law and since He

²³The Richmond Enquirer, February 12, 1820.

"I came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill," then slavery [was] acceptable." Moreover, He actually gave slavery "a sort of sanction" by using it in a parable. The article concluded:

If domestic slavery had been deemed by Jesus Christ the atrocious crime which it is now represented to be, could it have been passed over without censure? Would the doctrines of salvation have been illustrated by a reference to it, direct and unequivocal?--should we not have been told, not that the rich man, but that the slave-holders, could not enter the kingdom of heaven?²⁴

A later article in this same paper followed the identical line of reasoning. The author of this piece went to great lengths to prove that the "fundamental precepts" of the Old Testament were not changed by the New. "Tenures of involuntary service were not condemned or prohibited by the great luminaries of the New Testament." The author argued that the "Gospel dispensation is exhibited as never interfering with any of the civil institutions or political establishments of the world." Jesus obviously had to know of Roman slavery yet he said "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," and at another point he spoke about a servant "shall be beaten with many stripes."²⁵

Along this same line, the Virginia Baptist General

²⁴National Intelligencer as quoted in The Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819.

²⁵The Richmond Enquirer, February 15, 1820.

Committee in 1793 resolved that slavery was not a moral or religious issue and therefore was not a subject for discussion by that church body. Instead, they maintained that slavery was a political matter and any questions or problems associated with it should be left to the politicians.²⁶

An eighteenth century pamphleteer avered that Christ's "general maxims of charity and benevolence" could not be regarded as "proofs against slavery." He reasoned that "If the custom had been held in abhorrence by Christ and his disciples, they would, no doubt, have preached against it in direct terms. They were remarkable for the boldness of their discourses, and intrepidity of conduct. . . ."²⁷ The Southern Review in 1828 wrote that the Christian religion had nothing to do with slavery "except, indeed, that the total silence of its Divine Author upon the subject, and the positive injunction of obedience upon bondmen . . . seem to make the inference inevitable, that He considered the institution as altogether a matter of political expediency."²⁸ Reverend Richard Furman carried this argument to its logical end. He repeated the usual idea that if slaveholding had been considered evil, then Christ or the Apostles would not

²⁶W. Harrison Daniel, "Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the Antebellum Era," The Journal of Negro History, LVI (January, 1971), p. 1.

²⁷Nisbet, Slavery Not Forbidden, p. 8.

²⁸The Southern Review, I (February, 1828), p. 233.

have "tolerated it for a moment in the Christian Church."
 But they had "let the relationship remain untouched, as
 being lawful and right, and insist[ed] on the relative duties."
 Furman concluded: "In proving this subject justifiable by
 Scriptural authority, its morality is also proved; for the
 Divine Law never sanctions immoral actions."²⁹

Frederick Dalcho carried this argument one step
 further. He claimed that the New Testament required of
 servants "obedience, submission, [and] subjection, to a bad,
 as well as to a good master." Moreover, he insisted that
 there was "nothing in the law of God which can, in the
 slightest manner, justify the disobedience and revolt of
 slaves."³⁰

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also con-
 tained positive sanctions of slavery. Besides the Epistle
 to Philemon, there was a whole catalogue of quotations
 coming from both St. Paul and St. Peter which slavery advo-
 cates interpreted as justifying the institution. Southerners
 were especially pleased with these passages because all
 revolved around the idea of slaves being obedient and sub-

²⁹Furman, Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, pp. 7-8.

³⁰Dalcho, Practical Considerations, p. 25. Joe Gray
 Taylor, Negro Slavery in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana
 Historical Association, 1963), p. 151, wrote that the Baptists
 of Louisiana had reached a conclusion similar to Dalcho's:
 "Since the master bore responsibility for the souls of his
 servants, it was the servants' duty to subordinate themselves
 to the master in every possible way."

missive to their masters (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22; 1 Timothy 6:1-5; Titus 2:9-10; and 1 Peter 2:18).³¹

All this talk on obedience did not always have its desired effect, however. Charles Ball, writing about his grandfather, a native African, confessed that he had retained his "native traditions." "It is not strange that he believed the religion of his oppressors to be the invention of designing men," Ball alleged, "for the text oftenest quoted in his hearing was 'Servants, be obedient to your masters.'"³² A recent historian of slavery maintains this same view for he believes most slaveholders viewed religion more as a way of preventing insurrections than as a means to the slave's salvation.³³

Much emphasis was also placed on Paul's letter to the Corinthians. His dictum: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called," and "let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (1 Corinthians 7:20, 24) was taken to mean that everyone should be happy

³¹The Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819; February 15, 1820. "An American" writing to the Richmond Enquirer, January 8, 1820, "particularly recommended" that certain people read the selection from Timothy dealing with the "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds." (1 Timothy 6:5).

³²Charles Ball, Fifty Years in Chains (Detroit: Negro History Press, 1971), p. 15. This is a reprint of the 1859 edition.

³³John Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 61-62.

with, and make the best of his condition. If a slave was converted, he must still remain a slave. As a group of eighteenth century Virginians expressed it:

The Freedom promised to his Followers, is a Freedom from the Bondage of Sin and Satan, and from the Dominion of Men[']s Lusts and Passions; but as to their Outward Condition, whatever that was before they embraced the Religion of Jesus, whether Bond or Free, it remained the same afterwards.³⁴

It is significant that the proslavery appeal was always to the authority of the Bible and never to the spirit of Christianity. Slavery's advocates had to rely on the authority of certain passages to support their claims of Biblical sanction because their opponents contended that the general spirit of Christianity was clearly opposed to the practice of slaveholding. Thus the emphasis from slavery's defenders was on "proof," a reliance on authority. Congressman John C. Weems, for example, challenged his opponents "to attempt a reply on proof." Weems announced that he would not "reply to dogmatical declamation" but would be "happy to meet . . . in argument supported by proof." Weems said he would give "chapter and verse" and then proceeded to do so, ranging from Genesis to St. Paul.³⁵ One Missourian, for

³⁴"Petition to the General Assembly of Virginia from Amelia County, November 10, 1785: in Schmidt and Wilhelm, "Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia," p. 139; See also Dalcho, Practical Considerations, pp. 20-21.

³⁵Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 184-85 (January 7, 1829).

example, relied heavily on St. Paul's dictum that "where there is no law there is no transgression." (Romans 4:15).³⁶ Senator William Smith of South Carolina declared that "God was unchangeable . . . that he was without variation or shadow of turning; the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." Opponents of slavery, however, claimed that slavery was "against the spirit of the Christian religion." But, Smith thundered: "When, and by what authority, were we taught to separate the positive laws of God from the Christian religion?"³⁷ An editorial in the Richmond Enquirer castigated those who attempted to keep slavery from Missouri because slavery "was expressly sanctioned by the old, and recognized without censure by the new testament." Antislavery, the article continued, "is a plain, palpable, reversal of the decree of the Almighty." The editorial said it was only man's "unreasoning pride" that made him "think himself wiser than his Creator." It ended with a couplet from Pope: because of his pride, man does not hesitate to

Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his justice -- be the God of God.³⁸

One writer used the usual Biblical defense of slavery and then declared that "the Pentatench [sic] must be abandoned

³⁶Franklin (missouri) Intelligencer, February 18, 1820.

³⁷Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 270 (January 26, 1820).

³⁸The Richmond Enquirer, January 1, 1820.

as an absolute imposture, if the law authorizing slavery is not of divine original [sic]." Later he accused those who called slavery an "atrocious crime" of "blasphemy against the Most High." "They "reprove God and dis-annul his judgment;" they "condemn him that thou mayest appear righteous."³⁹ The Southern Review added its own theory in November, 1829. If the Bible was read in "the original Greek or in a literal version," it claimed, "we should, probably, be less troubled with the ravings of fanatics upon this subject."⁴⁰ The South Carolinian, Edwin Holland, concluded one of his sections with the observation that if "Mr. Morrill" [The Senator] and "his friends of New-Hampshire have not turned aside after strange gods, it is hoped the authority I have quoted might satisfy them."⁴¹

Note that the predominant theme in all of these examples is the appeal to the literal truth of scripture, the authority of the Bible. This was obviously meant as a counter to the broad appeals to the Christian spirit used by slavery's opponents. This feeling against a general religious spirit

³⁹National Intelligencer as quoted in The Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819.

⁴⁰The Southern Review (November, 1829), p. 353n.

⁴¹[Edwin C. Holland], A Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated Against the Southern & Western States Respecting the Institution and Existence of Slavery Among Them. By a South-Carolinian (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), p. 42. Italics mine. This work was originally published in Charleston in 1822.

could reach such extreme lengths that the South Carolina minister, Richard Furman, could insist that the "Christian Golden Rule" did not apply to slavery. "Surely this rule," he wrote, was "never to be urged against the order of things, which the Divine government has established . . ." Applied to slavery, the golden rule merely meant that the master should treat his slave as he would like to be treated if he were a slave. This same sentiment was echoed by Congressman Weems in January, 1829.⁴²

Evidently, Southerners of the post-Revolutionary generation had little difficulty in justifying their own morality. Congressman Weems of Maryland was a good example. In January, 1829, he boldly declared in Congress: "God forbid, sir, that I should be found practising that which I cannot fully justify to myself . . ."⁴³ Even some ministers shared Weems' position. William Winans, a Mississippi Methodist minister who held slaves could at least justify his own

⁴²Furman, Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, p. 8. Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., p. 185 (January 7, 1829). In an unusual twist on the morality argument, Robert Wright, a Senator from Maryland, asserted that Southerners should not be reproached with "the immorality of slavery" because that was a "crime" for which they must answer "at the bar of God," and it would be "unjust" for them to be "punished twice for the same offence." Everett S. Brown (ed.), "The Senate Debate on the Breckinridge Bill for the Government of Louisiana, 1804" from The Journal of William Plumer in The American Historical Review, XXII (January, 1917), p. 355.

⁴³Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., p. 185 (January 7, 1829).

morality. Writing to his brother in 1820, he affirmed that he "would not favor enslaving Negroes were they already free, nor would he retain them if he could emancipate them." Emancipation, however, would "ruin" the slaves and "endanger the very existence of the Nation." Under these circumstances he believed that Christians could own slaves because they had not enslaved them, and also because they would treat them better than non-Christians would. Moreover, slaveholding unbelievers, he claimed, would accept the "exhortations" of slaveholding Christians far more readily than from nonslaveholders. In typical fashion Winans concluded that Holy Scripture never condemned slavery: "The Apostles never [said] 'Set your servants free.'"⁴⁴ At about this same time, another minister reported the not too surprising claim of one Methodist who insisted that "God Almighty gave [his slaves] to him, and he intended to keep them."⁴⁵

Proslavery advocates could even see the hand of God involved in slave insurrections. Writing on the Vesey insurrection, Edwin Holland implied that slaveholders could not really be that wicked because "the protecting interposition of a beneficent Providence" had saved Charleston.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Donald G. Mathews, Slavery and Methodism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 46.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁶Holland, Refutation of the Calumnies, p. 13.

In 1790, during the debate over the slave trade, William Loughton Smith of South Carolina maintained that if slavery was a "moral evil" then it was "like many others which exist in all civilized countries, and which the world quietly submits to."⁴⁷ Senator James Barbour, thirty years later, carried Smith's viewpoint even further. Barbour first asked "However dark and inscrutable may be the ways of heaven, who is he that arrogantly presumes to arraign them?" He went on to propose, then, that however "incomprehensible" slavery might be to us, it was "a link in that great concatenation which is permitted by omnipotent power and goodness and must issue in universal good."⁴⁸

As Senator Barbour's comments reflect, slavery advocates could use the Bible offensively as well as defensively. One Southerner claimed, for example, that God had permitted some of the Africans to be "dragged into bondage" so that they might learn from the experience and then return to Africa taking with them "the light of civilization, and the blessings of Christianity, to their benighted and unhappy countrymen." Thus from this "apparent evil" God could bring about "the utmost possible good."⁴⁹

⁴⁷Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1560 (March 17, 1790).

⁴⁸Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 335 (February 1, 1820).

⁴⁹Letter from the Delaware Watchman to Hezekiah Niles Niles' Weekly Register, November 8, 1817. This idea of Chris-

As the above quotation indicates, there was some use made of the concept that slavery was justified because it brought Christianity to the blacks. In the early nineteenth century, however, such usage was slight; it was not a very important part of the proslavery argument. More emphasis was placed upon using the Bible itself as an authority to justify the institution of black slavery.

It was also possible to use Biblical references to attack the North. In March 1818, William Smith contended that Northerners using the Bible "forgot one of the great offenses . . . usury." The "same Bible" that Northerners used also said: "Take thou no usury of him, or increase; but fear thy God." Smith vehemently continued:

This part of the Bible must have become obsolete in New England since the introduction of banks. It must now be pleasing in the sight of Heaven to see a dividend as large as twenty per cent. to each bank share. There are as many chariots, as many pearls, as much gold and silver, perhaps, in New England, as there was in Babylon, at the time of its fall; yet they are in no danger till the vengeance of Heaven has fallen on the slaveholding States first, the gentleman [David Morrill of New Hampshire] seems to think.⁵⁰

tianizing the Africans was often used to garner support for the American Colonization Society in its early years. See: P. J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), and John R. Bodo, The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues 1812-1848 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954).

⁵⁰Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 238-39 (March 6, 1818).

Two years later, Smith said that he would not be "astonished" to find that Northerners were attempting "a new version of the Old and New Testaments," a "new model . . . to suit the policy of the times." They would "Throw off such parts as were uncongenial to their interests, and leave the residue to God." Smith finished with a particular concern of his: "They had already given the Scriptures an implied construction, as different from its literal sense, as they had that of the Constitution of the United States."⁵¹

From such views, it is obviously just a short step to attacking Northerners, especially the clergy. Edwin Holland, writing on the Denmark Vesey plot, charged that it was due to Northern misguided missionaries and their religious tracts. Another Southerner claimed that "all the late insurrections of slaves" were because of "influential preachers."⁵²

The National Intelligencer published a long article against those "ecclesiastical members" who were not content to attend to their "ministerial functions at home" but zealously pursued a "crown of worldly glory." The writer strongly implied that disaster was inevitably the conse-

⁵¹Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 269-70 (January 26, 1820).

⁵²Holland, Refutation of the Calumnies, pp. 11-12. [Z. Kingsley], A Treatise on the Patriarchial or Co-operative System of Society as it Now Exists in Some Governments . . . Under the Name of Slavery, with its Necessity and Advantages (2nd ed., NP, NP, 1829), pp. 13-14.

quence of such actions. A few months later the Richmond Enquirer charged that in spite of the Biblical sanctions, "the zealots of humanity" had denounced slavery. In reality, the writer proposed, these "most mistaken and misguided people" were merely exchanging the "religion of 1819 years, for the humanity of the moment." He concluded that "from the day of Diocleasian to the present moment, a blow so heavy has not been inflicted on revealed religion."⁵³ Here again is the appeal to stick with the authority of the Bible.

By 1830 certainly, and probably by the end of the Missouri controversy, Southerners had developed a comprehensive Biblical sanction for slavery. William S. Jenkins called this scriptural defense the "most elaborate, and systematic statement of any of the types of pro-slavery theory."⁵⁴ The connection between slavery and many of the Biblical references, such as the curse on Canaan and the Levitical ordinance, is easy to see; but in others, such as St. Paul's emphasis on order and callings, the connection is more obscure. Nevertheless, these specific sanctions for slavery used during the formative period of the proslavery defense, appeared again and again with each later stage of

⁵³National Intelligencer, November 18, 1819; The Richmond Enquirer, January 8, 1820.

⁵⁴William S. Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935), pp. 200-01.

the slavery controversy. Always the emphasis was the same: the authority of particular Biblical sanctions as a justification for the morality of slavery.

It also seems clear that in the late eighteenth century, and even extending into the early nineteenth, the Southern churches of all denominations were essentially anti-slavery in their teachings and practices. However, as the nineteenth century progressed there was a marked increase in church membership among the slaveholding classes; inevitably their interests greatly modified the attitude of most churches in regard to slavery. Available evidence indicates little difference among the major Southern denominations in regards to slavery. Each of the major denominations went through an early limited antislavery position, but then very rapidly came to an accommodation with slaveholders and the institution of black slavery. It was only the smaller, more pietistic sects such as the Quakers that retained much of an antislavery stance.⁵⁵ By 1830, religion was used by Southerners as one of the main supports for the institution of slavery. In its outlook, its practices, and

⁵⁵See for example: Mathews, Slavery and Methodism; Daniel, "Virginia Baptists and the Negro;" Andrew E. Murray, Presbyterians and the Negro (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966); Stephen B. Weeks, Southern Quakers and Slavery (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1896); Patricia Hickin, "'Situation Ethics' and Antislavery Attitudes in the Virginia Churches" in John Boles, America: The Middle Period (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1973).

its morality it helped to build and maintain an impregnable defense of Southern slavery and slaveholders.

The substance of the individual Biblical sanctions was not as important as the use made of them. Attacked for the immorality of holding slaves, Southerners carefully explored the Bible for passages relating to slavery in any manner, and then used these passages to justify their own slaveholding. Slavery defenders explicitly argued that since God recognized slavery in Holy Scripture, then by definition, slavery could not possibly be immoral. The appeal was always to the literal wording of scripture, the authority of the Bible; the purpose was always to discover sanctions for slavery and thus justify their own practice and institution of black slavery.

CHAPTER III: HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL DEFENSE

Closely allied to the justification of slavery by Biblical sanction was the defense based on historical or philosophical sanctions, the idea that slavery was a natural part of society and had existed in all ages and among all peoples in some form. Like the appeals to scripture, the appeals to history served as a basic defense mechanism for many Southerners. By pointing to other societies that were regarded as worthy of respect and emulation even though they held slaves, proslavery advocates thus could proclaim that there was nothing inherently wrong with slaveholding itself. Having existed in all societies in some form, slavery was thus a fundamental part of society and could not be the iniquitous institution it was charged with being. Alexander Smyth of Virginia, for example, reflected such an historical defense when he claimed that slaves were held "under the law and usage of nations, from the remotest times of which we have any historical knowledge . . ."¹ One Southerner remarked to a British traveler that slavery had "existed time out of mind," therefore why should "the

¹Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1005 (January 28, 1820).

present generation pretend to more wisdom and humanity than their forefathers." Similarly, a South Carolina pamphleteer contended that slavery had existed in the world from the time of the flood to the present day, and that "a history of slavery would be little less than a history of mankind during that interval." So pervasive was slavery, he argued, that it formed a part of the "polity" of civilized Christian nations as well as countries "buried in the depths of barbarism." Moreover, this author maintained that "slavery has ever been the step-ladder by which civilized countries have passed from barbarism to civilization."²

As early as the first Congress, such appeals to historical precedents were apparently commonplace. When William Loughton Smith of South Carolina was speaking against regulating the slave trade, the Congressional reporter merely reported, as if he were bored with the whole argument, that Smith made the usual appeal to history, reading from "Roman and Greek histories, and accounts of Africa showing how slavery was always there."³

As this Congressional reporter indicated, the most

²Francis Hall, Travels in Canada and the United States, in 1816 and 1817 (Boston: Re-printed from the London edition by Wells and Lilly, 1818), p. 250. [Edward Brown], Notes on the Origin and Necessity of Slavery (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1826), pp. 6-8.

³Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1456 (March 17, 1790).

typical appeal based on historical sanction was to the classical period of Greece and Rome. The common core of such declarations was the argument that the Greek and Roman republics were so wise and good that they were worthy of emulation. These republics also held slaves; therefore, in simple syllogistic reasoning, slavery could not be evil. One of the best examples of such a justification of slavery based on historical precedent was in an editorial against slavery restriction for Missouri which appeared in the Richmond Enquirer in January, 1820. This article asserted that slavery was acceptable because it had existed in Sparta which was "renowned for every patriotic virtue, and for every heroic achievement;" in Attica, which, even though it occupied a space "hardly larger than a county in America," had produced "a constant succession of philosophers, heroes, statesmen,--orators, poets, and artists who are at this moment the admiration and delight of the most enlightened part of the civilized world." And, of course, Rome which rose to "unequalled greatness . . . whose power in its meridian, governed the 'fairest part of the earth and the most civilized portion of mankind.'" Furthermore, the editor continued, the wisdom of Rome, even after the "lapse of more than two thousand years, furnishes the code, which at this day constitutes the law throughout the continent of Europe."⁴

⁴The Richmond Enquirer, January 1, 1820. For other

During this same Missouri debate James Barbour said in the Senate that, instead of the picture "furnished by the-
orists and enthusiasts," Congress should consult "the testi-
mony of history." He alleged that in the "master States of
antiquity" slavery had existed in its "worst form." Yet, he
concluded,

such was the march of the human mind in
these distinguished Republics in all that
was ennobling in morals and science, that
it continued to shine through the long
eclipse of interposing darkness. And in
the modern world, the lamps of science and
of liberty were lighted up from its yet
unexpired embers.

Eight years later, John Randolph was still talking about
the Greeks and Romans. He also reminded his colleagues
that Sir Thomas Moore, "one of the wisest and one of the
most benevolent of men, could not complete his Eutopian
Commonwealth without the aid of slavery,"⁵ the obvious im-
plication thus being that slavery was not only acceptable,
but also necessary.

examples of explicit appeals to Greece and Rome, see, for
example, Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 267 (Jan-
uary 26, 1820) and p. 1342 (February 14, 1820); Controversy
Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius in Reference to the Amer-
ican Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the
United States (Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827), p. 20;
The National Intelligencer, November 30, 1819; The National
Intelligencer as quoted in the Richmond Enquirer, December 7
1819.

⁵Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 333 (Febru-
ary 1, 1820); Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 1 sess., p.
964 (January 10, 1828).

A speech reported in a Georgia newspaper in August, 1826, carried this comparison to its logical conclusion. The speaker declared that if the compact of union between North and South had become too heavy for the Northerners, they could withdraw "to rejoice in their own self-righteousness." The Southern States would continue "to convey the products of a fertile soil and genial clime to the markets of the world." "As Athens, as Sparta, as Rome was, we will be; they held slaves, we hold them."⁶

It is interesting that despite all the appeals to Greece and Rome and their slavery precedents, there were no attempts to justify white slavery. Very little mention was ever made of the fact that most Greek and Roman slaves were white. The Southern justification was always in more general terms: Greece and Rome were exemplary states, yet they also possessed slaves, which "proved" that the institution of slavery itself could not be wrong. The kind of slavery existing in these states vis a vis their own was conveniently overlooked. Furthermore, there was no real attempt to resolve the contradiction involved by such an appeal to an historical precedent of white slavery and their own racist views regarding their institution of black slavery. In one breath they could appeal to the precedents of

⁶The Georgia Statesman (Milledgeville, Georgia), August 15, 1826.

Greece and Rome, yet in the next, justify slavery because it was the only way to control the blacks.

Southerners, however, did not stop with simple references to Greece and Rome. James Jackson of Georgia proclaimed that "There never was a Government on the fact of the earth, but what permitted slavery." He made the usual mention of Greece but then carried slavery forward, claiming that "On this principle, the nations of Europe are associated; it is the basis of the feudal system."⁷ Edward Brown in his Notes on the Origin and Necessity of Slavery spent several pages proving this same point, that feudal villeins were nothing more than slaves.⁸ To Brown, this is clear evidence that slavery had existed and had been accepted in Europe.

A Missouri newspaper in 1820 had carried this acceptance by Europe even further. It contended that slavery was "practised at this day, as a right" in the colonies of Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and Denmark. It also insisted that slavery was practiced in most parts of Asia and all of Africa. Moreover, the serfs of Russia and Poland were not any better than slaves.⁹

The ultimate justification for slavery based on the

⁷Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1200 (February 12, 1826).

⁸Brown, Notes on Slavery, pp. 34-38.

⁹Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, February 18, 1820.

sanction of history was printed in the Georgia Journal.

There "Limner" called upon history but proclaimed that you do not have to look to the ancients.

I cite readers to the fact that the United States compose the oldest and most considerable republic that ever has existed, and yet perhaps the only that has recognized black slavery; here we have the brace of the contention.¹⁰

Besides the examples of historical slavery, advocates continually used the historical evidence of the extreme condition of slavery in Africa to justify American slavery. According to this argument, African slavery was slavery in its worst form, in which the slave barely eked out an existence, and was at the mercy of the merest whim of his cruel and arbitrary master. They also argued that contrary to the views of slavery's opponents, most African slaves sold had not been kidnapped, but had either been born slaves, or else had been enslaved after having been captured in war.

Bryan Edwards, one of the Americans' most quoted West Indian historians, declared that most African slaves were "born slaves to great men," or their chiefs, who then sold them. Besides being captured in war, Edwards said there were other ways for free men to become slaves -- as punishment for crime, for example, or payment for debts. In one volume he claimed that he had personally talked to twenty-

¹⁰The Georgia Journal as quoted in the National Intelligencer, July 9, 1819.

five newly imported Africans to ascertain their condition prior to being sold to the white slave traders. He found that fifteen had been born slaves, five had been prisoners of war, and only the remaining five had been kidnapped in the interior.¹¹ Edwards played this up as proof against slavery's opponents. It is significant however, that even this limited sample by a slavery advocate showed that twenty per cent of the imported slaves had been kidnapped. It is also significant that this particular finding was ignored by most of Edwards' contemporaries.

Frederick Dalcho in his Practical Considerations Founded on Scripture, published in 1823, argued along the same lines. As he put it: "It is a well known fact, that great numbers of the Negroes in Africa are born in absolute and unconditional slavery. Adultery, and other crimes, are there punished with slavery." Dalcho also added one other element to the origin of African slavery, one which fit in very well with the Southerners' preconceived notions about blacks. Dalcho proposed that it had "often occurred" that from the "natural indolence of the Negroes" many of them had been in "such extreme want" that they had gone to the white factors and "voluntarily placed themselves in bondage to preserve

¹¹Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies, Vol. II (4th ed., London: John Stockdale, 1807), p. 125.

their lives."¹² A writer in the National Intelligencer maintained that the intercourse with the whites had taught the "value of liberty" to the Africans. Before the coming of the Europeans the Negroes "of course did not know how to appreciate [it]." In his own country the black was a slave to his chief and "his possessions, his family, himself and even his life were held by the will of and at the disposal of a king." Moreover, this was a king "whose splendor consisted in the number of victims he had the power of immolating to his resentment, or to the manes [names?] of his ancestors."¹³

Another pamphleteer of the late eighteenth century announced that slaves were bought "in the fair course of trade." Furthermore, it was "certain that these creatures, by being sold to the Europeans, are often saved from the most cruel deaths, or more wretched slavery to their fellow barbarians."¹⁴ A Missouri newspaper article in February of 1820 carried these observations one step further. The author started with the usual declaration that Africans had been

¹²[Frederick Dalcho], Practical Considerations Founded on the Scriptures, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina By a South-Carolinian (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823), p. 19.

¹³The National Intelligencer, September 28, 1821.

¹⁴[Richard Nisbet], Slavery Not Forbidden by Scripture. Or a Defence of the West-India Planters, from the Aspersions Thrown Out Against Them by the Author of a Pamphlet Entitled "An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America upon Slave-Keeping." By a West Indian (Philadelphia: NP; 1773), p. 25.

fighting and enslaving each other since "time immemorial." Also slavery was "more hideous there than here." He then added: "The state and condition which the negroes consider as lawful with each other, they have no claim to protest against when we subject them to it under better usage." Finally, he concluded with a brazen defense of the slave trade: "Moreover, I see no obligation we are under, of enquiring into the title of the seller who exposes in the usual way, in the usual market, a known commodity, never disputed in Africa as a fair object of sale."¹⁵

William Loughton Smith of South Carolina, arguing against any restriction on the slave trade, had voiced these same views in 1790. He contended that it was "well known that when African slaves were brought to the coast for sale, it was customary to put to death all those who were not sold." Smith concluded, then, that "the abolition of the slave trade would, therefore, cause the massacre of the people."¹⁶

According to Edward Hooker, a Yankee living in Charleston, this same argument was used in South Carolina during its debate over keeping open the African slave trade in 1805. One delegate swore that it was "a piece of humanity" to import slaves from Africa, because there "when taken prisoner

¹⁵Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, February 18, 1820.

¹⁶Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1463 (March 17, 1790).

of war, they are sold and enslaved, or else tortured and killed."¹⁷

While most slavery advocates admitted that the African slave trade was terrible, some, as Hooker indicated, used the historical "evidence" of the conditions of African slavery to justify even the slave trade itself. Rawlins Lowndes, for example, stated that "For his part, he thought this trade could be justified on the principles of religion, humanity and justice; for certainly to translate [transport?] a set of human beings from a bad country to a better, was fulfilling every part of those principles."¹⁸ While debating the slave trade in December, 1806, Representative Edward Lloyd of Maryland made the usual statements regarding imported slaves already being slaves anyway "either by descent or conquest." But then he went on to declare that those Africans taken in conquest had to be exported because of their "vindictive spirit." "Such is their thirst for revenge," he explained, "that this is absolutely necessary for the safety of the Conqueror." As a final statement of his position he charged: "Of course, all the arguments urged on the ground of the slaves being kidnapped and carried away

¹⁷J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), "The Diary of Edward Hooker" in the Annual Report of the American Historical Association, I (1896), p. 879.

¹⁸Quoted in Donald L. Robinson, Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 238.

from a state of freedom are fallacious."¹⁹

Such justifications of the slave trade were not limited to Southerners alone. Speaking against restrictions on the slave trade in 1800, John Brown of Rhode Island said that the slave trade was profitable so why should American citizens not profit from the "benefits of a trade enjoyed by all the European nations." Furthermore, such restriction, he claimed, "was wrong when considered in a moral point of view, since, by the operation of the trade, the very people themselves much bettered their condition." With or without the United States laws, Brown proposed, "not one more slave would be exported from Africa" who would not be exported anyway, so "our merchants and our revenue" might as well "enjoy the benefit." John Rutledge Jr. of South Carolina wholeheartedly backed Brown on this point.²⁰

Even the King of Dahomey was presented as defending the slave trade. In 1821 the National Intelligencer printed a conversation with this black king in which he declared that all people fight war; but on different principles. According to their principles, the King proclaimed, "the prisoner is at the disposal of his conqueror, and he may

¹⁹Annals of Congress, 9 Cong., 2 sess., p. 236 (December 31, 1806).

²⁰The fact that so many Rhode Islanders were involved with the slave trade undoubtedly influenced Brown's position. Annals of Congress, 6 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 686-87 (April 26, 1800); p. 689 (April 28, 1800).

kill or sell him according to his will." It was reported that the King further stated:

The few we can spare from death we sell to the white man, and they are happy to escape death for slavery. White men, they say, will not kill us, and we may even avoid punishment by serving our new masters with fidelity.

The author of the article then reiterated: "It was a barter of liberty for life." He then continued, "I am no apologist for the slave trade; but have my doubts whether its abolition will mitigate the sufferings of the Africans, [or] if even they have the sensibility to feel the degradations of slavery." The author concluded his piece with a catalogue of the sufferings of the African slaves now that most countries had outlawed the slave trade.²¹

Richard Furman, a Baptist minister in South Carolina, argued essentially that the African prisoners of war got exactly what they deserved. Furman's reasoning ran in a tight little circle: the Africans' law of nations, by common consent, justified them, while carrying on their wars, in killing their prisoners, or reducing them to slavery and selling them. The individual who was captured and reduced to slavery would have done the same thing to his enemy had he won. "Consequently," Furman concluded, "the man made a

²¹The National Intelligencer, September 28, 1821. For a similar viewpoint from this same king but given two years earlier, see Ibid., November 20, 1819.

slave in this manner might be said to be made so by his own consent, and by the indulgence of barbarous principles."²² Thus, to Furman, American slavery was justified because the slaves involved brought it on themselves.

Using this same comparison between African and American slavery, one pamphleteer argued against returning the Negroes to Africa because it would probably reduce them to "a state of wretchedness," a condition much "worse" than their slavery here." It would be a change from a "state of slavery among a people refined in morals and laws, to a slavery among ignorance and barbarism."²³ Such complaints against the American Colonization Society were quite frequent. One Southern Senator in 1818, for example, charged that the Negroes sent back to Africa would be "left to sink again into all the miserable barbarity of their ancestors." Another writer painted vivid pictures of the excesses of the African Kings toward their slaves, and even their subjects; then charged the abolitionists to "ask yourself seriously, whether you are promoting the cause of humanity in sending to the blood-stained shores of Africa, the descendents of those

²²Richard Furman, Exposition of the Views of the Baptists Relative to the Coloured Population in the United States (2nd ed., Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1833), p. 9. This pamphlet was first published anonymously in 1823.

²³Joseph D. Learned, A View of the Policy of Permitting Slaves in the States West of the Mississippi (Baltimore: Joseph Robinson, 1820), p. 7.

whose lives have been redeemed by the white man's gold!"

He finished by declaring that

Many think, and with reason too, that in the hands of a master whose interest is to preserve his life and health, [and] . . . provide all his wants, he is happier than when in his own country, with the sword of the tyrant hanging constantly over his head.²⁴

Even Samuel Stanhope Smith in his "scientific" treatise accepted this comparison as valid. Even the "most oppressed and destitute" of the Southern slaves, "with very few exceptions," Smith claimed, were "better fed, clothed, and lodged than their ancestors were in Africa." In a footnote, he said that "very exaggerated descriptions" were often given of "the severities practiced, and the deprivations imposed," yet in all his travels in the South he had "generally witnessed a humane treatment exercised toward that dependent and humiliated race of men."²⁵

John Drayton in his View of South Carolina went to great lengths to compare African and American slavery. His

²⁴Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., p. 235 (March 6, 1818). The National Intelligencer, September 28, 1821. For other examples of such charges against the Colonization Society see P. J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

²⁵Samuel Stanhope Smith, An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. To which are added Animadversions on certain remarks . . . by Mr. Charles White . . . Also Strictures on Lord Kaim's Discourse on the Original Diversity of Mankind (2nd ed., New Brunswick, New Jersey: J. Simpson and Co., 1810), p. 251. This is a revised and enlarged edition of the 1787 volume.

statements in many ways epitomize the ideas of early nineteenth century Southern planters. Drayton, the Governor of South Carolina, began this particular section of his study by examining the situation of the Negroes in Africa. Not surprisingly, he found them "generally in a state of slavery; liable to be sold for the luxury of their princes." The great mass of blacks which had been brought to South Carolina "only exchanged one slavery for another; and that too, with many advantages in favor of their present situation in this country." He proceeded with the typical catalogue of differences. In Africa they were subject to the "uncontrouled pleasures of princes;" sometimes they were "even slaughtered for the ceremonies of their funerals." Moreover, "Neither life or property is secured to them. But force, oppression, and injustice, are the great engines of their government." Obviously South Carolina compared very favorably to such conditions. In South Carolina, laws were passed for "their security and protection." Their work consisted of "certain reasonable tasks" which if done diligently left time for their own gardens. By law, they could only be worked certain hours, and masters had to feed and clothe them properly. In sum, Drayton found the South Carolina Negroes "happy and contented." Then, of course, he gave the capstone to many proslavery arguments: "and instances are known, where they have declined an offered freedom."²⁶

²⁶ John Drayton, A View of South Carolina As Respects

Obviously, such declarations of black contentment were always prominently displayed in proslavery literature. In the midst of the Missouri debates, for example, one writer was "grateful" to find a slave who was so contented that he would not accept freedom were it offered. This Virginia slave allegedly declared "If my master should offer me freedom I would refuse it, as I live as happily as I could wish, and shall be taken care of when old."²⁷

By such philosophical arguments as these, proslavery defenders justified American slavery on the grounds that it both elevated the Negro and also served the common good. It is clear that most of these arguments, like the appeals to scriptural authority, were used to counter various charges by slavery's opponents. By contrasting slavery in the United States to conditions in Africa, defenders of the American institution intended to answer the charges that slavery debased the blacks. Not only was the Negro better off in the United States, they argued, but also he was happier, and most importantly was being civilized and Christianized. Therefore, American slavery was neither a physical hardship nor a moral sin.

Hand in hand with the references to the precedents or

Her Natural and Civil Concerns (Charleston: W. P. Young, 1802), pp. 145-46.

²⁷The National Intelligencer, July 28, 1819.

evidence of history went the philosophical appeals to the "facts of nature." Using the evidence gleaned from history and nature, the early defenders of slavery denied the general principle of natural equality and argued that indeed men were not equal.²⁸ Many of the Southern thinkers drew their ideas from the Aristotteleian concept of superior and subordinate social functions. They borrowed from Aristotle the principle that domination and subjection pervaded all of nature. Carrying this concept over to man, they maintained that nature fitted some men for command; others for obedience.

Perhaps one of the best statements of this concept is found in John Drayton's View of South Carolina written in 1802.

Nature, governed by unerring laws, which command the oak to be stronger than the willow, and the cypress to be taller than the shrub; has at the same time imposed on mankind certain restrictions, which can never be overcome. She has made some to be poor, and others to be rich; some to be happy, and others to be miserable; some to be slaves, and others to be free. The subjects, or people, on which these principles are enforced, may be changed by industry, intrigues, factions, or revolutions; but the principles can never be altered; they will shew themselves again, with the same force on new subjects; unchangeable in their natures, and constant in their effects.²⁹

In other words, not only was slavery natural, it was also

²⁸Clearly much of this debate centered around the meaning of the Declaration of Independence; see Chapter VII.

²⁹Drayton, View of South Carolina, pp. 148-49.

inevitable and everlasting. Another Southerner told Basil Hall, a British traveler to America in 1827, that "Force -- power -- or whatever name you give it by which one nation gains the ascendancy over another, seems to be, in the practice of life, the grand rule which regulates the intercourse of man with man." This unknown speaker's discourse very closely paralleled the ideas of Aristotle on order and function in society. He saw the rulers, "whether they be the many or the few," as giving the orders and the "inferior party" submitting. He concluded:

This may not appear just, but so it is; such is the order of our moral and political nature. It has been so from all time, and will continue so as long as there remain any distinctions between human beings. The slave question is merely one of the varieties of this principle.³⁰

Reverend Richard Furman of South Carolina argued that there was "just reason" to conclude that a "considerable part" of the human race, regardless of what they might be called, were, in fact, slaves. He contended that so necessary was this subordinated condition to society, that this class would "continue in such circumstances, with mere shades of variation, while the world continues."³¹

³⁰Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, Vol. III (Edinburgh: Adell and Co., 1829), pp. 156-59.

³¹Furman, Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, p. 12. [James K. Paulding], Letters from the South Written During an Excursion in the Summer of 1816, Vol. I (New York: James Eastburn & Co., 1812), p. 120, maintained an identical viewpoint.

Edward Brown in his Notes on Slavery proposed that the "division of mankind into grades" and the relations which resulted "constitute the very soul of civilization." Nothing could be so disruptive of "sobriety and good order, as perfect equality in civilized society." He maintained that "the only barrier to this disorganization of civilized society is slavery."³² Brown thus saw slavery as more than just a labor system; it was also a system of social control. It is interesting that Brown never explicitly equated slavery and blacks, but the implication was clearly there. Other Southerners were much more blatantly racist in their connection.³³

Some slavery advocates even asserted that a slavery system was necessary for progress. For example in the National Intelligencer, "Cato" stated that it would be "no difficult task to show from history" that slavery was a condition in which a "large portion" of the human race had always existed. Furthermore, slavery "seems to have [been] a natural and necessary condition for the social advancement of mankind."³⁴

³²Brown, Notes on Slavery, pp. 24-31. Brown seemed to see all slavery as evolving around the concept of labor. In some ways so does [Z. Kingsley], A Treatise on the Patriarchial or Cooperative System of Society as it Now Exists in Some Governments . . . Under the Name of Slavery. with Its Necessity and Advantages (2nd ed., NP, NP, 1829).

³³See below: Chapter IV on Racism.

³⁴The National Intelligencer, December 4, 1819.

Examining the conditions of nature, one Missourian discovered that "It is the law of nature that we should prefer our own well-being, our own ease and comfort, to the well-being, ease and comfort of our fellow men" He thus deduced that the origin of slavery lay in the state of nature where man used the force he possessed "to coerce other animals, his fellow men among the rest, and compel them to submit to his command, and contribute to his comfort." He alleged that "all right is founded on power, whether in a state of nature or a state of society. In the latter case, we do no more than substitute the force of the society for the force of the individual;" Slavery was justified, he concluded, because "might gives right in such a case." If slavery was wrong, it was because it was contrary to the law of God, but since this was not the case, then slavery was justifiable due to its origin and evolution from the state of nature.³⁵ The author of a long article in the National Intelligencer in 1819 wrote that the question of slavery and the law of nature had been discussed by Grotius, Puffendorf, Hobbes, and "their successors" who decided that "slavery may be justified on principles of natural law." This author placed particular emphasis on Grotius and Lord Melville's concession that owners have "a right to be indemnified for the trouble and expenses of maintaining the off-

³⁵ Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, February 18, 1820.

spring of slaves, by the labor of this offspring." The Southern Review almost ten years later also used the authority of Grotius, claiming that he "distinctly" maintained that slavery was "not contrary to natural right."³⁶

As has been suggested, much of the militant, public proslavery defense really was engendered by the attack on slavery, or an attack on a particular aspect of it. One of the best examples of such a development was the controversy centering around the connection between slavery and republicanism. Anti-slavery sympathizers charged that slavery and republicanism were incompatible; indeed, by their definition, a true republican could not be a slaveholder. Slavery defenders countered this contention by arguing from history, especially American history, that not only were slavery and republicanism compatible, but slavery even strengthened republicanism by releasing those of superior talents to devote themselves to society as a whole.

The issue of slavery and republicanism really came to a head in the debate over the admission of Missouri. Both sides continually referred to this topic throughout the debate. In February, 1820, William Pinckney of Maryland, in one of the few unemotional arguments, stated that "The introduction or continuance of civil slavery is manifestly the

³⁶The National Intelligencer as quoted in the Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1819, see especially note 14. The Southern Review, I (February, 1828), p. 233.

mere result of the power of making laws. It does not in any degree enter into the form of the government." Regardless of what others claim, he maintained:

Make the government what you will in its organization and in the distribution of its authorities, the introduction or continuance of involuntary servitude by the legislative power when it is created can have no influence on its pre-established form, whether monarchical, aristocratical or republican.

But then he too fell back on an emotional appeal to history to bolster his arguments. He stated that "Sparta, and Rome, and Athens, and many others of the ancient family were Republics," not only in form but also in their accomplishments. It was "the unconquerable spirit of liberty, nurtured by republican habits and institutions," Pinkney claimed, that defended the pass at Thermopylae. Liberty was "characteristic" of Attica; how else explain the victory at Marathon and Salamis. Waxing ever more eloquent he proclaimed "What other soil than that which the genial sun of Republican freedom illuminated and warmed, could have produced such men as Leonidas and Miltiades, Themistocles and Epaminondas?" Obviously, as Pinkney pointed out, all these "highest order of Republics also held slaves. Pinkney ended with the charge that if slavery and republicanism were indeed incompatible, then the only alternatives were emancipation or else expulsion of the Southern states.³⁷ Clearly, he thought

³⁷Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 410-11 (February 15, 1820).

either alternative ridiculous.

Others also argued that most of the original states held slaves at the time of the adoption of the Constitution, and they certainly considered themselves republican.³⁸ John Taylor of Caroline, for example, pointed out that all the states during the Confederation period were slaveholding states when they formed their constitutions. If such states "possessed the contemplated republican forms of government," he concluded, "then that circumstance is not inconsistent with such forms . . ." In his own inimitable fashion then, Taylor attempted to draw a distinction between "Congress" and the "United States." Part of the Constitution, he argued, acted on Congress, part on the states. One of the latter was Article IV dealing with republican government. This stipulation was a duty "to be performed by states to states" so Congress should not really even be involved.³⁹

Slavery, therefore, was not an anti-republican institution, advocates argued, because it had existed both before and after the formation of the nation. "Sydney" in the Missouri Gazette insisted that the "real question" was whether or not a constitution admitting slavery was republican. But he then argued that the word republican had to be

³⁸Ibid., pp. 993-94 (January 28, 1820); p. 1234 (February 10, 1820).

³⁹John Taylor, Construction Construed, and Constitutions Vindicated (Richmond: Shepherd & Pollard, 1820), pp. 310-11.

understood as it was used in the federal constitution, which clearly accepted slavery.⁴⁰

Most slavery apologists, however, went further than a mere statement of the compatibility of slavery with republicanism; they proclaimed that slavery was a means of advancing the common good because it allowed slaveholders to devote their time, talent, and energy to governing. As "Cato" proposed in the National Intelligencer in December, 1819:

it does not appear that slavery can be regarded, in any degree, as a political evil: the history of mankind proves that wherever it is established, those who are free are most proud and jealous of their freedom, which is, among them, not only an enjoyment, but a rank and a privilege.

Later he claimed that slavery led to an "increased intensity of the independent spirit." Cato ended by the usual reference to Greece and Rome, "the earliest nurseries of freedom." "This state of things must have powerfully contributed to inspire that unconquerable love of liberty which marked their genius," he decided, "and which is still imbibed from them, by us, through the medium of their immortal writers."⁴¹

Cato's remarks concerning the connection between

⁴⁰ St. Louis Missouri Gazette, April 14, 1819.

⁴¹ The National Intelligencer, December 4, 1819.

republicanism and slavery are very close, almost to the point of plagiarism, to Edmund Burke's remarks about the Southern colonies during the American Revolution, comments Southerners were inordinately fond of quoting. Burke said:

There is a circumstance attending these southern American colonies, which makes the spirit of liberty still more high and haughty there than in those to the northward. It is that, in Virginia and the Carolinas, they have a vast multitude of slaves. Where this is the case in any part of the world, those who are free, are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege. Not seeing there, that freedom, as in countries where it is a common blessing, and as broad and general as the air, may be united with much abject toil, with great misery, with all the exterior of servitude, liberty looks, amongst them, like something that is more noble and liberal. . . . these people of the southern colonies are much more strongly, and with a higher and more stubborn spirit, attached to liberty than those of the northward.⁴²

During the controversy over Missouri, the National Intelligencer printed a long article from "An American" answering some aspersions on the United States by the Edinburgh Review. Obviously, one of the issues raised was that of slavery's effect on the people. "An American" answered: "Draw a line between the slave-holding and the other states,

⁴²For references to Burke, see, for example, Robert Walsh, Jr., An Appeal from the Judgments of Great Britain Respecting the United States of America (Philadelphia: Mitchell, Ames, and White, 1819), pp. 402-03; Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 228 (January 20, 1820); Richmond Enquirer January 18, 1820.

and then compare the people of the two sections in point of honor, courage, patriotism, intelligence, morals, manners, and temper. To the latter you will ascribe no superiority." Furthermore, he pointed out, the first President of the Revolutionary Congress, the only Commander of the Revolutionary army, and the first, third, fourth, and present President of the United States were all "selected from slave-holding states, and themselves the owners of slaves." This section was brought to a close with the usual reference to Edmund Burke's remarks.⁴³

In January, 1820, Freeman Walker of Georgia spoke on this same theme in the Senate, making the North-South comparison in more explicit terms. Walker disclaimed any intention of making "invidious comparisons, or in the slightest degree to disparage other parts of the country," but then proceeded to do so. "Where will you find a greater degree of pure and unadulterated patriotism -- where will you find a greater devotion to the true principles of liberty, than among the inhabitants of the slave-holding States?" he asked. Walker followed this challenge with a series of questions: "Who first fanned the sacred flame of freedom on this continent?" "Who penned the immortal Declaration of Independence?" "Who led your Revolutionary armies to battle and to

⁴³The National Intelligencer as quoted in the Richmond Enquirer, December 7, 1819.

victory?" "Who first agitated the question, which eventuated in the formation of our inestimable Constitution?" "Who was first called by the unanimous voice of his countrymen to preside over the destiny of the new Government?" "Who now conducts our political bark with so much honor to himself and benefit to the nation?" Obviously the answer to all these questions was "A native of a slaveholding State" which Walker announced at the end of every question. He finally declared that the idea that slavery had a tendency to make men tyrannical and despotic was false. The whole experience of the country was proof against this assertion, he claimed. "In no part of this widely extended Government have the pure principles of democracy been so much cherished, as among the inhabitants of the slaveholding States; and these yield to none in the practice of benevolence and humanity."⁴⁴

It is significant that Walker **felt** compelled, in the final analysis, to return to the theme of humanity. Regardless of the terms or circumstance in which slavery was justified, its defenders nearly always felt necessitated to at least refer to humanity too, to reiterate again and again that slavery was not a moral evil. Some Southern newspapers even referred to a master's humaneness in his obituary.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 162 (January 19, 1820).

⁴⁵For a very small sample, see the Mirror of the Times (Augusta, Georgia), March 5, 1810; December 3, 1810.

One Southern writer pushed the sectional comparison so far as to contend that Southerners were "a more independent, high-spirited people; jealous of their civil and religious rights, ever prompt and ready to expose the abuses of government . . ." Moreover, the "servile terms of address" such as "The Honorable," "His Excellency" and "the other terms of courtly distinction" were used more in the North than the South.⁴⁶ Another charged in 1819 that the North had always "savored more of distinctions;" had always been "more federal, more favorable to the speculations of the enemies of their government."⁴⁷

"Virginius" in the Richmond Enquirer castigated Rufus King's questioning of the three-fifths clause. He pointed out that of the 181 members of Congress only 76 were from the slave states. "And how seventy six members can preponderate over one hundred and five, Mr. King, has not explained to us," "Virginius" commented. Yet, returning to the point

⁴⁶Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius, p. 19.

⁴⁷The National Intelligencer, September 3, 1819. Such veiled, or even explicit references to the Hartford Convention were frequent since political feeling was also often involved in this sectionalism. The Georgia Journal, for example, compared the actions of the two sections of the country during the War of 1812: Georgia Journal quoted in the National Intelligencer, July 9, 1819. For some other specific mention of the Hartford Convention, see Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 984 (January 27, 1820), 16 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1108 (February 12, 1821); National Intelligencer, December 4, 1819; Southern Recorder (Milledgeville, Georgia), September 19, 1820. For a fuller discussion of slavery and politics, see below, Chapter VI.

about slavery and republicanism, he hinted rather broadly that if such were indeed the case it was because the institution of slavery permitted the South to send better men to Congress.⁴⁸

Charles Wiltse in his biography of Calhoun suggests that the South was really correct in its belief that it sent better men to Congress. He too saw this as being related to the plantation system. Success as a planter, according to Wiltse, depended upon good land, ample labor, and adequate transportation for the crop. Given all these, full-time supervision was really not that necessary; therefore, the more able and ambitious were free to enter politics. In contrast, success in the commercial and industrial North depended upon the personal guidance of the entrepreneur. Wiltse contended that thus in the North the more capable stuck with business, leaving politics to the less able.⁴⁹

As the debate over the connection between republicanism and slavery developed, Southerners increasingly saw slavery as a positive good. Slavery was perceived to be, or at least was claimed to be, necessary for a truly democratic or republican citizen's government. Slavery was necessary because it permitted the slaveholder the leisure time required

⁴⁸The Richmond Enquirer, February 8, 1820.

⁴⁹Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun Nationalist 1782-1828 (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944), pp. 192-93.

to develop his highest capabilities. By thus having the best leaders the whole Southern society benefitted.

By their own reading of history Southerners were thus convinced that slavery was right. Examining the past, they discovered, to their satisfaction, that some type of slavery had existed at all times in all countries; it was a part of the state of nature. It was particularly significant, slavery advocates argued, that those nations which were looked to for examples to emulate, the classical states of Greece and Rome, had held slaves and unquestionably had regarded slavery as right. Thus slavery in general was justified by historical precedent, and American slavery was especially acceptable because it was so benign. Southerners insisted that theirs was the mildest form of slavery that the world had ever seen; indeed, American slavery was even better than normal conditions in Africa. In addition to such historical and philosophical sanctions, defenders of slavery defended the institution by comparing it to the alternative. Emancipation, they argued, certainly had not worked in the past. In the United States it had resulted in a class of free blacks which was acceptable in neither the North or the South, and which was clearly both morally and physically inferior. Furthermore, just over the horizon lurked the spectre of Santo Domingo, the fearful reminder of the end to which emancipation could lead.

Underlying these appeals to historical and philosophical

sanctions and evidence was the basic attempt to prove that slavery was right and therefore that slaveholders were not morally reprehensible. Like the appeals to the Bible, then, the references to historical precedents for slavery and the comparisons of American slavery to the alternatives were used to justify slavery in the South. Often these appeals were used together as if the combination of scriptural, philosophical and historical sanction would create an impregnable shield for the institution of slavery, but even more importantly, a shield for the reputation of the South against attacks of immorality.

CHAPTER IV: RACIAL DEFENSE

Today most people generally accept the idea that nineteenth century America was a racist society. Nearly everyone, Southerners as well as Northerners, even most abolitionists, regarded blacks as inferior. Clearly, then, a distinction must be drawn between racism and proslavery. A racist was not necessarily a supporter of slavery; he merely believed that blacks were inferior. On the other hand, racism was a vital element in the proslavery argument. It is clear that much of the defense and justification for slavery was based on racial terms. From the Biblical curse on Canaan to the various "scientific" studies, blacks were pointed to as being different. It is significant that in nearly all cases slavery advocates were not defending slavery itself so much as they were justifying black slavery. In doing so they could point to the various accepted evidences of black inferiority as well as play upon the racial fears and prejudices of others. Since colonial times Americans had rather pragmatically assumed that there were such things as "race," and moreover, that the various races differed in capacity with the white being on top and the black on

the bottom.¹ Racism was thus a critical factor in the perception of Negroes and of slavery.

George M. Fredrickson in his study The Black Image In the White Mind drew a distinction between racism and racial prejudice, claiming that the former had to have a "scientific basis," and thus did not really come into existence until "almost the middle of the nineteenth century." He asserted that since there had been no elaborate scientific defense of slavery, racism could not exist.² Fredrickson's point is well taken, but for the early national period this distinction between racism and racial prejudice has little meaning as far as understanding the attitudes of the people. Most Americans were convinced that they did have a scientific basis for their beliefs. Simply because scientific thinking was dominated by environmentalism is no reason to discount the acceptance by the people of its conclusions that blacks

¹See Chapter V below on the scientific defense.

²George M. Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 2-3. Yet, at another point Fredrickson weakens his own argument by claiming that the antislavery impulse was so "weak and hesitant . . . that there was no need to develop and promulgate an articulated racism in order to sustain the institution [of slavery]," p. 3. Other historians certainly see racism as an important component of the slavery defense. See, for example, William W. Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," The American Historical Review, 77 (February, 1972); William Cohen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery," The Journal of American History, LVI (December, 1969); W. Harrison Daniel, "Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the Early Republic," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 80 (January, 1972).

were inferior. Most Americans of that period certainly regarded blacks as different, whatever the cause.

Perhaps it could be claimed that early proslavery sentiments reflected nothing more than racial prejudice. It would seem, however, that the two are separate entities. As mentioned earlier, racism was an important component of the proslavery argument but it does not follow that all racists therefore supported slavery. The two ideas are separate though overlapping entities. Negro inferiority was basically accepted in the early United States, but from this accepted concept, proponents of slavery moved beyond mere racial prejudice to a justification of slavery. Others, while equally prejudiced against blacks, were adamantly opposed to the institution of slavery. Jonathan Mason, Congressman from Massachusetts, is a good example of a prejudiced antislavery Northerner. In 1818 he supported a strengthened fugitive slave bill because he wanted to facilitate the recovery of runaways because he did not want his city, Boston, to become "infested" with blacks as it would be, he claimed, without an effective restraint.³ The depth of such prejudice was graphically shown in the midst of the Missouri debates when Samuel C. Allen of Massachusetts moved to amend a bill then pending before the House to extend voting privileges to all

³Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., p. 838 (January 30, 1818).

free male citizens. When the vote was taken, Allen was the only one to vote in its favor.⁴

Those few Southerners who favored emancipation did not foresee or want equality between the races. St. George Tucker, for example, claimed that he was opposed to the banishment of the Negroes; however, he favored it in all but name. His plan involved "denying them the most valuable privileges which civil government affords . . . [in order] to render it their inclination and their interest to seek those privileges in some other climate."⁵ In other words, Tucker wanted to make blacks such obvious second class citizens that they would emigrate on their own. Thomas Jefferson too can be seen as fitting into this mold. He never really considered the possibility of any form of racial co-existence based on a full equality of the races. In his Notes on Virginia, for example, he referred to the "physical distinctions [between blacks and whites] proving a difference of race." So great were these "real distinctions" that he believed free blacks could not be "retain[ed] and incorporated into the state" but would have to be "removed."⁶

⁴Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1556 (February 28, 1820).

⁵St. George Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery (Philadelphia: printed for Mathew Carey, 1796), pp. 94-95.

⁶Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1788), pp. 147-48, 154. Also see Cohen, "Jefferson and Slavery."

During the debate over Missouri, Louis McLane of Delaware claimed that he was "an enemy" of slavery but at the same time deprecated any policy "assailing that discrimination which reason and nature have interposed between the white and black population."⁷ A few months later, McLane returned to this same theme, declaring that "reason and nature have drawn a line of discrimination which never can be effaced" He would never agree to put the white and black population upon an equality, or to destroy the features of both, by the vain attempt to amalgamate one with the other!"⁸

As McLane's statement indicates, much of the racial feeling found voice in the fear over racial mixture. In the First Congress, for example, William Loughton Smith of South Carolina spoke out against emancipation because it would lead to a mixture of the races which would "degenerate the whites without improving the blacks." He claimed that such a mixture would "stain the blood of the whites;" the white race would become "extinct."⁹

⁷Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1155 (February 7, 1820).

⁸Ibid., 16 Cong., 2 sess., p. 621 (December 12, 1820). See also speech of Philip P. Barbour, Ibid., p. 547 (December 8, 1820).

⁹Ibid., 1 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1505-08 (March 17, 1790). Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968) makes much over the Americans' concern about

The idea, even fear, of intermarriage was also often used as a counterpoise to the demands for equality from anti-slavery proponents. From Bryan Edwards' History of the West Indies, to William Loughton Smith's attack on the Quakers in the First Congress, to the Missouri debates, slavery's defenders charged that those pushing for emancipation would never want a member of their family to marry a black. One Missouri paper went so far as to claim that the abolitionists had carried their "equalizing theory" so far as to marry a "deranged white man to a black negroe woman." According to the paper, this "unhappy man" soon "relieved himself" by committing suicide.¹⁰

Clearly many of these racial attitudes are closely tied in with the scientific and societal defenses of slavery. Such defenses allied with the racial argument to prove the Negro a distinct species and one which could only be controlled by the institution of slavery. Slavery was thus seen as being a method of regulating race relations, as an

racial mixture. For other contemporary statements, see, for example, Louis McLane, Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 619-20 (December 12, 1820); Alexander Smyth, Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., 1015-18 (January 28, 1820); John Scott, Ibid., p. 1520 (February 25, 1820); St. Louis Enquirer, March 4, 1820; The Statesman and Patriot (Milledgeville, Ga), September 6, 1828; Robert Walsh, Jr., An Appeal from the Judgments of Great Britain Respecting the United States of America (Philadelphia: Mitchell, Ames, and White, 1819), pp. 390-93, 397.

¹⁰St. Louis Enquirer, August 26, 1820.

instrument of social control. It was seen as being the only way of organizing a biracial society, or keeping control over a savage and barbaric people.

Evidences of this perceived black inferiority were every where apparent from casual observation to scientific treatises. Thomas Cooper, President of South Carolina College, for example, wrote: "I do not say the blacks are a distinct species: but I have not the slightest doubt of their being an inferior variety of the human species; and not capable of the same improvement as the whites."¹¹ Much of Samuel Stanhope Smith's volume on human variety assumed a priori the barbarity of the Africans. He rather openly equated dark skin to savagry and inferiority.¹²

Proponents of slavery openly maintained that the institution was of natural origin. The nature of the black was such that he made a perfect slave. Whether or not this

¹¹Thomas Cooper to Mahlon Dickerson, March 16, 1826 as reprinted in The American Historical Review, VI (July, 1901), p. 729.

¹²Samuel Stanhope Smith, An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species (New Brunswick, New Jersey: J. Simpson and Co., 1810), see, for example, pp. 96-98, 113, 279, 311. Donald G. Mathews, Slavery and Methodism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 22, claimed that **the** "revolutionary ideals of freedom and the enlightenment belief in equality" never really took root in the South because such beliefs "were neither widespread nor powerful enough to command men to love or free a race which many believed unequal to their own."

nature was ultimately due to God or not was never discussed; these distinctions in nature were merely accepted as given. Implicit in the Southern thoughts, obviously, was the belief that the black was undeniably inferior and therefore should be the obedient, menial class. Indeed, some slavery advocates insisted that slavery was of benefit precisely for that reason: it limited the servant class to blacks, thereby elevating all whites. Duff Green, running as a delegate to Missouri's constitutional convention, supported slavery in terms of the Aristottelelian social function that "it devolves on a part of the community to perform the labor and do the menial service." By having slavery, Green argued, "the distinction between master and servant would be color, and not money." This situation would clearly redound to the benefit of society because "the high and elevated consciousness of being an American citizen, would prevent the poor from serving the rich -- and we should have more national feeling, virtue and honor."¹³

A pamphleteer carried this argument even further, declaring that the history of every civilized country had shown that there must always be, in good Biblical terms, "hewers of wood, and drawers of water." Moreover, if there was not "a particular description of persons" upon whom these duties naturally fell as in the Southern States, then the

¹³Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, April 15, 1820.

servants would have to come from "the great bulk of the population of the country." He then clinched his argument for many Southerners by pointing out that the result of such a system "is well known both in Europe and the nonslaveholding States of America."¹⁴ A writer to the Georgia Journal declaimed along these same lines. He insisted that if black slavery was abolished, white slavery would follow. "Without the one, the other is of necessity, and inevitable." In Aristotelleian concepts, he argued that slavery existed and was absolute in all governments. Some men had "more property, and capacity to manage;" eventually their "growing influence and power" would claim the obedience of others. "In all countries men make slaves of men; . . ." He concluded his argument with a justification of black slavery based on racism. "The question, thus, then, resolves itself: we have only to chuse between black and white slavery; for if I have furnished no justification for the one I have made it the only substitute for the other more intolerable than the first; . . ."¹⁵ One Maryland legislator carried such sentiments one step forward. In January, 1821, he "urged the propriety" of allowing slave importations into Maryland from

¹⁴For one particular development of this theme, see Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius (Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827), especially p. 20.

¹⁵The Georgia Journal as quoted in the National Intelligencer, July 9, 1819.

other states in order to reduce their price so that small farmers could afford them and would therefore not leave the state.¹⁶

A good example of the state of Southern racial opinion is found in Charles Pinckney, the old revolutionary hero, who, in February, 1821, declared that of all the parts of the world, Africa was the only one which remained "completely unaltered from the creation until the present moment." He concluded that the reason this was so was because the blacks had been created "with less intellectual powers than the whites." Pinckney then carried this observation to its logical conclusion as far as most Southerners were concerned: blacks were "most probably intended to serve them [whites], and be the instruments of their cultivation." To support his claims of black inferiority, he referred to both Hume and Jefferson who "have invariably expressed the same sentiments." Returning to the theme of servitude, Pinckney claimed that "all the most enlightened nations of Europe" had used blacks as slaves because "they found no other parts of the human race so inferior in intellect to the whites as the Africans, or none which it can be so fairly presumed were created for the purpose of serving them."¹⁷

¹⁶(Baltimore) American & Commercial Daily Advertiser, January 23, 30, 1821.

¹⁷Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1136-37 (February 13, 1821).

As Pinckney's speech implies, slavery and Negroes were increasingly linked together so that most Southerners began to perceive race as the primary foundation upon which slavery was based.¹⁸ Negroes were seen as the perfect slaves. One Southern newspaper, for example, printed an excerpt from Madden's Travels regarding the Constantinople slave markets where the white women were filled with "sickness and sorrow" whereas the blacks were happy and laughing.¹⁹ Hezekiah Niles carried such racial perception to its logical conclusion. In an editorial on slavery written in March 1820, he argued for making the "grade of color" the determining factor for slavery. All persons with a certain degree of lightness of color would be free regardless of the condition of the parents. Niles felt this would not only present a "considerable check" to the black population but would also do much to relieve the evils of slavery. In other words Niles wanted the blackness of the skin to determine who was slave and who was free. It is unclear exactly why he thought this would relieve the evils of slavery. Perhaps he believed that such

¹⁸See, for example, Jordan, White Over Black, p. 279. Lewis C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Vol. I (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1933), p. 465, claimed that besides the mixtures between blacks and whites, planters could also "shrewdly distinguish" ethnic differences of various "African stocks." In support of Gray's contention, as late as November, 1820, David Bates was advertising for sale a "yellow girl of a good breed," National Intelligencer, November 28, 1820.

¹⁹Niles' Weekly Register, September 5, 1829, p. 32.

a law would place strong barriers in the way of miscegenation, an "evil" of slavery. Or, perhaps Niles' racism was such that he simply wanted to eliminate the evil of keeping slaves of those mulattoes who were particularly light-skinned.²⁰

Whatever his reason, Niles could gather little, if any, support for such a proposition. Most Southerners were determined to keep the distinction between Negro and white races intact. After the Denmark Vessey plot, for example, a group of South Carolinians petitioned their legislature for laws and regulations to mark "every distinction" between whites and blacks and especially "calculated to make the latter feel the superiority of the former."²¹ Edwin C. Holland was certainly one South Carolinian who felt that way. In 1822 he wrote of the Negroes: "It is politic and proper . . . to preserve such a system of discipline in relation to them as

²⁰Ibid., March 11, 1820, p. 26. At another point Niles reprinted an article from The (Louisville) Emporium that referred to the "great indignation" over attempts to sell a woman and child who were white but slaves. "Who can think of this and not shudder," Niles thundered. "Can there not be, ought there not to be, some limitation, some bounds fixed to this principle?" Ibid., June 9, 1821, p. 240. Duff Green, running for Missouri's constitutional convention, defended slavery in Missouri, and declared that he wanted a "slavery based on color and not on money." Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, April 15, 1820.

²¹Quoted in Joseph C. Carroll, Slave Insurrections in the United States 1800-1865 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), p. 104.

effectively mark their distinctive condition in society, and regulate their degree, when placed in opposition to tha[t] of our own."²² Still another Southerner declared that "the mark set by the Creator upon the negro is of too indelible a nature" to expect the mere granting of civil and political rights to assimilate or incorporate them into American society.²³

The degree that such racism could reach is exemplified by a bill introduced into the Georgia legislature directing that the bodies of executed Negro felons be given to the medical school. One legislator in 1828 defended his vote in favor of the bill on the grounds that there was a need to dissect bodies for medical purposes but it was "insensitive" to do so to whites; therefore, they should use blacks. This legislator thought the bill would also serve a further purpose in operating as a powerful restraint on the colored population which was so "universally superstitious" that this bill might deter them where the penalty of death alone would not.²⁴

²²[Edwin C. Holland], A Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated Against the Southern & Western States Respecting the Institution and Existence of Slavery Among Them; by a South Carolinian (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), pp. 84-85. This is a reprint of the 1822 edition.

²³The National Intelligencer, December 4, 1819.

²⁴The Statesman and Patriot (Milledgeville, Ga.), August 16, 1828. In the first issue of the Carolina Journal of Medicine, Science, and Agriculture, January, 1825, five

Ulrich B. Phillips suggested that the central theme of Southern history was the "common resolve" that the South "be and remain a white man's country."²⁵ Such sentiment certainly played an important role in the racial justification for slavery. It was this element of racial adjustment that bothered Southerners as much as, if not more than, the concern over the economic costs of emancipation. Slavery was defended so vigorously because it was perceived to be so crucial to the Southern way of life in all of its manifestations. Slavery was seen as being the only way to protect that life style, and more importantly, the only way to control an alien and savage race in that society. Congressman James Jones of Georgia, for example, declared in January, 1800, that he did not think that slavery was an evil; without the institution of slavery to control them the blacks would be free "to ravage, murder, and comit every species of crime."²⁶

Using both the evidence of history and the examples of

of the six cases written about were Negroes. Further work needs to be done to see if this was coincidental or typical; to discover if any medical "experiments" were being done on slaves.

²⁵Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History," The American Historical Review, XXXIV (October, 1928), p. 31.

²⁶Annals of Congress, 6 Cong., 1 sess., p. 235. (January 2, 1800). In the same speech, Jones went so far as to proclaim that slavery was so good that the blacks had been "immensely benefitted by coming amongst us."

the free blacks in the American population, Southerners were convinced that free blacks rapidly slipped back into "degradation," thus proving their innate inferiority. Drawing upon historical experience, slavery advocates pointed out not only the disastrous results of emancipation in Santo Domingo, and the discouraging colonization experiment, but also the wretchedness of the free Negroes as a class in both the South and the North. For example, an article against manumission in the American Farmer claimed that "experience proves that there is no condition of humanity which begets more wretchedness, more vice, more premature disease and mortality, than that of emancipated negroes who remain without political rights in the midst of a free white population."²⁷ One British traveler swore that he was a "decided advocate" for ameliorating the blacks' condition, but was "convinced that their emancipation would be attended with imminent danger." He pointed out, for example, that "some evil" had even attended the manumission of Washington's slaves. He had "frequently heard the measure reprobated in the neighborhood of Mt. Vernon" because a "great part" of them had "prostituted" their liberty to the "purposes of licentiousness, which was supported by plunder."²⁸

²⁷The American Farmer, August 7, 1829, p. 167.

²⁸Charles W. Janson, The Stranger in America (London: Albion Press, 1807), pp. x-xi. As Janson's observation indicates, the argument based on the blacks' degraded condition

The favorite method used to prove the degeneracy of the free black population was to compare the vital statistics of mortality and criminality. Niles in his Weekly Register, for example, compared the free black mortality to that of the slaves in 1824. In Baltimore, over eight per cent of the free blacks died, but only less than half of one per cent of the slaves died. In Philadelphia, Niles claimed, that in proportion, twice as many free blacks died as whites. Lest the point be missed, Niles declared: "The mere liberation of the person from slavery may just as likely be a curse as a blessing . . ."²⁹

Statistics on criminality were used in a similar vein. In 1826 Niles reprinted an article showing that for the last two years the ratio of crime between free blacks and whites in Loudon County, Virginia, was twenty-one to one. In Congress, Charles Pinckney stated that "the most miserable and degraded state of human nature is to be found among the free negroes of New York and Philadelphia . . ." He claimed that he personally examined this subject while in Philadelphia and found its streets "crowded with idle, drunken negroes at every corner." Moreover, for all of Pennsylvania, he contended, the crime rate for blacks was twenty times higher

was more often than not due to racial feelings.

²⁹Niles' Weekly Register, April 16, 1825. Brown, Notes on Slavery, p. 43 uses the same Baltimore comparison.

than for the whites.³⁰

Over a year later, a Savannah newspaper using the same cities as Pinckney, attempted to answer the criticisms of the New York Daily Advertiser by comparing the morality of southern and northern blacks. In Philadelphia at the last court session, the editor pointed out, there were 84 criminals, 45 of whom were black while the proportion of blacks to whites was only 10½ to 84. In New York, the editor continued, "The evils of the black population are felt in full force; and the docket of every session of their courts is crowded with sable offenders for crimes of the most depraved nature." It is highly significant that the Georgian was especially upset over the attack on the South's morality.

When justice is executed upon these offenders, are the inhabitants of those cities stigmatised by innuendo, or otherwise, as persecutors of their "fellowmen" or as hunting them like wild beasts! When perpetual imprisonment or death is awarded in New York, for crimes, for which a negro in Georgia would only receive a limited number of stripes -- are reflections made in the southern states calculated to encourage the idea that they are examples of northern injustice to an "oppressed race" as they are called? No -- it was left for the Daily Advertiser to represent the merciful decree of southern justice as criminal; to misrepresent the motives and actions of a whole community.³¹

³⁰The Genius of Liberty as quoted in Niles' Weekly Register, September 2, 1826. Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1324 (February 14, 1820).

³¹The Savannah Georgian as quoted in the Washington Gazette, September 1, 1821.

In answer to other criticism, another Southern newspaper took an imaginary trip into the future to see what the condition of the blacks would be if slaves were freed. They found less than a third of the number of blacks that had existed thirty years earlier under slavery. The author explained that at one point there had been even fewer, but "at their own prayer" they were "distributed among the people" as slaves and now they "will probably again increase and multiply, as they did in happier times."³²

This latter fantasy obviously reflected one of the primary viewpoints of the Old South: the idea that the blacks were contented, and well taken care of, indeed, they even preferred slavery. From such a view, it was just one short step to the assertion, as voiced by the Mt. Zion Georgia Missionary, that "there are many who now retain their slaves from motives of humanity, and who would gladly embrace the opportunity of giving them their freedom whenever it could be made beneficial to them." This paper even claimed that it would be wise for a slave to refuse his freedom from a kind master; the master, on the other hand, would confer but a "miserable boon" to the faithful servant by throwing him at large upon the community. Like so many other Southerners of the period, the only answer this paper could

³²The National Intelligencer as quoted in the Richmond Enquirer, December 7, 1819.

accept was colonization.³³

As this article indicates, slavery's defenders could use the degraded conditions of the free blacks as proof against the wisdom of emancipation. The South Carolina Baptist minister Richard Furman spoke for much of the South when he declared that on "abstract principles" emancipation was good, but there also had to be other considerations. All this agitation, he felt, was a "vain attempt" to bring about a change which would probably not better the blacks' condition. At least this was true, he said, of those negroes who had been liberated in the northern states.³⁴ Another South Carolinian went even further. "Manumission would produce nothing but evil," he insisted. "Not one of these people in a hundred would maintain himself by labour." He then supported this contention by his own racist conception of the character of the Negro.

Ignorant and indolent by nature, improvident and depraved by habit, and destitute of the moral principle, as they generally appear to be, ages and generations must pass away, before they could be made virtuous, honest, and useful members of the body politic.³⁵

³³Mt. Zion Georgia Missionary as quoted in the National Intelligencer, October 22, 1819.

³⁴Richard Furman, Exposition on the Views of the Baptists Relative to the Coloured Population of the United States (2nd ed., Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1833), pp. 10-11.

³⁵Dalcho, Practical Considerations, p. 6.

Peter Early, Congressman from Georgia, did not bother to offer even this little proof for his contention that free blacks were "an evil far greater than slavery itself." He merely stated: "All proof is useless; no fact can be more notorious."³⁶

Given such views of the Negroes' nature and capacity, it is interesting that many Americans, even some of the more vehement racists, could still claim that these same "degenerate" blacks were going to redeem Africa. Part of the momentum behind the efforts to colonize American free blacks in Africa was the desire to civilize the "dark continent."

In many respects, the American Colonization Society grew out of the spirit of the age. It was one of the many reform and benevolent societies that was established in the early nineteenth century. In 1816, after several years of preparation, Robert Finley, a New Jersey Presbyterian minister, and a group of eminent politicians met in Washington to form a society

to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the Free People of Colour residing in our Country, in Africa, or such place as Congress shall deem most expedient. And the society shall act to effect this object, in co-operation with the General Government,

³⁶Annals of Congress, 9 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 173-74 (December 17, 1806).

and such of the States as may adopt regulations upon the subject.³⁷

Thus at its inception the Society showed its dependence upon federal aid, an aid that for various reasons never came.

Bushrod Washington, a slave-holding nephew of George, was elected President of the Board of Managers. Other prominent members and officials included Henry Clay, William H. Crawford, Andrew Jackson, John Randolph, Richard Rush, Francis Scott Key, and John Taylor of Caroline. Reverend Finley believed that the society would help blacks work out their own destiny in Africa and carry the benefits of American civilization and religion to that benighted land. At the same time, the Society would relieve America of a discordant element, help prevent the dangers of amalgamation, and perhaps, eventually emancipate all the slaves through expatriation.³⁸

One early historian of the Society, Early Lee Fox, claimed that Colonization "was essentially a moderate . . . movement, counting among its supporters the moderate men of every part of the Union." He insisted that Colonization's

³⁷P. J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Early Lee Fox, The American Colonization Society 1817-1840 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1919).

³⁸Mathews, Slavery and Methodism, pp. 88-90.

"bitterest opponents" were the "strange bedfellows" of New England and South Carolina.³⁹ Perhaps Fox overstated his case, but it is true that the Colonization movement was attacked from both sides. Slavery's opponents claimed that the Society really was strengthening the institution of slavery itself by siphoning off the discordant element of the free blacks. On the other hand, slavery's advocates damned the society for really being an abolitionist society in disguise. For various reasons the society was not highly successful. Between 1817 and 1830 less than 1500 colonists had been sent to Africa; by 1860 the figure was only slightly above 10,000.⁴⁰ Or, as another historian put it: "The whole colonization movement throughout the entire country is said to have removed in nineteen years the natural increase of only $9\frac{1}{2}$ days."⁴¹

Undoubtedly many Americans were sincere in their beliefs and efforts in helping to send American blacks to Africa. However, it must not be forgotten that such efforts were basically founded upon a deep and abiding racism. In the long run, Africa might be helped, but for most white Americans, the real purpose behind Colonization was to relieve

³⁹Fox, American Colonization Society, p. 49.

⁴⁰Staudenraus, African Colonization, p. [251].

⁴¹Charles Kerr, History of Kentucky as quoted in Frank F. Mathias, "Slavery, the Solvent of Kentucky Politics," Kentucky Historical Society Register, (January, 1972), p. 2n.

the United States of an unwanted and undesirable element. Furthermore, their basic racism was reflected in their belief that Africa needed civilizing, and that American blacks, by the very fact of having been exposed to white culture, could do it.

Such views can be seen in people like Hezekiah Niles who, in November, 1817, published a long letter which had been written to him defending colonization on several grounds. It referred especially to establishing a "correct knowledge of national governments," and also "the arts of civilized life and the principles of Christianity" in a land "immersed in barbarism, and in heathenish darkness." The letter concluded:

It would seem as if Providence had permitted a part of these people to be separated from their country, and dragged into bondage, that there might be sent back with them the light of civilization, and the blessings of Christianity, to their benighted and unhappy countrymen. By similar means are great events often brought about by Him who, from the greatest apparent evil, can at pleasure bring the utmost possible good.⁴²

Representative Weems of Maryland reflected this concern when he asked for government support to send willing free blacks

⁴²Letter from the Deleware Watchman to Hezekiah Niles published in Niles' Weekly Register, November 8, 1817. For a fuller discussion of the view that colonization could civilize Africa, see John R. Bodo, The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues 1812-1848 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1954).

back to Africa to carry "not only the arts and sciences, but a spiritual, practical knowledge of the Gospel, the religion of their Savior . . ." back to their "heathen neighbors."⁴³

Niles also reprinted a letter from Thomas Jefferson favoring colonization for similar reasons. Jefferson believed that since the blacks would be going from a country "possessing all the useful arts" American Negroes might thus be the means of "transplanting" these arts among the inhabitants of Africa, and would thus carry back to the country of their origin the seeds of civilization . . ."⁴⁴ With his observations on the American Negro, Samuel Smith determined that such a transplantation would not be impossible. Smith claimed that not only were American blacks "gradually losing" the racial "peculiarities" of Africans, but also, that they were "beyond all doubt, more ingenious, and capable of acquiring any new art, than those who have grown up to maturity in the savagism of Africa."⁴⁵ Even the blacks of America accepted this view of a benighted Africa. Paul Cuffee, a free black, petitioned Congress in 1814 for a dispensation to take a ship to Africa in order "to attempt the civiliza-

⁴³Congressional Debates, 20 Cong., 2 sess., p. 184 (January 7, 1829).

⁴⁴Letter of Thomas Jefferson written on January 21, 1811 as published in Niles' Weekly Register, April 19, 1817.

⁴⁵Smith, Essay on Variety and Complexion, pp. 115, 194-195n. For a fuller discussion on American Negroes becoming more like the whites, see Chapter VI below.

tion and amelioration of the condition of the inhabitants of the African Continent . . ."⁴⁶

One opponent of Colonization, however, used the identical facts as a reason for not sending American Negroes back to Africa. He agreed with Samuel Smith that America had changed the African: "his language, his religion, as well as his moral and physical capacities have all been changed; and almost every trait of the African character, corrected by civilization." It was for this very reason, he argued, that the American Negro could not survive in Africa. He would either succumb to the climate, be enslaved by the natives, or slip back into barbarity.⁴⁷

Many slavery proponents went much further than those who supported colonization as a civilizing influence, and claimed that slavery itself was justified because it brought Christianity and civilization to the blacks. "Cursor" in The Maryland Republican, for example, asserted that had the Southerners entered Africa in a "hostile manner," carried off the savage people by force, and consigned them and their offspring to perpetual slavery, then they might be accused of "injustice and cruelty." But he asked, "what have we done for the people of color, and what have they done for us?"

⁴⁶Annals of Congress, 13 Cong., 2 sess., p. 861 (January 7, 1814).

⁴⁷Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius, see especially p. 77.

His answer speaks volumes for his age: "They have simply labored in every capacity wherein we dare entrust them. We, in return, fed and clothed them; and, above all, taught them the doctrines of civilized life and life everlasting."⁴⁸

Reverend Furman claimed that not only had slavery been the means to the mental and moral improvement of the blacks, but even more important, it had helped lead them to salvation.⁴⁹

Senator Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky carried this viewpoint one step further by insisting that good could come from apparent evil. He contended that seeming "outrages upon humanity," in reality, could be "overruled by Divine Providence for the ultimate good." "Such has been the consequence of the slave trade," he argued.⁵⁰ Thus, according to Johnson and other like minds, American slavery was more than just a human contrivance; it was the divinely ordained means of introducing the African race to Christianity and civilization. Regardless of how ruthless the slave trade may have appeared, in actuality God was working through it to redeem the blacks.⁵¹

⁴⁸The Maryland Republican as quoted in the National Intelligencer, July 30, 1819. This same quote was also picked up by the Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, December 3, 1819.

⁴⁹Furman, Exposition of the Views of the Baptists, p. 10.

⁵⁰Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 348 (February 1, 1820).

⁵¹For a fuller discussion of this topic, see H. Shelton Smith, In His Image But . . . (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972).

It is clear that the various justifications for slavery overlapped each other. Of all the arguments, however, the racial defense was the most pervasive. If not always explicitly stated, it was the undergirding upon which so many of the other defenses were built. The racial justification often stood on its own as a clear statement of the belief in black inferiority; however, it more often was implicitly there to support and interact with the other strands of the proslavery argument.

When standing on its own, racism did play a vital role in the defense and justification for slavery. In the final analysis, after all, it was black slavery that was being justified. Slavery was perceived to be the only way to organize a biracial society and keep control of the savage elements within the society. Most white Southerners essentially failed to recognize the contradictory picture they painted of the Negro: the docile, happy, natural slave was also the savage barbarian with murder in his heart who could only be controlled by the institution of slavery. Those who did see this duality explained that happiness and loyalty were the slaves' natural state unless excited by outside interference. Such a view also helps explain the harsh measures taken against free blacks and abolitionists.

Events such as the Santo Domingo revolt, and insurrections and rumored insurrections at home merely confirmed the already existing fears. Most Southerners thus insisted on

maintaining slavery as a means of race control, or, at the very least, combining emancipation and colonization into one process so that Negroes were either slaves or nonexistent in the community. George C. Sibley, a candidate from Cooper County to Missouri's constitutional convention, graphically summarized the position of most Southerners. "So long as there are blacks among us," he declared, "so long I think they ought to be held slaves. So soon as they are freed, so soon, I think, they ought to be sent out of the state, and out of the United States."⁵² Thus, as Sibley admitted and Macon observed about Jefferson and his generation, the resolve was certainly to keep the South a white man's country.

⁵²Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, April 22, 1820.

CHAPTER V: SCIENTIFIC DEFENSE

In the early national period, the institution of black slavery was supported by the corpus of scientific evidence then in existence. Whites clearly perceived blacks to be inferior, even to the extent of being a distinct species, and one that in Aristotelian terms was "made for slavery." Scientific knowledge helped sustain this belief. By the late eighteenth century the study of man was starting to become a science in the modern sense of the world. One recent historian of science writes that science is "a body of knowledge and opinions about nature, existing at a particular time and place." He claims that science is simply "the currently accepted way of looking for answers. It even dictates the type of questions that will be asked in the first place" Viewed from this perspective, science becomes not only "methodology" but also a general frame of reference which influences yet is influenced by the "cultural context" within which it appears.¹

¹George H. Daniels, American Science in the Age of Jackson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 3.

American science in the early republic certainly fit into this definition. As far as man was concerned, the question science was asking was not whether the races were different, but why and how much they differed. Essentially, scientists of this period a priori assumed that there were such things as race, and even more importantly, assumed that blacks were inferior.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the "cultural context" existing in the western world was the concept of the Great Chain of Being. As usually conceived, the Chain of Being started with inanimate things, working upward through the lower life forms to man himself, then beyond through the heavenly creatures to God. As the name implies, all the world was a chain with gradations between the various links.² By the end of the century the strict hierarchy implied in such a system was breaking down, but the concept still remained. Indeed it was even beginning to be given a scientific basis. In 1735 Linnaeus had published his Systema Naturea with its emphasis on descriptive classification which soon became the norm for eighteenth and nineteenth century works. Although Linnaeus himself did not place his various

²The standard work on the Chain of Being is Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936). For a discussion of the Chain of Being and the Negro, see Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1968), Chapters VI and XIII.

classifications in an hierarchical format, such an approach was there by implication, and others soon began using the Linnaean system for such a purpose. One historian goes so far as to claim that a complete understanding of the biological sciences of the eighteenth century is impossible without keeping in view the concept of the Chain of Being. For most men of science throughout that period, the theorems implicit in the idea of the chain constituted the "essential presuppositions" for framing scientific hypotheses.³

Linnaean classification coupled with the Chain of Being was a powerful means of organizing the world and comprehending the distinctions which Europeans saw. George H. Daniels points out that much of science during this period was merely an attempt at a classification in which things could be assigned their proper place or order, and thus the truth known.⁴ As far as man was concerned, anatomical investigation proved to be the means by which the facts of nature could be connected to the concept of the Chain of Being. Since Europeans were doing the classifying, it is not surprising that once the various types of men began to be classified, it was the European, the white, that was placed on top. Soon, also, it became accepted that the Negro was the furth-

³Lovejoy, Chain of Being, p. 277.

⁴Daniels, American Science.

est removed.⁵ From the middle of the eighteenth century on, there were many of these comparative studies, nearly all of which found the Negro to be nearest the "brute creation."

Each of these treatises helped to justify the institution of black slavery by "scientifically" proving that Negroes were indeed inferior. Few of these studies were intentionally designed as proslavery defenses, but their character and findings were such that they readily lent themselves to such uses.

In the United States, one of the first treatises based upon such a hierarchic classification was an anonymous pamphlet, Personal Slavery Established, published in 1773.⁶ The author of this pamphlet charged that the Negroes were "the most stupid, beastly race of animals in human shape, of any in the whole world." Their known "brutality, nastiness, indolence and other criminal propensities" were "convincing

⁵As Jordan points out it is easy to understand the European's place, but harder to see why the African, of all the earth's peoples, should be on the bottom. Jordan has various explanations for this. Jordan, White Over Black, pp. 226-39.

⁶Personal Slavery Established by the Suffrages of Custom and Right Reason. Being a Full Answer to the Gloomy and Visionary Reveries, of all the Fanatical and Enthusiastical Writers on That Subject (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1773). The validity of this pamphlet as a true proslavery pamphlet seems open to question, but if it is a valid proslavery document, it is one of the most blatant of the early writings.

proof" of this to any one familiar with the facts. He followed this with his "scientific" classification claiming that the African was only a "species of the genus" of man and "totally devoid of reason." Furthermore, he subdivided the African into "five classes, arranging them in order as they approach nearest to reason, as 1st, Negroes, 2d, Ourang Outangs, 3d, Apes, 4th Baboons, and 5th, monkeys." He went on to declare that "the opinion of their irrationality is so well supported by facts, that to those acquainted with them, I need advance very little on the subject."

This same pamphlet then used David Hume's analysis and declared that there never was a "civilized nation of any other complexion than white." Furthermore, there had never been any individual "eminent" in either "action or speculation" that was not at least "inclining to the fair." Africa itself was "totally overrun with Barbarism."⁷ This pamphlet thus **raised** the question of the Negro's humanity and his place in the Chain of Being, two questions that were to be recurring themes throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

During this same public debate over slavery, Richard Nisbet, a West Indian living in Pennsylvania, anonymously published his own defense of slavery. While concerned primarily with a scriptural defense of slavery itself, Nisbet

⁷Ibid., pp. 18-20.

also dealt with the question of the humanity of the Negro. He concluded, not surprisingly, that the Negroes were a "much inferior race of men to the whites, in every respect." Nisbet believed that the only "method of judging" was by considering "their genius and government in their native country." He too then borrowed from Hume, quoting extensively from him in a footnote, and declared that all Africa was overrun with barbarism; the natives were "utterly unacquainted with friendship, gratitude, and every tie of the same kind."

The "want of genius" in the people was shown by the fact that the vast continent of Africa "remains in the same state of barbarism, as if it had been created yesterday" even though it had had more chances of improving than Europe due to its "vast superiority" in population. Anticipating later arguments, Nisbet then asserted that this condition could not be due to climate because the Moors "have always made a figure in history" and the Egyptians were one of the "first nations that became eminent."⁸ The condition of Africa then, Nisbet clearly implied, must be because the Negroes were naturally inferior.

⁸[Richard Nisbet], Slavery Not Forbidden by Scripture. Or a Defence of the West-India Planters, from the Aspersions Thrown Out Against Them by the Author of a Pamphlet Entitled "An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America upon Slave-Keeping." By a West Indian (Philadelphia: NP, 1773), pp. 21-24.

The first really "scientific" treatise published in the United States dealing with the Negro's place in nature was the Reverend Samuel Stanhope Smith's An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species.⁹ Samuel Smith, the son of a Presbyterian minister, was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in 1750. After a thorough tutoring in his father's school, he went to the College of New Jersey (Princeton), graduating in 1769. It was there, he later claimed, that he came to appreciate the study of natural science. By 1773, Smith had been licensed to preach by the New Castle Presbytery. Eventually he went into missionary work and was sent to what was then western Virginia, where he helped found Hampden-Sydney, serving as its president for two years. Reverend Smith returned to Princeton in 1779 as a teacher of moral philosophy. He remained at Princeton for the next thirty-three years, the last seventeen as President of the College.¹⁰ It was while at Princeton that Smith wrote his Essay in 1787, revising

⁹Samuel Stanhope Smith, An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. To Which are added Animadversions on certain remarks . . . by Mr. Charles White . . . Also Strictures on Lord Kaim's Discourse on the Original Diversity of Mankind (2nd ed; New Brunswick, New Jersey: J. Simpson and Co., 1810). This is a revised and enlarged edition of the 1787 volume.

¹⁰There is no full biography of Samuel Stanhope Smith, but the article by John E. Pomfret in the Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XVII gives all the salient points.

and adding to it in 1810.

In his Essay Samuel Smith was primarily concerned with vindicating the Scriptural doctrine of a single creation and the unity of the human race.¹¹ Smith attempted to prove, therefore, that the physical peculiarities of the human race, ranging from skin color to facial features, were the result of natural causes. In so doing, however, Smith also presented some interesting views of the Negro, which tell us much about the state of public opinion, even in scientific circles, regarding blacks. Smith continually refers to the Africans as "savages," "negligent," "uncultured." He accepted as a matter of course the fact that Negroes were inferior, that they had an "offensive smell" and a very volatile and ardent nature.¹² Furthermore, Smith totally discounted any claims of "ingenuity" for the Africans. Such "exaggerated representations" of their ingenuity were startling because they were so unexpected. They were esteemed "for the same reason that we admire a monkey, -- that is a certain resemblance of the actions of men in Civilized society which was not expected from the rudeness of their

¹¹For a full discussion of this debate over the unity of the human race, see William Stanton, The Leopard's Spots (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), and John C. Greene, "The American Debate on the Negro's Place in Nature, 1780-1815," Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, No. 3, (June, 1954), pp. 384-96.

¹²See, for example, Smith, Essay on the Variety of Complexion, pp. 90, 97, 193.

condition."¹³

As to be expected, Smith contrasted these conditions and results with those of the white world. Specifically, he drew a contrast between Greece and other parts of Europe where "the human person is so often seen to display that perfect symmetry of parts, and those beautiful proportions, which most nearly correspond with the original idea of the Creator."¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, note that the contrast was usually always between the opposites of white and black, seldom white and red or yellow. It was black and white which were seen to be furthest separated from each other, with the latter, obviously, always being the best, nearer the "original idea of the Creator."

Smith even went so far as to see a change in American Negro slaves. Not only were they becoming more "ingenious" and more capable of instruction, but even their features and perhaps even skin color were changing. Since the domestic servants were closer to the whites than the field slaves, they were changing even faster.¹⁵

In many ways such environmentalism serves to underscore Smith's racism. Negroes were improving because they were perceived to be approaching nearer the form and color of the

¹³Ibid., pp. 193-94n.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 91, 115-16, 169-71.

whites. As Jordan points out, Smith was in effect denying "inherent inferiority" while at the same time conceding "present inferiority." Smith's view, clearly shared by many of his contemporaries, was that "the Negro was going to be the equal of the white man only when the Negro came to look like one."¹⁶

Such sentiment was not uncommon. Hezekiah Niles, as late as 1819, in his Weekly Register was writing that the Negro's complexion was due to climate and "would be improved" by association with the whites.¹⁷ Although others disagreed that color was due to climate, and many violently disagreed that the American Negro was changing, few would fault the unquestioning assumption of such people as Smith and Niles that white was best and natural.

Shortly after the publication of the first edition of Smith's book, the American public was presented with an extremely negative view of the Negro's endowments and humanity. In early 1788 the Columbian Magazine reprinted parts of Edward Long's History of Jamaica giving it the title "Observations on the Gradation in the Scale of Being between the Human and Brute Creation. Including some Particulars Respecting Negroes." As the title suggests, this article was con-

¹⁶Jordan, White Over Black, p. 509.

¹⁷Niles' Weekly Register, July 17, 1819.

cerned with the Chain of Being and the Negro's place in it. Long insisted that there were "gradations and links" in other species so why should man be different. Building on this view, he argued that when we reflect on the nature of blacks and "their dissimilarity to the rest of mankind, must we not conclude that they are a different species of the same GENUS?" All observers represent them as being the "vilest of human kind," having "little more pretension or resemblance" to men than that which "arises from their exterior form."

Long catalogued these differences as being essentially in "blackness" which does not change with the climate. After all he pointed out, they had been in New England for 150 years and there had been no apparent change. Secondly, they had a covering of wool like the "bestial fleece" instead of hair. There were also other physiological differences such as the "roundness" of their eyes, "tumid nostrils," "invariable thick lips" and even the "general large size of the female nipples" which Long claimed was a natural adaptation to their children's mouths. Furthermore, they had a "bestial or fetid smell" which Long contended varied among the different "herds" of Africans. (Note his choice of words.) The capstone of the differences Long saw was his assertion that the Negroes were even infested with black lice which would not bother whites.¹⁸

¹⁸"Observations on the Gradation in the Scale of Being

As others before him, Edward Long declared that the Negroes had no "moral sensations;" they had no taste but for women; gormandizing, and drinking to excess; no wish but to be idle." Africa was so large that there should be some diversity among the people but none was found. If there was any difference at all it was only in "degrees of the same qualities" and those of the "worst kind." He concluded: "it being a common known proverb, That all people on the globe have some good as well as ill qualities, except the Africans."¹⁹

As far as the Negro's place in the Chain of Being, Long declared that the "orang-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied." The fact that the orang-outang had a passion for Negro women indicated that they were of the same species because the "natural impulse of desire . . . inclines one animal towards another of the same species." Long carried this linkage one step further by alleging that an orang-outang husband would not be "any dishonor" to a

between the Human and Brute Creation. Including some Curious Particulars Respecting Negroes," The Columbian Magazine, II, (January and February, 1788), pp. 14-15. The title of the book was given, but not the author. Long's statement is as bad as that of Bryan Edwards, another West Indian historian that Americans were fond of quoting. Edwards claimed that even a dog owned by a Negro felt inferior and "actually crouches before such of his own species as are used to better company." Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies Vol. II (4th ed., London: John Stockdale, 1807), pp. 95-96.

¹⁹"Observations on the Gradation," p. 15.

Hottentot female. "For what are these Hottentots?" he asked. They were stupid and brutal, in many respects, "more like beasts than men."²⁰

It is significant commentary on the age that Long never mentioned white-Negro intercourse. By the very terms of his own argument, if the orang-outang's passion for the Negro proved their kinship, where does this place the European who obviously had a "passion for Negro women?" Long, and his supporters, apparently never saw the anomaly of their own position.

In the nineteenth century this myth of Negro-orang-outang sexual intercourse was widely accepted, even by some of the most enlightened minds of the age, like Thomas Jefferson. So widely accepted was the belief, that one author felt compelled to assert that this was still no reason for the slave trade. Evidently, some writers were using this "fact" to defend the slave trade, arguing that the mixed offspring were thus humanized by two or three generations of intercourse with the whites in the West Indies. In reply, the author did not deny that such Negro-orang-outang intercourse did take place, indeed, he accepted it as a proven fact, going so far as to allege that the Negro women then probably continued to cohabit with the apes. He also accepted as

²⁰Ibid., pp. 21-22.

fact that offspring could exist, but he insisted that such offspring would be sterile, like the mule, because it came from two different species. Most of the article then dealt with trying to prove that, contrary to popular belief, Negroes and orang-outangs were indeed different species.²¹

Another attempt to find the Negro's place in the Chain of Being was Dr. Charles White's Regular Gradation in Man, published in 1799. White disclaimed any purpose beyond scientific inquiry. "Nature exhibits to our view," he wrote, "an immense chain of beings, endued with various degrees of intelligence and active powers suited to their stations in the general system," and he wanted to investigate these various degrees and powers.²²

Despite his disclaimer, White's prejudice is clear when he stated that he did not inquire into "provincial or national varieties" but confined his inquiry "chiefly to the extremes of the human race: to the European, on the one hand, and on the other to the African, who seems to approach nearer to the brute creation than any other of the human species." He then proceeded to discuss the differences he found which ranged from facial angle, muscles, and bones to skin, brain size,

²¹"An Answer to a Circumstance on which Some Writers, in Defence of the Slave-Trade have founded much of its Legality," The Columbian Magazine, II, (May, 1788), p. 266.

²²Charles White, An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man (London: C. Dilly, 1799), p. 1.

"rankness of smell," and even manner of walking. Not surprisingly, White found that in all these points the Africans "differed from the Europeans and approached to the ape." Indeed, "one may truly say that there is a greater difference between them [Africans] and the Europeans, than between the monkeys and them."²³

White concluded that these differences "mark a regular gradation, from the white European down through the human species to the brute creation." In "those particulars" where mankind excels the brutes, the European excels the African. Conversely, in those particulars in which animals excel man, Africans excel the Europeans.²⁴ From these differences then, White derived various postulates. As should be evident from his approach, White took the European as a "standard of comparison" because he stood "at the head as being farthest removed from the brute creation." It followed then that the African, especially in his differences from the European, "approaches to the ape." Likewise, the characteristics which distinguished the African from the European, were the same "differing only in degree" that "distinguish the ape from the European."²⁵

White finally concluded his treatise with a ringing

²³Ibid., pp. 42-55, 66.

²⁴Ibid., p. 80.

²⁵Ibid., p. 83.

paeon to the white European.

Ascending the line of gradation, we come at last to the white European; who being most removed from the brute creation, may, on that account, be considered as the most beautiful of the human race. No one will doubt his superiority in intellectual powers; and I believe it will be found that his capacity is naturally superior also to that of every other man. Where shall we find, unless in the European, that nobly arched head, containing such a quantity of brain, and supported by a hollow conical pillar entering its centre? Where the perpendicular, the prominent nose, and round projecting chin? Where the variety of features, and fulness of expression; those long, flowing, graceful ringlets; that majestic beard, those rosy cheeks and coral lips? Where that erect posture of the body and noble gait? In what other quarter of the globe shall we find the blush that overspreads the soft features of the beautiful women of Europe, that emblem of modesty, of delicate feelings and of sense? Where that nice expression of the amiable and softer passions in the countenance; and that general elegance of features and complexion? Where, except on the bosom of the European woman, two such plump and snowy white hemispheres, tipt with vermillion?²⁶

Little else need be said! White's book did play an important role in America because it provided the precedent for proving the black's inferiority by referring to the "facts" of comparative anatomy.

The attempts at classification were carried forward in 1808 when Dr. John Augustine Smith, a Virginia graduate of William and Mary with a medical degree from Europe, gave a

²⁶Ibid., pp. 134-35.

lecture to a group of New York medical students on the unity of man and the Negro's place in nature. From the outset, Smith said he intended to prove that the "anatomical structure" of the European "whatsoever may be the cause" was superior to that of the African, Asiatic, and aboriginal American, or at least, that it was "further removed from the brute creation." He continued, "But I shall principally contrast the European and the African, because, by being placed at the opposite extremes of the scale, the differences between them are more numerous, and more strongly marked."²⁷

Relying heavily on European authorities, Smith made the usual comparison, but appealed primarily to a single index of gradation -- the facial angle. He maintained that in nature the sloping of the head flattened progressively downward from the European through the Negro to the lesser animals. For example, the European's facial angle usually was between 85 and 90 degrees, the Asiatic's between 75 and 80 degrees, while the African's was only 70 degrees, very close to the Ourang-outang's 67 degrees. He also found the Negro's brain "firmer" and smaller -- "about one-thirteenth" less capacity than that of the whites.²⁸

²⁷John Augustine Smith, "A Lecture Introductory to the Second Course of Anatomical Instruction in the College of Physicians . . . 11th of November, 1808 . . ." The New York Medical and Philosophical Journal and Review, I, (1809), p. 33.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 39-40.

Two years after this lecture was published, Samuel Smith brought out an enlarged edition of his earlier work which was reviewed by Dr. Charles Caldwell in the American Review of History and Politics. As is so often the case with reviews, Caldwell used this as an opportunity to present his own ideas. Using concepts which by now must have been completely familiar to the American people, he made the usual Negro-white comparisons. The African possessed black skin, frizzled hair, depressed features with a retreating forehead, and gibbous legs, features which were "incontestably primitive and permanent." In contrast, the European was fair with flowing hair, prominent forehead, straight legs and projecting features. The Negro also had a smaller brain.²⁹ Like other examples discussed, this is another instance where critic and original author both agree on the fundamental idea: that the Europeans and Africans were indeed different, with the latter obviously being inferior.

While others hinted at, but stopped short of, the idea of a multiple creation, Abraham Bradley contended that the differences between blacks and whites were so great that there had to be more than one creation. Writing in 1800, he asserted that there were two creations, one before and one

²⁹[Charles Caldwell], "An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species by Samuel Stanhope Smith," The American Review of History and Politics, II, (1811), p. 141.

after the great flood. Moreover, there had been "not less than six or seven original pairs" of human beings, each adapted to its own climate. Among all these though, the "native Africans are considerably inferior in point of understanding to the Asiatics and very far below the Europeans."³⁰

The most extreme, one is tempted to say far-out, explanation for the Negro's differences came from a Georgian newspaper of 1827. In an article against evolution, "Isadore" insisted that man was "never a mite or an earthworm, nor a polypus," This antievolutionary belief did not apply, however, to the Negro who was so different that he probably came from outerspace.

The negro variety of him [man], has actually had wings, like a bat or a peafowl, and flown through the liquid air--probably emigrated from some conflagrated planet or some comet, as their broad flat feet, slender legs, large pectoral muscles, huge latissimus dorsi, and other proportions of their body all strongly indicate.³¹

In contrast to such a little known article, Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia was a widely read and highly influential scientific treatise, part of which dealt with the nature of the Negro. The Notes on Virginia

³⁰Abraham Bradley, New Theory of the Earth, Quoted in Jordan, White Over Black, p. 531.

³¹The Statesman and Patriot, (Milledgeville, Georgia) January 2, 1827.

were written in the early 1780's in response to a series of questions from the Marquis de Barbe-Marbois. In many ways, this volume contained the only systematic account of Jefferson's racial views. The book was not published in the United States until 1788 because Jefferson feared the reaction his views might produce in his countrymen. The book was a tremendous success, however, going through ten American editions by 1802. It also had a tremendous influence both in the United States and Europe. Dr. Charles White, for example, quoted extensively from it to support his contention of the Negro's inferiority, as did William Smith in the First Congress, and Charles Pinckney in a later one.³²

Like his contemporaries, Jefferson too saw white as being the standard. If the "circumstances of superior beauty" were worthy of attention in the propagation of domestic animals, he asked, why should man be different? Obviously, the first difference which was noticed was that of color. Jefferson refused to be drawn into the controversy over the reason for blackness, but merely accepted it as a difference "fixed in nature." As far as beauty was concerned, the "fine mixtures of red and white" were preferable to "that eternal monotony," "the immoveable veil of black" which covered the Negro. To this could also be added the "flowing hair" and

³²White, Regular Gradation, pp. 63-67. Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1455 (March 17, 1790); 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1136-37 (February 13, 1821).

"more elegant symmetry of form." Even the Negroes prefer the whites, Jefferson maintained, as "uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan [sic] for the black women."

Jefferson also saw "other physical distinctions" which proved a difference of race. The Negroes had less hair on both the face and body; they urinated less and perspired more which gave them a "very strong and disagreeable odour," they were also thought to be more tolerant of the heat and less so of the cold than Europeans. Furthermore, they seemed to require less sleep, and although as "bold and adventuresome" as the whites this might perhaps proceed from a "want of forethought." Jefferson also saw them as "more ardent after their female; but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation." In sum, "their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection."

Comparing them in memory, reason, and imagination, he found them equal in memory but much inferior in the ability to reason. In imagination they "are dull, tasteless, and anomalous." For example, the poems of the Negro poetess Phyllis Wately were "below the dignity of criticism." Jefferson went on to state that the blacks improved in "body and mind" with the first mixture with the whites, which proved that their inferiority was not due merely to their environment. Moreover, when their achievements were compared to those of Roman slaves, it proved that it was the nature of

blacks and not the condition of slavery which had "produced the distinction."

After all this, however, Jefferson said that "the opinion that they are inferior . . . must be hazarded with great diffidence."

I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whither originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.³³

Yet, as Merrill Peterson has pointed out, this "suspicion" came at the end of a long passage which seemed to prove the Negro's inferiority. Furthermore, the fact that Jefferson assumed inferiority rather than equality, speaks volumes for his age.³⁴

These early attempts at classifying man were so important because of the impression they left. All these classifications "proved" that the Negro was inferior, that he was close to being an animal. While the scientists stopped there, the implications of such conclusions were carried forward by others. As far as the proslavery argument was concerned, the importance of all these studies lay in their underlying assumptions and scientific findings: the fact

³³Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1788), pp. 147-53.

³⁴Merrill D. Peterson, Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 263.

that the Negro was, at best, an inferior species of man. Thus it was concluded that blacks were perfectly suited, indeed almost designed for slavery; the institution of slavery would actually help civilize the black race.

Furthermore, these studies had one other important implication. If, as these scientific treatises showed, blacks were indeed a separate and inferior species, basically subhuman, then normal values and the question of morality had limited applicability. If the African was less than a man and really some sort of beast, then different standards would apply. Owning and using a Negro would thus be little different than owning a horse.

It is clear that few nineteenth century Americans could discourse on the alleged differences in body structure, skin make-up and brain size of the Africans and Europeans, and fewer still understood the concept of facial angle. Yet it is also clear that the average American was familiar with the general conclusions of the scientific community regarding the Negro's place in nature. He was aware of the contrasts which scientists had made between whites and blacks, of the linkage they saw between ape and Negro, of their conclusions that the Negro was the lowest man, if not a distinct species. All these conclusions were a part of the accepted knowledge of the age.

Nearly everyone accepted the assumption that the Negro was inferior. Of the small dissenting minority that held out,

many were like Samuel Stanhope Smith who essentially admitted present inferiority but claimed the Negro would eventually be the equal of the white just as soon as he became like them. Other dissenters claimed that it was not heredity, but environment, that held the Negro black, but they too stopped short of proclaiming full equality. Most Americans, however, would agree with the National Intelligencer which proclaimed "You cannot wash the Ethiop white, nor can you impart to him the active intelligence of the homo sapiens Europaeus."³⁵ Dr. Thomas Cooper echoed this sentiment writing to Senator Mahlon Dickerson in 1826, "I do not say that blacks are a distinct race: but I have not the slightest doubt of their being an inferior variety of the human species and not capable of the same improvement as the whites."³⁶ Charles Pinckney went so far as to claim that the Negroes were so inferior that the Romans would not even enslave them³⁷

Indeed, many Americans sincerely believed that the Negro was a distinct species from the white man, the connecting link between man and beast. Hezekiah Niles, who had antislavery sentiments, could still declare in his Weekly Register that the Hottentots were "the most brutal and

³⁵The National Intelligencer, November 20, 1819.

³⁶Thomas Cooper to Mahlon Dickerson, March 16, 1826 as reprinted in The American Historical Review, VI (July, 1901), p. 729.

³⁷Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1137-38 (February 13, 1821).

beastly of all men, the connecting link between man and the ourang-outang."³⁸ In commenting on Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, Dumas Malone points out that Jefferson was not trying to sum up the average opinion, but present his own scientific conclusions. However, in so doing, he was also providing an index to the local opinion. "If his judgment of the Negroes was unfavorable, that of his local contemporaries was probably far more so."³⁹ Here indeed lies the key to much of the accepted ideas about blacks in the early republic. Many of the scientific observations were little more than oft-repeated folk beliefs about the Negroes. Note, for example, the frequency of the mention of the connection, sexual and otherwise, between Negroes and orang-outangs. Yet these beliefs are significant because they reflect the perceived reality of the white Americans. These observations were even more important because they gave a scientific basis for already existing practices and prejudices.

Francis Hall, a British traveler to the United States in 1816-17, provides one example of how this belief in the Negro's difference could be used. Referring to cruelty towards slaves, Hall found that most Americans, due to "their very good nature" tended to disbelieve these stories. If

³⁸Niles' Weekly Register, July 17, 1819.

³⁹Dumas Malone, Jefferson The Virginian (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948), p. 267.

the "evidence of particular facts" should overpower their prejudice, however, they replied that since Negroes were "constitutionally different from white men, they require a different treatment, so that what may seem harsh to us, and would in fact be harsh to people of our complexion, is no more to them than a salubrious regimen."⁴⁰

Hall's observation reflects an important corollary to the scientific argument: the idea that the Negroes were different and therefore could withstand the labor, climate, and diseases of the South better than the whites. Jefferson, for example, was one scientist who found the Negroes more tolerant of heat. So too did Samuel Smith in his treatise.⁴¹

Southerners maintained that it was precisely this aspect of the Negroes' toleration of heat and certain diseases that not only justified, but necessitated their use as the labor force for the South. They contended that it was only the Negro who could labor and live in the Southern climate.⁴²

⁴⁰Francis Hall, Travels in Canada and the United States, in 1816 and 1817 (Boston: Republished from the London edition by Wells and Lilly, 1818), p. 250.

⁴¹Jefferson, Notes on Virginia, p. 148; Smith, Essay on the Variety of Complexion, p. 279. One amateur scientist missed the point completely by declaring that "black surfaces radiate heat freely, therefore negroes are better able to stand hot weather but get colds and diseases in the winter." The American Farmer, October 27, 1820.

⁴²Clearly most of such arguments were mere rationalizations for doing what the controlling white society wanted to do anyway' however, there is also some basis in fact for such

From the earliest days of the new nation, Southerners had argued that the South needed slave labor to exist. In the South Carolina ratification convention, for example, Charles C. Pinckney declared that "While there remained one acre of swampland uncleared in South Carolina, I would raise my voice against restricting the importation of negroes. I am thoroughly convinced," he continued, "that the nature of our climate, and the flat, swampy situation of our country, obliges us to cultivate our lands with negroes, and that without them South Carolina would soon be a desert waste."⁴³ These sentiments were echoed by William Loughton Smith in the First Congress. Smith insisted that the abolition of slavery would not strengthen South Carolina because it could only be cultivated by Negroes. "The climate, the nature of the soil, [and] ancient habits" all worked to "forbid the whites from performing the labor." He then called upon experience to prove his point. "Great Britain made every attempt to settle Georgia by whites alone, and failed, and was compelled at length to introduce slaves; after which that State increased

conclusions; for example sickle cell anemia, we know today, does provide a certain immunity to malaria. For a full discussion of this topic, see Peter H. Wood, Black Majority. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), Sections IV and V of Chapter III.

⁴³Elliot's Debates quoted in Dwight L. Dumond, Anti-slavery (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1961), pp. 38-40.

very rapidly in opulence and importance."⁴⁴

In 1802, these same terms were used by John Drayton, the South Carolina Governor, in his View of South Carolina to show not only the necessity of slavery but also its justification in regards to South Carolina. The area of "swamps and low lands" was "particularly unhealthy, and unsuitable to the constitutions of white persons; whilst that of a negro, is perfectly adapted to its cultivation," he wrote. The Negro can "stand the sun's meridian [sic] heat; and labour his appointed time, exposed to the continual steam which arises from the rice grounds." Whites on the other hand, could "barely support" themselves even "under the shade, surrounded by such a relaxing atmosphere." Moreover, the Negro could work "for hours in mud and water . . . without injury to himself; whilst to a white this kind of labour would be almost certain death." Such conditions Drayton concluded "sufficiently justify the present condition of this state, in the kind of property to which we immediately refer."⁴⁵

Edwin Holland in 1822 was using the same climatic argument to "refute the calumnies" directed at the South. Holland declared that it was no longer a subject of "problematical

⁴⁴Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1459-60 (March 17, 1790).

⁴⁵John Drayton, A View of South Carolina As Respects Her Natural and Civil Concerns (Charleston: W. P. Young, 1802), p. 147.

inquiry" concerning the climatic conditions of the South, especially South Carolina and Georgia: they were "inconceivably hostile to the white constitution" which the "experience of more than a century" had proven. Those sections which provided the planters with most of their wealth were covered much of the year with stagnant water which under a tropical sun gave out nothing but pestilence and disease. However, "in breathing this pestilential atmosphere, the negro, whose constitution seems better adapted to it, subjects himself to the introduction of none of those fatal distempers, to which the white man falls a sure and certain victim." He then quoted from Jefferson's Notes on Virginia to prove that the Negro was more tolerant of the heat.

Holland did not know whether the reason was physical or anatomical, but he, like many others, did believe there was a difference between the two races. "That same season of the year which carries on its wings the blessings of health to the negro, gives an early warning to the Planter to quit his estates and flee from the destruction that awaits him." To prove this contention, Holland referred to all the "fevers and agues, and other diseases" which were so prevalent among the poor whites who could not flee during the "sickly months." Had it not been for Negro slaves, Holland concluded, the rich and productive lowlands would be nothing but "dark and dismal swamps."⁴⁶

⁴⁶[Edwin C. Holland], A Refutation of the Calumnies

Writing at the same time, Frederick Dalcho, another South Carolinian, neatly tied together this climatic argument, economics, and his racism when he asserted:

In South-Carolina, a large portion of our lower country could not be cultivated by white people. Our swamps would send thousands of them to their graves, in the first summer. The constitutions of the Negroes appear to be perfectly adapted to the climate; and they thrive and increase under our burning sun and humid atmosphere. Our rice fields, without Negroes, must be abandoned. The richest, **and** most productive lands in the State, must be for ever left a waste, and the planters either abandon the sea-coast for the upper country, or emigrate to other climes. Can we reasonably be expected to submit to this state of things?⁴⁷

This concept of climatic necessity was a convenient argument. Southerners, especially South Carolinians, were continually using it to argue for the things they wanted. In 1827, for example, Robert Turnbull insisted that South Carolina would be useless without slaves. Writing against the American Colonization Society, he said that emancipation would not strengthen the Southern country, but just the opposite. If the slaves were emancipated, it would make no

Circulated Against the Southern & Western States Respecting the Institution and Existence of Slavery Among Them. By a South-Carolinian (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), pp. 42-45. This book was originally published in Charleston in 1822.

⁴⁷[Frederick Dalcho], Practical Considerations Founded on the Scriptures, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina. By a South-Carolinian (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823), pp. 7-8.

difference, he claimed, who owned South Carolina -- "whether the French, or English, or Russians . . . or whether it existed at all."⁴⁸ Dr. Thomas Cooper, of South Carolina College, believed slave labor to be unprofitable, but concluded that the South still needed African slavery because the "nature of the soil and climate" would "incapacitate" the whites.⁴⁹

As the country expanded, this climatic argument for slavery went with it into the new territory. In the debate over Louisiana in 1804, Jonathon Dayton of New Jersey stated that slavery had to be established in that country or it could never be inhabited; whites simply could not "bear the burning sun and damp dews." The next day, Dayton returned to this same argument. The prohibition of slavery in Louisiana would "barr [sic] the cultivation and improvement of that extensive territory." He claimed that the life span of whites in Louisiana was shorter than for any other state; therefore slave labor was more necessary. Indeed, "slavery is essential to their existence."⁵⁰

⁴⁸[Robert J. Turnbull], The Crisis: or Essays on the Usurpations of the Federal Government. By Brutus (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827), p. 136. This was reprinted in 1834 with a "Eulogium" on Turnbull by James Hamilton.

⁴⁹Thomas Cooper, Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy (Columbia: Doyle E. Sweeney, 1826), pp. 95-96.

⁵⁰Everett S. Brown (ed.), "The Senate Debate on the Breckinridge Bill for the Government of Louisiana, 1804"

Dayton was supported by James Jackson, a rice planter from Georgia. After discoursing on how well his slaves were treated, Jackson professed that the whites could not cultivate rice in Georgia, and it was not as hot as Louisiana. Impassionately, Jackson maintained: "Gentlemen from the north and east do not know that white men cannot endure the heat of a vertical sun -- they cannot cultivate and raise a crop of rice -- negroes are necessary for that country." He went so far as to say that he was sorry Georgia did not allow slave importation because true Africans were better for that type of work than Negroes who had been in this country for a time.⁵¹

The people of Louisiana even sent a remonstrance to Congress asking for the right to import slaves since slavery was so necessary in their climate. Besides the usual climatic argument on the necessity of African labor, these people added a "peculiar reason" pertaining to their country alone.

The banks raised to restrain the waters of the Mississippi can only be kept in repair by those whose natural constitution and habits of labor enable them to resist the combined effects of a deleterious moisture, and a degree of heat intolerable to whites; this labor is

from The Journal of William Plumer in The American Historical Review, XXII (January, 1917), p. 345.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 347, 350. The factor of African immunity might indeed have played a role, Wood, Black Majority, pp. 79-91.

great, it requires many hands, and it is all important to the very existence of our country. If, therefore, this traffic is justifiable anywhere, it is surely in this province, where, unless it is permitted, cultivation must cease, the improvements of a century be destroyed, and the great river resume its empire over our ruined fields and demolished habitations.⁵²

Some Southerners even tried to apply this climatic argument to Arkansas. Felix Walker, a Congressman from North Carolina, contended that Arkansas would be "an uncultivated waste -- a fruitless soil" without slavery. Since the territory was south of the thirty-fifth latitude, and was "a low and warm country," it could not support a "laboring white population."⁵³

Interestingly, the climatic defense of slavery did not come from Americans alone. It was one of the favorite justifications for slavery offered by British travelers. In familiar terms, Charles Janson, writing in 1807, said that the swamps and lowlands of the South were so unhealthy that they could not be cultivated by white persons. The labor and working conditions of the slaves would "prove certain death" for whites in just a few days.⁵⁴ Writing ten years later, another British traveler, who later settled in Illinois,

⁵²Annals of Congress, 8 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1606.

⁵³Ibid., 15 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1226 (February 17, 1819).

⁵⁴Charles W. Janson, The Stranger in America (London: Albion Press, 1807), p. 358.

declared that the southern states, or "at least Georgia and the Carolinas" had to be cultivated by blacks or else abandoned. "The heat there is so excessive in August that to walk a mile in the Sun would subject a European to the most imminent danger."⁵⁵

Even those travelers opposed to slavery apparently accepted the climatic argument as valid. Charles Sealsfield wrote in 1828 that "if the general cultivation of Louisiana, and the southern states, is to proceed successfully, emancipation is impossible. In this climate, no white person could stand the labour; . . ." This same author later claimed that as "treacherous and barbarous" as the slaves were, emancipation would subject the "former masters to certain destruction and death." He suggested further study of "the different gradations of the human species" in order to arrive at some solution.⁵⁶

The unanimity of the opinion regarding the Negro's survival in the South's climate is reflected in the observations of another British traveler who was quite explicit on this

⁵⁵Elias Pym Fordham, Personal Narrative of Travels in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky; and of a Residence in the Illinois Territory: 1817-1818, ed. Frederick A. Ogg (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), p. 67.

⁵⁶Charles Sealsfield, The Americans As They Are; Described in a Tour Through the Valley of the Mississippi (London: Hurst, Chance, and Co., 1828), pp. 177-78.

point. He called plans to cultivate the low districts of the South by white labor "quite viissionary." He continued,

Every thing I heard in the South respecting the climate, showed this [plan] to be impossible. Whether my informants were planters, or merchants or medical men, or strangers, or advocates for slavery, or the contrary, one uniform opinion was expressed on this point. There seems, therefore, to be no choice left between abandoning the fertile countries in question, or having them cultivated by negroes.⁵⁷

Obviously, for various reasons, Southerners chose the latter.

Such climatic arguments appear ridiculous today, yet it seems clear that they were believed or at least voiced, by the majority in the early nineteenth century. These arguments reflected not only the existing social order and the needs for labor in the low lands, but also the belief, based on "scientific" evidence, that blacks and whites were distinct species. The former, because of their original environment and bestial proclivities, were naturally adapted to climatic conditions that would kill the whites. Such arguments, then, not only answered the Southerner's intellectual needs but also reinforced the existing social order.

The belief that the Negro was indeed different was important for the psyche of the South. Since the differences were permanent, the barrier between the races was insur-

⁵⁷Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, Vol. III (Edinburgh: Cadell and Co., 1829), p. 194.

mountable. It was as if nature herself had set limits beyond which the Negro could not go. The Negro's association with the ape was thus more than just scientific; it also functioned to express the social distance between the Negro and the whites.⁵⁸ As long as attention centered on the Negroes' appearance and condition in Africa, it was easily believed that he was indeed distinct from the white man. The growing use of comparative anatomy to examine the races, almost by definition then, elaborated and emphasized differences found. As Winthrop Jordan has noted, these "dovetailed circumstances" of slavery, tradition, European ethnocentrism, the concept of the Chain of Being, and racial differences were then all assimilated into the prevailing system of social values so that the Negro's differences were perceived as indications of inferiority.⁵⁹

Clearly the racial and scientific proslavery defenses were closely connected, closer than any of the other types of justification. The scientific argument especially interacted with and reinforced the racial argument. On the surface there appears little difference in the form of the argument. Both stressed that blacks were inferior. The difference between the two lies essentially in intent. The scientific argument

⁵⁸Jordan has a long section dealing with the association of the Negro and ape in the Chain of Being. See especially White Over Black, p. 239.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 504.

was not necessarily racist, although given the scientists' preconceptions, their findings pointed in that direction. The scientists, like Samuel Stanhope Smith, John Augustine Smith, and Thomas Jefferson simply recorded the "facts" as they saw them and discovered that blacks were more "beast like," that they were inferior; all this was based on "scientific evidence." Racists, on the other hand, merely proclaimed blacks inferior; they did not necessarily need any evidence.

Whatever the intent of the scientist making the observations, eventually his findings were used to justify the institution of black slavery. Slavery advocates insisted that this scientific evidence proved that blacks and whites were indeed different, the former being greatly inferior and thus "natural slaves." As Charles Pinckney proposed, blacks were "most probably" intended to serve the whites.⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, many Southerners agreed with the writer in the National Intelligencer who declared that he doubted if the Africans even had "the sensibility to feel the degradation of slavery."⁶¹ Furthermore, slavery proponents alleged, it was a scientific fact that laboring in the climate of the South was dangerous, if not deadly, to whites but not Negroes.

⁶⁰ Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1136-37 (February 13, 1821).

⁶¹ The National Intelligencer, September 28, 1821.

These two scientific facts coincided neatly with the South's need for large quantities of steady cheap labor. Since blacks were natural slaves and also able to tolerate the climatic conditions of the South, they were, slavery advocates contended, the solution to the South's labor problem. Indeed, the institution of black slavery was necessary for the very existence of the Southern way of life.

CHAPTER VI: CONSTITUTIONAL DEFENSE

Like the appeals to scriptural-historical sanctions, the Constitutional defense of slavery had one primary purpose: it was an attempt to justify the status quo of slavery in the South. In its simplest form this defense merely rested on the issue of Constitutional legitimacy. Southerners defended slavery because they had a legal right to hold slaves. The argument, however, was essentially two-pronged: not only did the Constitution contain positive recognitions of slavery, but also by the very nature of the Constitution, the central government possessed limited powers and functions, none of which involved an interference with the institution of slavery. For this very reason, therefore, most Southerners increasingly tended to be strict constructionists, insisting that Constitutional powers were limited, and intending to keep them that way. Robert Seager, John Tyler's biographer, for example, sees a close linkage between Tyler's strict construction-states rights and his defense of slavery.¹

Many Southerners, like John Tyler, wanted a federal government too weak to interfere with the South's peculiar insti-

¹Robert Seager, And Tyler Too (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), p. 53.

tution.

In the early republic, many political issues were such that a defense of limited constitutional powers could be also a defense of slavery. The best examples of this are the debates over the fugitive slave law, over ending the foreign slave trade, and, of course, over slavery restriction in Missouri. In these instances, the higher ground of constitutional right was talked about, but it is also clear that the principles and institution of slavery were consciously being defended too. As one historian of Missouri has written: "It seems hardly possible that the hardheaded frontiersmen with their ten thousand slaves would thunder at Congress for two years on an abstract question of constitutional equality. . . . slavery was the basis, at least to a considerable extent, of the local struggle against restriction."²

Even though the term slavery **was** never used in the Constitution, Southerners insisted that it did contain positive recognition of slavery in three different places: The section dealing with the three-fifths compromise over taxes and representation (Article I, Section 2, Clause 3); The section concerning the slave trade (Article I, Section 9, Clause 1); and the provision regarding fugitive slaves (Article IV,

²Harrison A. Trexler, Slavery in Missouri (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1914), p. 104.

Section 2, Clause 3).

During the Missouri debates, for example, Alexander Smyth of Virginia went to great lengths to establish this idea of the Constitutional recognition of slavery. Smyth started his long, involved Constitutional defense by an appeal to precedent. He boldly declared that "the old [Confederation] Congress expressly sanctioned the right of slavery." Smyth based this claim on actions undertaken by that Congress in regards to slaves carried off by the British during the Revolutionary War. By requesting the Secretary of Foreign Affairs to seek the return of such stolen slaves, and by commissioning agents to obtain their delivery, the Confederation Congress, Smyth contended, thus "sanctioned the right of slavery." Such sanction was further strengthened by the simple fact of ratifying the peace treaty which contained the provision about returning slaves.

Smyth applied this same line of reasoning to the new Congress. By providing for an enumeration of slaves for taxing purposes, and making that tax a lien on them as property, then the Constitutional Congress too had "sanctioned the right of slavery." As if seeking proof in numbers, Smyth then catalogued all the various acts in which Congress had "in the most explicit manner, recognized slaves, by that name, as property." He identified such statutes as the several census acts, the acts which prohibited the slave trade but allowed and sanctioned the transportation of slaves

from state to state for sale, and the provision for selling captured African slaves.

Furthermore, Smyth even extended his argument to include the whole country. By ratifying the Constitution, Smyth claimed, the nation thus also ratified and sanctioned its slavery provisions.³

Earlier in the same speech Smyth passionately had asked "The right to own slaves being acknowledged and secured by the Constitution, can you proscribe what the Constitution guaranties [sic]? Can you touch a right reserved to the States or the people?" Obviously, Smyth decided "You cannot."⁴

In March, 1818, during the debate over strengthening the Fugitive Slave Act, Senator David Morrill of New Hampshire, who later was to be one of the leading advocates for slavery restriction in Missouri, agreed that slavery was recognized under the Constitution. Furthermore, he disclaimed any "disposition to deprive slaveholders of that species of property." He continued:

I very readily acknowledge that there are provisions in the Constitution which recognise slavery -- which I consider a kind of compact by compromise, into which the States mutually entered when they adopted that instrument, about which I have neither a right nor disposition to

³~~Annals of Congress~~, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 1005-06 (January 28, 1820).

⁴Ibid., p. 995 (January 28, 1820).

complain.⁵

It was such constitutional recognition that Southerners relied on so heavily. Problems arose, however, with the expansion of the nation. As Morrill's speech implies, he, along with many others in the North, limited such recognition to the institution as it existed in the original states, and fought against slavery's expansion into new territory. Southerners, on the other hand, saw the constitutional recognition of slavery as an immutable right not dependent upon geography.

The constitutional defense of slavery, however, relied more heavily on the argument centering on the limited nature of the Constitution, than on its positive recognition of slavery. According to the accepted Southern theory, there really was no necessity to find a positive constitutional sanction for the institution of slavery; it was sufficient to demonstrate that there was no positive power in the Constitution to interfere with slavery.

Many Southerners thus argued that the Constitution was a compact between sovereign states which established a government with certain specifically delegated powers beyond which it could not go. Charles Pinckney, for example, looking back on the Constitutional Convention declared that "it was an agreed point, a solemnly understood compact" that if the

⁵Ibid., 15 Cong., 1 sess., p. 243 (March 9, 1818).

Southern States would consent to close their ports to the African slave trade after 1808 then "no power was to be delegated to Congress, nor were they ever to be authorized to touch the question of slavery; that the property of the Southern States in slaves was to be as sacredly protected to them, as that of land, or any other kind of property in the Eastern States were to be to their citizens."⁶

As early as the First Congress, James Jackson of Georgia had used the concept of the limited nature of the Constitution for the benefit of slaveholders. He claimed that Congress could not at that time "interfere with the importation of slaves" because "the Constitution expressly mentions all the power they can exercise on the subject."⁷ Thirty years later, another Georgian, Freeman Walker, was still referring to the limited power granted under the Constitution. Walker provided an exaggerated statement, perhaps designedly so, of the South's view of the Constitution when he declared: "In approaching the Constitution of my country, sir, I proceed with a kind of deferential awe: it is a

⁶Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1316 (February 14, 1820). Pinckney had one great advantage over his opponents during the Missouri debate: he was the only member of the Constitutional Convention now in Congress so no one could dispute his claims of what the convention had agreed upon.

⁷Ibid., 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1184 (February 11, 1790). Jackson's remarks were given in answer to a Quaker petition which Jackson labeled "a business of questionable policy" thus reflecting concern over what would become another perennial problem for the South.

hallowed instrument, with which I am almost afraid to trust myself." Thus setting the stage, he followed with a long declamation regarding delegated powers and states rights.⁸

Walker's overblown rhetoric demonstrated the heights to which Southerners, as well as some Northerners, were moved to delineate the limited nature of the Constitution. The reason for their concern was clearly an anxiety to keep the Constitution unchanged, a static document whose limited powers could not be used to interfere with slavery.

In several ways the issue of fugitive slaves provides a good indication of the attitude of Southerners towards the Constitution and Constitutional power. Late in the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention, Pierce Butler of South Carolina had gained an insertion of a fugitive slave clause into the Constitution. Like so many other sections of the Constitution, the actual legislative operation of this clause was left for later. This the new Congress proceeded to supply in 1793, passing the Fugitive Slave Act by a substantial, intersectional majority. The act provided that any master, or his agent, could seize a runaway anywhere in the Union, take him before any federal or state judge, who upon being satisfied of the master's claim to ownership, issued a certificate authorizing that the runaway be returned. Additionally,

⁸Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 165-170 (January 19, 1820).

anyone obstructing the recovery of runaways was liable for a \$500 fine.⁹

Periodically throughout the early national period efforts were made by both Northerners and Southerners to revise the act. In 1796, Albert Gallatin laid the groundwork for the first attempted revision by presenting a petition asking that the federal government exercise its power over commerce and enact legislation against the kidnapping of Negroes and mulattoes. In December the commerce committee to whom the petition had been referred reported that such a concern was valid and asked for permission to bring in a bill that would prevent ship captains from kidnapping blacks in one state then selling them in another.¹⁰

Southerners were understandably leery of a bill which was supported so earnestly by those known for their anti-slavery sentiment, such as Albert Gallatin and the chairman of the commerce committee, John Swanwick of Pennsylvania. William Vans Murray of Maryland first tried a delaying tactic on the bill by asking what was "fully meant by the idea of preventing kidnapping." Later he tried to swing the debate in the other direction by bringing in the question of fugitive slaves. He complained of the "great evils" which attended the

⁹Ibid., 2 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1414-15 (February 12, 1793).

¹⁰Ibid., 4 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1730 (December 29, 1796).

leniency of the original act, and placed the blame squarely on the "false philosophy and misplaced philanthropy of the advocates of emancipation."¹¹

It was left to William Loughton Smith of South Carolina to offer the classic Southern defense to this issue. Smith spoke twice in one day on the proposed bill, and each time defended his position by pointing to the limited nature of the Constitution. The whole subject, Smith said, "involved many serious questions." To him, however, one of the most essential questions was "how far Congress had a right to meddle with it at all. He [Smith] felt alarmed on the subject. . . . He considered it as a kind of entering-wedge . . . [and] did not think the Constitution allowed the House to act in it." In his second speech, Smith reiterated this same theme. The subject was "that kind of business which, by the Constitution, was to be left to the different States, [and] he could not agree to the subject going any further." It was a "dangerous thing to meddle with," "an improper question for discussion" and the House "ought not to interfere with the individual States on the subject . . ."¹² Eventually a motion

¹¹Ibid., pp. 1731, 1733-34. Later, after this particular issue was settled, Murray submitted a resolution, which was quietly placed on the table, to strengthen the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, Ibid., pp. 1740-41.

¹²Ibid., pp. 1731-32, 1734. After Smith had spoken, Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina reported that now he "began to see more the impropriety of the measure" and now supported Smith's views. Ibid., p. 1732.

to "postpone" the whole subject was adopted 46 to 30.¹³

Unfortunately, the issue of slavery was soon before the House again. In January 1797 Representative John Swanwick of Pennsylvania presented a petition from four Negroes who had been manumitted by their owners in North Carolina, but whose liberty was now threatened by a new North Carolina law which directed the reenslavement of all blacks freed for reasons other than "meritorious service." The four blacks had fled from North Carolina and were now residing in Pennsylvania, hence Swanwick's presentation of their petition. They addressed Congress as "fellow men" and asked if such an ex post facto law did not violate "fundamental principles of the Constitution."¹⁴

Thomas Blount of North Carolina immediately objected. He hoped that Congress would refuse even to receive the petition because by North Carolina law these Negroes were slaves and thus not entitled to approach Congress.¹⁵ As to be expected, however, South Carolinian William L. Smith presented the most fervent argument. Smith thought the subject "such an improper nature as to be surprised that any gentleman would present a petition of that kind." It was a subject

¹³Ibid., pp. 1736-37.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 2015-18 (January 30, 1797).

¹⁵Ibid., p. 2018.

"not entitled to attention" from Congress; it would "act as an 'entering-wedge' whose consequences could not be foreseen. This is a kind of property on which the House has no power to legislate." Later in the same debate, in a classic understatement, Smith declared that "when subjects of this kind are brought up in the House they ought to be deprecated as dangerous. They tended to produce very uncomfortable circumstances."¹⁶

In the course of the debate, James Madison had argued that the question was really of a judicial rather than legislative character and ought, therefore, to be settled in the courts. Both Blount and Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina supported Madison and insisted that the North Carolina courts could be relied upon to be fair and just. Whether or not this promise had an effect or not is not known, but when the vote was taken to receive the petition and refer it to a committee for study, it was rejected 33 to 50.¹⁷

In both these cases, Southerners had argued that the limited nature of Constitutional power prevented any kind of Congressional action on the problem. It is significant that both in 1802 and 1817 when Southerners attempted to revise

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 2021, 2023. Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina believed the whole subject "a very delicate subject for the General Government to act on." Ibid., p. 2023.

¹⁷For Madison's speech, see Ibid., p. 2020; for the final vote, p. 2024.

the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 for their benefit, there was little mention of Constitutional limitations.¹⁸

Nowhere, however, was this concern over Constitutional limitation so manifest as in the debates over the restriction of slavery in Missouri. Given the nature of the subject, much of the proslavery position centered around the belief that Constitutional limitations on Congress prevented its dealing with the subject of slavery at all. Senator James Barbour of Virginia, for example, saw the Constitution as "nothing more than an expansion of the Confederation." Both possessed the same objects:

To operate on our external concerns, and to regulate such subjects internally as could not, from their character and extent, be properly administered by any of the States; and there only to the extent specifically enumerated in the Constitution.

As to be expected, Barbour relied heavily on the idea of non-delegated powers being reserved to the states. He insisted that the powers of the federal government resulted from "the compact to which the States are parties," and were limited by "the plain sense and intention of the instrument constituting that compact." Barbour was especially incensed by that

species of special pleading, which rejecting the principle just alluded to, hunts for

¹⁸For the debates for these two bills, neither of which passed, see *Ibid.*, 7 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 423, 425 (January 15, 18, 1802) and 15 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 825-31, 837-40 (January 27-30, 1818).

powers in words or sentences, taken here and there from the instrument and patched together, forming something like a pretext for the exercise of power palpably interdicted by the plain sense and intention of the instrument.

Barbour finally concluded his speech with the typical declamation on enumerated powers.¹⁹

It is highly significant that such a strong Constitutional defense came from James Barbour, who adamantly refused to accept the notion that Congress had any power to deal with the question of slavery. James' position here is so significant because unlike his brother Philip, James was a nationalist on almost all other issues. He finally served, for example, in John Quincy Adams' cabinet. On the subject of slavery, however, James stood firmly rooted in Southern tradition and denied that Congress had any authority or power over the subject of slavery.²⁰

Thus Barbour, and those like him, contended that the Constitution was static: it meant exactly what it said and nothing more. There was no room for interpretation. Some of the best examples of this viewpoint came from Thomas Ritchie, editor of the Richmond Enquirer. In an editorial in November, 1819, Ritchie declared that he had read all the memorials

¹⁹Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 316-24 (February 1, 1820).

²⁰For a brief biography of the Barbours, see the articles by Dumas Malone in the Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. I.

that had been published supporting Congressional restriction on slavery in Missouri and had found that "there is nothing in [any] one of them which wears the semblance of an argument to prove the existence of this authority." He maintained that "They neither prove it to be a power which has been explicitly given to the government, nor that it is necessary to carry into effect any power which is given. But they deal in generalities, . . ."²¹

Later Ritchie returned to this same theme in an article attacking Rufus King's position. Ritchie claimed that King merely "infers the power to exclude slavery from territories and states . . ." He then vehemently presented his own position:

My inference would be and is diametrically opposite. A power so important, of such high character, affecting so large a portion of our people, would have been expressly given. Such a power was not thought of: if it had, could it have been left to be inferred, from the grant of a power to make needful regulations concerning it, or from the power to admit new states into the Union? Certainly not. This inference of power or assent from mere silence, is rather a novelty in the political world . . .²²

In the House of Representatives, Philip P. Barbour carried this concern over Constitutional power to its limits.

²¹The Richmond Enquirer, November 30, 1819. This same editorial is later prominently reprinted in the Missouri Gazette, January 19, 1820.

²²Ibid., December 29, 1819.

He insisted that it was not "sufficient" to show that slavery was a "moral and political evil," but slavery's opponents also had to "show that the Constitution gives us power over it" before they could act.²³

The nature of the actual defenses used in the Missouri debates ran the whole gamut of ideas from the nature of the treaty of cession with France, to the concern over property rights, to the claim against ex post facto laws. Those opposed to slavery restriction in Missouri also examined the differences between migration and importation, and the meaning and limits to the "general welfare" and "necessary and proper" clauses of the Constitution.²⁴ In each instance the position

²³Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1219 (February 10, 1820).

²⁴For just a sampling of the myriad examples, see the following: (1) on the treaty of cession: Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1233 (February 17, 1819), 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 132 (January 17, 1820), p. 231 (January 20, 1820); St. Louis Enquirer, May 12, 1819; (2) on property rights in slaves: Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 196-97 (January 19, 1820), p. 998 (January 28, 1820), p. 1033 (February 4, 1820), pp. 1153-54 (February 7, 1820); St. Louis Enquirer, April 28, 1819; Franklin Intelligencer as quoted in Niles' Weekly Register, November 27, 1819, p. 201; Southern Review, November, 1829, p. 354; (3) for ex post facto law: Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1521 (February 25, 1820); (4) on the differences between migration and importation: Ibid., pp. 130-31 (January 17, 1820), p. 1274 (February 12, 1820), pp. 1315-16 (February 14, 1820); The Richmond Enquirer, December 21, 1819; Jackson (Missouri) Herald, February 5, 1820; (5) on the general welfare clause: Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 997-98 (January 20, 1820), pp. 1343-44 (February 15, 1820); [Robert Turnbull], The Crisis (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827), pp. 12, 64; Whitemarsh E. Seabrook, A Concise View of the Critical Situation (Charles-

taken had a dual purpose. On one level, it was a defense for a strict construction of the Constitution, an attempt to keep the central government one of limited specific powers. Many sincerely viewed the contest as almost a holy battle to save the Constitution. For example, in the midst of the debates over Missouri, John J. Crittenden wrote James Barbour: "I could not help wishing to be again in the midst of you, & to have had some humble share in the great battle you have fought for the Constitution."²⁵

Just as importantly, however, the fight was also a defense of slavery. It was the right of slavery which lay at the bottom of the contest over Missouri. Significantly, it was also during the Missouri debates that Southerners increasingly took a more militant, less apologetic, view towards the necessity, permanence, and benefits of slavery. In January, 1820, Benjamin Ruggles of Ohio voiced his "astonishment and surprise at the sentiments and opinions" being advanced on slavery. Ruggles felt that slavery was now being justified "on the broadest principles, without qualification or reserve." He continued:

ton: A. E. Miller, 1825), pp. 14-15; (6) on the necessary and proper clause: The Southern Recorder (Milledgeville, Ga.), July 18, 1820; The Richmond Enquirer, February 8, 1820, March 7, 1820.

²⁵John J. Crittenden to James Barbour, April 3, 1820 as quoted in Glover Moore, The Missouri Controversy (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), p. 119N.

This was taking entirely new ground; it was going farther than he had ever heard any gentleman go before. Heretofore, in discussion upon this subject, slavery had not been considered as a matter of right, but as an evil, a misfortune entailed upon the country, for which no complete remedy could be suggested.²⁶

Evidently Ruggles was either unfamiliar with or chose to ignore some of the positive good sentiments on slavery which had been expressed earlier, such as those by William Loughton Smith in the First Congress. However, Ruggles was correct in seeing in 1820 more bellicosity and defense, less apology and contrition, for the institution of slavery.

Virginians had led the debates against slavery restriction in Missouri and although other Southerners came to the defense of the peculiar institution, it almost seems as if few other Southerners fully shared the Virginians' fears of the threats that a strong central government offered to slavery. Such as appreciation, however, was soon brought home to South Carolinians, and through them most of the rest of the South.

In May and June, 1822, Charleston, South Carolina was shocked by disclosures of an imminent slave uprising. The leader of the plot was Denmark Vesey, a free Negro, who had

²⁶Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 279 (January 27, 1820). A few days later, Jonathan Roberts of Pennsylvania also remarked on the "new language on the subject of slavery," Ibid., p. 341 (February 1, 1820).

enlisted several able lieutenants including two of the Governor's slaves. Slaves from the region had been divided into six "regiments," each to take a particular objective when the attack came in June. The white inhabitants were to be overwhelmed, Charleston sacked and burned, then either a black republic established, or else the rebellious slaves were to escape to Santo Domingo. Obviously, the disclosures threw South Carolina into an uproar. Eventually 35 Negroes would be hanged and 32 others deported.²⁷

In the wake of the Vesey Plot, the overriding objective of South Carolinians was to insulate their black population from contact with "incendiary" ideas. One outgrowth of this concern was the Negro Seamen Act of 1822 which required all black seamen to be seized and jailed while their ships were in Charleston harbor. Not only did such a law conflict with the Constitution, it also violated the provisions of a treaty between the United States and Great Britain giving the inhabitants of each nation free access to the other's ports.²⁸

It did not take long for the law to reach the courts.

²⁷An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection Among A Portion of the Blacks of This City (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822); Also see William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 53-61 and Donald G. Morgan, Justice William Johnson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1954), pp. 127-130.

²⁸Morgan, Justice Johnson, pp. 192-95ff; Freehling, Prelude to Civil War, pp. 113-14.

In the case, those supporting the law admitted that the law violated the treaty with Great Britain, but then argued that the treaty itself violated the Constitution because the federal government's power to make treaties extended only to the delegated powers. All other powers remained with the State governments which hence were sovereign. The defendants then carried their argument forward in a tight little circle. Any government which could not protect itself from external rebellion was not sovereign; therefore, any federal action which impinged on a state's police power was unconstitutional. Specifically, any act necessary to avoid servile insurrection took precedence over any federal treaty.²⁹

Supreme Court Justice William Johnson, himself a South Carolinian, refused to accept such an argument. Johnson maintained that the Constitution expressly made federal laws and treaties the "supreme law of the land." If a state could pass any law it deemed necessary in defiance of such authority, then state law became supreme. This would allow, Johnson claimed, each state the right "to throw off the federal Constitution at its will and pleasure."³⁰

Despite Justice Johnson's decision, South Carolinians continued to imprison Negro seamen and Britain continued to

²⁹Morgan, Justice Johnson, pp. 193-94; Freehling, Prelude to Civil War, pp. 113-14.

³⁰Morgan, Justice Johnson, pp. 194-96.

protest the action. Secretary of State Adams in May, 1824, finally asked Attorney General William Wirt, another Southerner, to give his opinion of the law. Wirt claimed that the law violated not only the treaty with Great Britain, but also Congress's exclusive right to regulate commerce.³¹

The whole case created an uproar in South Carolina. In defiance of Adams, the South Carolina legislature adopted a resolution declaring:

The duty of the state to guard against . . . insurrection . . . is paramount to all laws, all treaties, all constitutions. It arises from the supreme and permanent law of . . . self-preservation; and will never, by this State be renounced, compromised, controlled, or participated with any power whatever.³²

The whole case brought squarely home to South Carolina, as nothing else had, the danger a strong central government posed to their peculiar institution and thus their way of life. The case did much to push South Carolina into adopting a strong states rights, strict-construction position in order to prevent the federal government from ever possibly touching any aspect of the slavery issue. As the Charleston Mercury declared in May, 1825: "The State Sovereignities -- the ark to which we must ultimately look to our safety. Let it not

³¹Freehling, Prelude to Civil War, p. 115.

³²Herman V. Ames (ed.), State Documents on Federal Relations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Department of History, 1904).

be engulfed in the constructive powers of Congress."³³

It was certainly true that during the early national period, especially during the 1820's, many Southerners were upset over loose construction generally and the direction the central government was going; it was also true that beneath much of this concern over the Constitution lay the fear of establishing a precedent for future action. Southern dreams were haunted by the spectre of establishing an "entering wedge," some action that would set the pattern for an interference with slavery by the federal government. Thus, much of the Southern effort was used to keep the Constitution unchanged: it meant exactly what it said and nothing more.

Undergirding the whole concept of state sovereignty lay the understanding that in this manner the status of slavery and the Negro would thus always remain a state problem. Whenever the institution of slavery seemed in the least threatened, the almost reflexive Southern response was immediately to cry that the Constitution established a government of limited powers which did not include any right to deal with the strictly local problem of slavery. As early as the First

³³Quoted in Freehling, Prelude to Civil War, pp. 115-16. Morgan, Justice Johnson, p. 140, saw the same reaction. "As fear of an uprising became the dominant mood, leaders in South Carolina came inevitably to associate the protection of slavery with states rights. . . . As a result, nationalism and national power would acquire in the eyes of many Carolinians, the appearance of a threat to slavery and, hence, to life and prosperity."

Congress James Jackson of Georgia and William L. Smith of South Carolina spoke out against memorials opposing slavery, claiming that others should "not interfere with a business in which they are not interested."³⁴ Willis Alston of North Carolina used this same argument in 1804 to oppose a slave import tax.³⁵ In January, 1800, during one of those periodic debates over petitions from blacks, John Rutledge Jr. of South Carolina had gone so far as to declare that some of the states would never have adopted the Constitution "if it had not been secured to them that Congress would never legislate on the subject of slavery."³⁶

Like so many other issues, however, the concept of state sovereignty, especially in regards to the institution of slavery, received full expression during the Missouri debates. Richard H. Brown in his article on the Missouri controversy and slavery claimed that the South's insistence that slavery was uniquely its own concern and was not to be touched by outsiders, had been the basis for "Southern participation in national politics" from the very beginning of the country. Likewise their insistence on a central government of limited powers grew out of this same concern. Moreover,

³⁴Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1187 (February 11, 1790), p. 1458 (March 17, 1790).

³⁵Ibid., 8 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1031 (February 17, 1804).

³⁶Ibid., 6 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 240-42 (January 3, 1800).

he maintained that during the 1790's Jefferson and Madison perceived that such a constitution was "only the first step in guaranteeing Southern security;" therefore they moved toward creating a national political party to keep the Constitution inviolate, and thus, by implication, protect Southern interests.³⁷ Agreeing with Richard Brown, Donald L. Robinson, examining the connection between slavery and early politics, suggested that the South carried one "portentious qualification" into its nationalism of the 1780's. Robinson labeled this qualification "the crucial minor premise" that slavery was a local matter forever beyond the limits of national power.³⁸ From the time of the first Congress, Southerners acted upon this premise by opposing even the consideration by Congress of any issue remotely touching domestic slavery.

From such a premise, too, it was but a short step to a states rights position. Certainly one way to protect slavery, and thus the Southern life style, was to keep slav-

³⁷Richard H. Brown, "The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LXV (Winter, 1966), p. 56.

³⁸Donald L. Robinson, Slavery in the Structure of American Politics 1765-1820 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 210. John Alden, The First South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 130 contended that by 1791 Southerners who had opposed the Constitution had joined those who had supported it in order "to defend Southern interests" and had formed the Democratic-Republican faction for that purpose.

ery a local concern, therefore insuring that the central government could not interfere. Certainly much of the states rights sentiment was genuine, a sincere belief in a small constitutionally limited government; however, it was also clear that underneath much of this sentiment lay a concern over slavery. Unless the system was protected, many Southerners believed, emancipation would be forced on the South and its pattern of life destroyed. It is true that in the early republic very few people seriously considered moving against the institution of slavery as it then existed in the South. However, many in the South, especially after 1820, did see the institution of slavery, and thus their life style, as being threatened. Whether or not the system was seriously threatened is not as important as the fact that many Southerners believed it to be under attack, and acted accordingly upon this perceived reality. Thus the states rights position was clearly tied in with the defense of slavery. Robert Y. Hayne, Senator from South Carolina, presented the South's whole point of view in February, 1827, when he declared:

The only safety of the Southern States is to be found in the want of power on the part of the Federal Government to touch the subject [of slavery] at all. Thank God, the Constitution gives them no power to engage in the work of colonization, or to interfere with our institutions, either for good or for evil. This is the very "Ark of the Covenant," in which alone we will find safety.³⁹

³⁹Congressional Debates, 19 Cong., 2 sess., p. 329 (February 9, 1827).

Another South Carolinian, Charles Pinckney, argued that slavery restriction for Missouri would only convince the South that the Northern and Eastern states were enemies. Great Britain, in the heat and passion of the Revolutionary War, he continued, never ventured to inflict such dangerous measures.⁴⁰ Any attempt to legislate on slavery Pinckney thus clearly saw as a threat to the South and its way of life.

The connection between states rights and the defense of slavery had been there, at least by implication, from the earliest days of the new nation; the debates in 1819-1820 over slavery restriction in Missouri made such a connection explicit.⁴¹ Southerners were convinced that slavery restriction in Missouri was merely the first step, a precedent which would later lead to abolition in the older states. A St. Louis Grand Jury presentment made this connection quite evident:

all the slave-holding states are vitally
menaced and threatened with eventual
destruction; as the transition is easy

⁴⁰Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1312 (February 14, 1820).

⁴¹See, for example, Brown, "Missouri Crisis;" Glover Moore, The Missouri Controversy. Moore tied it in particularly with diminishing Southern liberalism, p. 256. Norman K. Risjord, The Old Republicans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) proposed that the "second" Missouri debate, that over their constitutional provision against free blacks, especially worked to further this identification. He also contended that the whole Missouri controversy "marked the dividing line" between the old Virginia "conservatism" and South Carolina's "sectionalism," pp. 220-21, 213.

and direct from prescribing a constitution in a new state, to that of altering it (for the same cause) in an old one; and, if it is conceded to be anti-republican to hold slaves, it will then become the duty of Congress, as the guarantee [sic] of republican constitutions to all the states, to make was upon those whose constitutions admit of that doctrine.⁴²

Alexander Smyth of Virginia begged the slaveholding states to make "common cause" with Missouri because any recognition of federal power to deal with slavery would be "fatal" to them all.⁴³ Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, one of the two Southern Senators to vote against the final Missouri compromise, did so because "to compromise is to acknowledge the right of Congress to interfere and to legislate on the subject. This would be acknowledging too much."⁴⁴ Macon thus wanted to protect the South from any sort of recognition of federal power to deal with any aspect of domestic slavery.

⁴²Quoted in the National Intelligencer, June 15, 1819.

⁴³Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1004 (January 28, 1820). Such sentiments were legion. For just a few examples during the Missouri controversy, see: Richmond Enquirer, January 1, 22, 1820; (Milledgeville, Ga.) Southern Recorder, July 18, 1820; Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 925-26 (January 19, 1820), 1013-14 (January 28, 1820), 395 (February 15, 1820), 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 549-50 (December 18, 1820). Philip P. Barbour of Virginia insisted that even if such rights were not claimed now, future generations would do so, Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1240 (February 10, 1820). This argument of not wanting to set a precedent for interference with slavery was also used against federal support for the American Colonization Society, the Ohio Resolution of 1824, and Attorney General Wirt's decision the Negro Seamen Act.

⁴⁴Nathaniel Macon to Bolling Hall, February 13, 1820 as quoted in Risjord, Old Republicans, pp. 216-17.

Support for state sovereignty was so strong during the Missouri conflict, particularly in the South, that President Monroe's most recent biographer has claimed that Monroe had even written a rough draft of a veto message on Missouri to be delivered if the Tallmadge Amendment restricting slavery had passed. In this message Monroe relied heavily upon the concept of state sovereignty.⁴⁵

In the middle of the debate over restriction in Missouri, Congressman James Johnson of Virginia summarized the viewpoint of many Southerners regarding the connection between slavery in Missouri and state sovereignty when he declared:

What then, sir, has produced this degree of excitement which gentlemen assure us exists in the nation? Is it the mere question whether the lands of Missouri shall be cultivated by freemen or by slaves? No, sir -- no, sir -- no. It is a question about power; power -- that idol which has a charm, an irresistible fascination, for the human heart. it is a question calculated to test the powers of the Federal Government; to determine how much sovereignty or power is left to the States and to the people.⁴⁶

The Missouri controversy was only the best example of

⁴⁵Harry Ammon, James Monroe (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp. 451-52. For examples of some of the arguments, based on state sovereignty, used during the Missouri debates, see: Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 1075-76, 1080-81 (February 4, 1820), p. 1152 (February 7, 1820), pp. 1234-35 (February 10, 1820), pp. 1497, 1499-1500 (February 25, 1820). See also the Missouri Gazette, April 7, 1819, The National Intelligencer, December 4, 1819, and June 20, 1821, quoting the Albany Register.

⁴⁶Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 1356-57 (February 16, 1820).

this states rights-slavery defense connection. There were other incidents throughout the early republic which played upon this connection too. These disputes ranged over such topics as what to do with confiscated smuggled slaves, the reaction to Attorney General William Wirt's decision on South Carolina's Negro Seamen Act, and Southern discontent over Ohio's Resolution of 1824 asking for federal support for emancipation/colonization. In each case the concept of states rights was used to defend the slavery system. The action proposed was always challenged as being the "entering wedge," the "dangerous precedent," from which other action would inevitably flow until finally there would be emancipation with its consequent destruction of Southern society. The federal government was increasingly distrusted, indeed feared, because its power represented a threat to Southern life. The answer, the South believed, was strict construction and states rights which were preached with increasing stridency.

The Missouri Compromise settled the immediate issues, but certainly did not resolve the question of state sovereignty. The question was brought to the fore again in 1827 when Congress was asked to appropriate funds to further the work of the American Colonization Society of sending blacks to Africa. This request once again touched off Southern cries against an interference with the local right of slavery. The Georgia legislature, for example, accused the Colonization

Society of seeking to remove the whole black population of the country, and, moreover, to do this using the government's "general fund" to which the South had so largely contributed. The Georgia legislature believed such a purpose would be "especially ruinous to the prosperity, importance, and political strength, of the southern States." The legislature was particularly upset over such interference in what it regarded as its own concern. It could not "avoid reprobating the cold-blooded selfishness, or unthinking zeal, which activates many of our fellow-citizens in other states to an interference with our local concerns and domestic relations, totally unwarranted either by humanity or constitutional right."⁴⁷ In other words, Georgia was determined that any solution to the "negro problem" would be kept in her hands, which in practice meant doing nothing to end, or even weaken, the institution of slavery. Once again the principle of state sovereignty was used to prevent an attempt to deal effectively with the problem of slavery.

Besides the issue of state sovereignty and a limited central government, Southerners were also vitally concerned with one other aspect of the Constitution, the section

⁴⁷Ames, State Documents on Federal Relations, No. V, pp. 18-20. See these examples for other pointed statements against interference with slavery: [Robert J. Turnbull], The Crisis, (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827), p. 130; speech of Robert Y. Hayne, Congressional Debates, 19 Cong., 2 sess., p. 289 (February 7, 1827); The American Farmer, August 7, 1829, p. 167.

counting three-fifths of the slaves for purposes of taxes and representation (Article I, Section 2, Clause 3). Southerners were concerned about protecting this provision because it obviously aided their political power. Slaves did represent power. As one historian has cynically noted, Thomas Jefferson was antislavery until this representation provision of the Constitution enabled him to win the election of 1800; then "Neither he nor his successors in the presidency from the Jeffersonian and Democratic parties ever spoke against slavery after that election."⁴⁸

Although putting it somewhat in a different context, Albert Simpson in his study, "The Political Significance of Slave Representation," agreed with Dwight Dumond about the importance of the three-fifths ratio. From 1787 to 1821, Simpson claimed that it was doubtful if any other single factor was of greater significance than this ratio in the political field. Furthermore Simpson contended that this ratio had a "strong influence in the formative stages of the struggle between the North and South for control of the several branches of the Federal government." He went so far

⁴⁸Dwight L. Dumond, Antislavery (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), p. 73. Dumond bases his conclusion that slaves elected Jefferson on the fact that he defeated Adams seventy-three electoral votes to sixty-five; Jefferson received all the votes of Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Kentucky, ten of whose electoral votes were based on the three-fifths ratio. Thus, slave representation elected Jefferson.

as to claim that it was such slave representation that acted as a "powerful" stimulant to the growth of a "vigorous antislavery and antislavery sentiment in the northern states."⁴⁹

Simpson undoubtedly overstated his case but clearly slave representation by the three-fifths ratio did play an important role in the early republic. In March, 1816, for example, both Senator James Barbour of Virginia and William Bibb of Georgia refused to support a Constitutional amendment regarding presidential elections because, as both explicitly stated, it would be "deeply injurious" to the South by adversely affecting the three-fifths ratio.⁵⁰ Later other Southerners attacked the American Colonization Society for this same reason. They charged that the Society's aim of freeing the slaves and transporting them to Africa would "directly interfere with the bases of our Representation in

⁴⁹Albert F. Simpson, "The Political Significance of Slave Representation, 1787-1821," The Journal of Southern History, VII (August, 1941), p. [35]. Such slave representation, for example, was one of the primary concerns of the Federalists who attended the Hartford Convention.

⁵⁰Annals of Congress, 14 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 225-26 (March 20, 1816). The amendment had been suggested by Massachusetts and provided for each state to be divided into fairly equal districts for electing presidential electors. The President, thus, would be elected on a district and not a state basis. Such a system would clearly have a detrimental effect on the influence of the tidewater areas in the South.

Congress; . . ."⁵¹

This issue of slave representation reached its apogee during the Missouri debates. In many ways, and both sides perceived this, the struggle for Missouri was above all a contest over power, over the western territory, and ultimately, therefore, the national government. Thus in February, 1820, Benjamin Hardin of Kentucky could cry that the South was not contending for victory, but merely struggling for political existence. He pointed out that the South had already surrendered the northwest territory and if it lost the country west of the Mississippi, then Southerners might as well surrender, crouch at the feet of their adversaries, and beg for mercy.⁵² The Lexington Gazette viewed the struggle in much the same terms. It declared that the final decision on Missouri by its very nature "must affect the interests, power, political weight and destinies of the southern and western states." If the struggle for Missouri was lost, the South and West, the paper charged, would be "as

⁵¹Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States (Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827), p. 104. Robert Turnbull was also disturbed over this feature of the Society's plans, The Crisis, p. 89.

⁵²Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1070 (February 4, 1820). Edward Lloyd of Maryland explicitly declared that he favored the linking of the Maine-Missouri admission in order to maintain the political balance of power. Ibid., p. 94 (January 13, 1820).

we have too long been, dependents on Atlantic or Yankee notions and views . . . "53

While some Southerners were thus defending slave representation, others tried to show that it really did not give the South an undue advantage. Writing in 1825, Whitemarsh B. Seabrook claimed that if anything, the South was under-represented. Using the census figures of 1820 Seabrook pointed out that the three New England states of New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island combined had less free population than Virginia but had six Senators to her two. He asserted that in the Senate the Eastern States had one Representative for every 133,312 free persons whereas the Southern States had one for every 185,463. Seabrook went on to compare the value of exported domestic produce for the year October 1, 1823 to September 30, 1824. He claimed that the six New England states had an export value of nearly six and a half million; whereas the six Southern States of Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, Louisiana, and the Carolinas had an export value of well over 26 million dollars. He concluded:

This statement strikingly demonstrates the folly and injustice of the ceaseless clamour of the North and East, relative to the gross inequality of the representative system,

⁵³The Lexington Gazette as quoted in Moore, Missouri Controversy, p. 239. At another point, Moore claims that most Missourians viewed the attempted restriction as "an Eastern attempt to check the growth of the West," p. 259.

particularly as it regards their influence in the national councils, and exhibits the support that the different States give to the Union.⁵⁴

Perhaps because the South was so concerned over its own political power, it projected this feeling onto others. Whatever the reason, many Southerners did see a political plot involved in the Northern response to the Missouri question. As early as December, 1819, in the Missouri debates, the Richmond Enquirer swore that the reason for this "outrage upon the rights of the South" was "easily explained by the antipathies of certain politicians, and their jealousy of the influence of the southern states in the councils of the nation." In the same article the editor asserted that "Some master spirit of the north, may expect to ride on this popular wave to the lofty pinnacle of his ambition."⁵⁵

One month later, Thomas Ritchie, the editor, returned to this same theme. This time he did admit that many of those involved with the attempted restriction were "very

⁵⁴Seabrook, Concise View, pp. 25-26, 28. Charles Pinckney also claimed that the South supported the Union through her exports. He went on to compare the value of the labor of the slave to the laboring whites of the North. He insisted that the labor of two or three slaves was "more valuable" than that of five Eastern inhabitants; therefore, he charged it was "unjust and unequal" to count only three-fifths of the slaves for representation since they were more valuable. Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 1314-15 (February 14, 1820).

⁵⁵The Richmond Enquirer, December 23, 1819.

sincere," but at the bottom he still professed to see those who had ulterior motives. To Ritchie, the real purpose of the agitation over Missouri was political, to revitalize the old Federalist party and bring the Presidency to those involved.⁵⁶ There were many in the South who agreed with Ritchie that the whole Missouri contest was nothing more than a political move.⁵⁷ Even Jefferson and Madison agreed with Ritchie's interpretation. Jefferson called the Missouri dispute "a mere party trick." He claimed that "the leaders of federalism" had merely changed tactics because they had been unsuccessful in "their schemes of obtaining power by

⁵⁶Ibid., January 22, 1820. The Enquirer used this theme again and again; some articles from Ritchie, others from letters to the editor. See, for example, December 14, 16, 23, 1819; January 11, 1820; March 10, 1820. Ritchie's feelings ran so deep that at one point he swore that for some in the North "it is a truth that the predominant sentiment is not sympathy for the blacks, but hatred for their masters." Ibid., January 1, 1820.

⁵⁷For such sentiments, not all of them from Southerners, see, for example, Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 328-29 (February 1, 1820), p. 383 (February 11, 1820), pp. 987-88 (January 27, 1820), p. 1070 (February 4, 1820), pp. 1579-81 (March 2, 1820); 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1022-23 (February 2, 1821), pp. 1140-41, 1144 (February 13, 1821); The National Intelligencer, December 20, 1819, August 8, 1820; The Southern Recorder, September 19, 1820; St. Louis Enquirer, October 27, 1819; Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, May 17, 1819, January 29, 1821. One particularly favorite tactic was to compare the actions and feelings of those supporting restriction in Missouri to the Hartford Convention. See, for example, Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 984 (January 27, 1820); 2 sess., pp. 1107-08 (February 12, 1821); The National Intelligencer, December 4, 1819.

rallying partisans to the principle of monarchism, . . ."
Madison too saw it as a political move to divide Northern
and Southern republicans, thus allowing "the opponents of
both an ascendancy over the whole."⁵⁸

How much such anti-Federalist, anti-northern feeling
was also genuinely proslavery sentiment is unclear. It is
clear, however, that in the minds of many Southerners there
was a connection between them. Many Southerners saw them-
selves, and especially their institution of slavery, under
attack, and rushed to defend it and themselves. To Souther-
ners of such mind, such events as the attempt at restriction
in Missouri and the various attempts to secure federal
funding for the American Colonization Society were part of
the same pattern, a design to destroy slavery and the South-
ern way of life.

Southerners responded to this perceived attack in
various ways but their last line of defense was the Constitu-
tion. Like the appeals to the Bible, the use of the Consti-
tution was an appeal to authority. The Constitution was the
law of the land; it contained positive recognitions of slav-
ery and prohibited any interference with it. Men like John
Tyler, James and Philip Barbour, and Robert Turnbull clearly
believed that now was the time that they had to take a stand.

⁵⁸Both quotations from Moore, Missouri Controversy
pp. 252-53.

If the Constitution was allowed to be tampered with in any guise, then strict construction, states rights and slavery were ultimately doomed. Thus in the face of threats to their conception of the purity of the Constitution in the 1820's, they rushed to its defense -- not only for its own sake but also to protect and defend the peculiar institution and the Southern way of life.

CHAPTER VII: SOCIAL DEFENSE

The proslavery defense was more than simply a justification for slavery; it was also a justification for the whole Southern way of life. Very early, proponents of slavery had been able to convince most Southerners that the institution of slavery was the sine qua non of Southern existence, setting the distinguishing pattern of the Southern life style. In the early nineteenth century, for example, John Randolph told the British ambassador to the United States, Sir Augustus Foster, that "the possession of slaves was necessary to the formulation of a perfect gentleman."¹ This sentiment came from a man who prided himself on being against slavery. It shows, therefore, the depth of the real acceptance of the institution, an acceptance linked to the belief in a Southern way of life superior to that of a free society. Because so many Southerners saw a direct connection between slavery and their life style, they rushed to defend the institution the moment it was attacked. To them, antislavery was an anathema

¹Augustus J. Foster, Jeffersonian America: Notes on the United States of America Collected in the Years 1805-6-7 and 11-12, ed. Richard Beale Davis (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1954), p. 307.

because it would destroy their society and life style based on slavery. "An American" writing in the Richmond Enquirer at the time of the Missouri debate played heavily upon this point. He swore that the "future peace, safety, dignity, honour, [and] independence of the whole southern country and a great portion of the west" depended upon slavery. As he saw the Missouri controversy: "On the one side then there is a struggle not only for property, and character, but existence: on the other, there is no mischief threatened: no danger apprehended."² Slavery, in other words, was crucial for the South's very existence; therefore it had to be defended against all encroachments.

Clearly slavery did play a critical role in the South. Whether fully accepted by all the people or not is not particularly significant when considering its effect and importance. Certainly by the end of the eighteenth century, the system of slavery was an integral part of Southern life. Both economically and socially it was deemed necessary; it not only provided a system of labor but also a system of racial adjustment and social order. Slavery pervaded the whole of Southern life. Almost any Southern newspaper from the period could give an indication of this pervasiveness: it abounded with advertisements for the sale or rental of slaves, or for the capture of runaways. The system created

²The Richmond Enquirer, January 8, 1820.

professions from the slave dealer to the overseer to the professional slave catcher.

It has generally been alleged that the plantation overseer and the slave trader, especially the latter, were greatly looked down upon, even shunned, by the rest of Southern society, thus indirectly indicating that slavery itself was held in disrepute. In his study of the overseer, however, William Scarborough claimed that the overseer's "unsavory reputation" was due in large part to the existence of a "large floating population of amateur overseers" who possessed a "general lack of competence." Furthermore, Scarborough found that most secondary writers have "equated the entire class of southern overseers with this group of ill-paid, inexperienced, unqualified wanderers, thereby producing a stereotyped image of the southern overseer which does not accord with the facts."³ Scarborough found that the overseers themselves had "no feeling of class inferiority."⁴

Even more than the overseer, the slave trader is especially pointed to as being held in opprobrium. Undoubtedly to a certain extent he was. Such odium can be partially explained by the fact that the slave trade, first the foreign and then the domestic, was one of the most visible cruelties of the

³William K. Scarborough, The Overseer (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 196.

⁴Ibid., p. 45.

institution of slavery; thus most everyone could unite in excoriating it. Moreover as Frederic Bancroft in his monumental study on slave trading in the South pointed out, the fear of imported slaves combined with the high prices on inferior slaves "irritated" so many people that it was easy to arouse "extra prejudice against interstate traders." Furthermore, Bancroft claimed that it was the "supposed dishonesty" of the traders as much as anything else that caused them to be shunned and "hated."⁵ Significantly, Bancroft also found that the acceptance of a slave trader's status depended not on his profession but his name and connections. He claimed that the slave dealer was no more ostracized by "good society" than was any "petty merchant" or "common mechanic." Bancroft went so far as to claim that "honest and humane trading of itself, especially if on a large scale, seems never to have lowered the standing of a man of good family, and it always improved that of men of humble origin." As Bancroft asked in conclusion: "How could it have been hateful to trade honestly in the most coveted and prestige-giving property . . ."⁶ Other observers support Bancroft's findings. Francis Hall, a British traveler in the United States, for example, was shocked at the inn keeper who received

⁵Frederic Bancroft, Slave-Trading in the Old South (Baltimore: J. H. Furst Company, 1931), pp. 271, 375.

⁶Ibid., pp. 191, 365-81.

two slave traders "as if they were just as 'honourable men' as any other fair dealers in the community . . ."⁷

Such observations thus indicate that slave trading in and of itself did not create social ostracism. Increasingly the institution of slavery and those activities needed to maintain it were seen as being an integral part of the Southern way of life and were accepted as such. It could not be denied that slaves were omnipresent within that society. The slave was the servant in the home and on the street; some corporations and local governments even owned slaves. As ironic as it may seem to us, so did some churches. The Briery Presbyterian Church of Virginia in 1781 owned twelve slaves as an endowment "for the permanent support" of the gospel and the congregation. In December, 1789, a Cumberland County Virginia church resolved to sell "Pompey" for whatever amount they could get for him because his value had been declining "for a considerable time."⁸ From the field hand to house servant, wet nurse to mistress, slavery was indeed an integral part of the Southern way of life. William Freehling in his study on the founding fathers claimed that this

⁷Francis Hall, Travels in Canada and the United States, in 1816 and 1817 (Boston: Re-published from the London edition by Wells and Lilly, 1818), p. 216.

⁸Quoted in W. Harrison Daniel, "Southern Presbyterians and the Negro in the Early National Period," The Journal of Negro History, LVIII (July, 1973), pp. 304-05.

"plantation life style with its elegant manners and extravagant tastes" was just as responsible for the continued acceptance of slavery as was the cotton boom.⁹

Southerners thus saw themselves not so much defending slavery alone as defending their whole existence. Robert J. Turnbull, writing in 1827, summed up this connection succinctly:

Domestic servitude is the policy of our country and has been so from time immemorial. it is so intimately interwoven with our prosperity, as a member of the Confederacy, and with our comfort as a society, that to talk of its abolition, is to speak of striking us out of our civil and political existence.¹⁰

Abolition, in other words, would mean the end of the Southern way of life as it had been known. "Gracchus," writing against emancipation, claimed that it would "revolutionize the whole character and habits of the people of the South."

⁹William W. Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," The American Historical Review, 77 (February 1972), p. 85. William Cohen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery," The Journal of American History, LVI (December 1969), p. 525 claimed that Jefferson's "proslavery behavior" was tied to a complex set of factors including his belief in Negro inferiority, societal values, and the fact that he already owned extensive slave and land holdings. Clearly, these same factors affected many other Southerners too.

¹⁰[Robert J. Turnbull], The Crisis: or. Essavs on the Usurnations of the Federal Government (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827), p. 124. For similar sentiments see speech of Freeman Walker, Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 165 (January 19, 1820); Philip P. Barbour, Ibid., 15 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1188 (February 15, 1819). Even William Plumer, Jr. of New Hampshire accepted the necessity of slavery for the South. Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 1426 (February 21, 1820).

He went on to assert that the habit of slavery had become "almost incorporated with our very existence." Slavery was now necessary because "even our bodies, as well as our minds, have been moulded under the influence of this principle of labour among us; and that which was first a habit has become constitutional."¹¹

In the midst of the Missouri debates, Richard M. Johnson, a Kentucky slaveholding Senator, alleged that only the sugar, rice, and cotton plantations were profitable, but the rest of the South maintained slavery because it was a part of their life style.¹² Charles S. Sydnor in his study of slavery in Mississippi claimed that "the planter's life had attractions and obligations that kept many from deserting it even though their investments showed an inadequate return." Sydnor specifically referred to the "pleasurable distinction and dignity" in addition to the relief from physical labor which slavery gave to the planter's way of life.¹³ Many clearly

¹¹Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States (Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827), p. 16. Hezekiah Niles reprinted a resolution from the South Carolina House of Representatives affirming that "the people of this state will adhere to a system, descended to them from their ancestors, and now inseparably, connected with their social and political existence." Niles Weekly Register, January 8, 1825, p. 292.

¹²Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 350 (February 1, 1820).

¹³Charles S. Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933), p. 198.

saw slavery as profitable as well as socially beneficial. For example, David Todd, running as a delegate to Missouri's Constitutional Convention from Howard County, declared:

"I would recognize the principle of slavery, as conducting [sic] to our happiness, required by our habits, tending to our prosperity as a state, and infringing the rights of none . . ."¹⁴

In seeking to justify slavery and a social system on the basis of black inferiority, slavery's defenders increasingly had to explain away the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence.¹⁵ Proslavery spokesmen basically explained the Declaration on two grounds: it was asserting a principle of national independence and not a maxim of individual equality, or else was asserting abstract principles not intended to be applied in practice. Senator Nicholas Van Dyke of Delaware, for example, found it unbelievable that "the recital of abstract theoretical principles, in a national manifesto in 1776, would be gravely urged at this day, to prove that involuntary servitude does not lawfully exist

¹⁴Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, April 22, 1820.

¹⁵The use of the Declaration by both sides was especially prevalent in the debates over Missouri statehood. For a full discussion of the uses made of the Declaration of Independence, see Philip F. Detweiler, "Congressional Debate on Slavery and the Declaration of Independence, 1819-1821," The American Historical Review, LXIII (April, 1958). Detweiler claims that during the Missouri debates the preamble to the Declaration of Independence was examined and analyzed for the first time in American history, p. 598.

within the United States!"¹⁶ William Pinkney of Maryland agreed fully with Van Dyke. Pinkney declared that "The self-evident truths announced in the Declaration of Independence are not truths at all, if taken literally; and the practical conclusions contained in the same passage of the declaration prove that they were never designed to be so received."¹⁷

As Pinkney's speech indicates, many proslavery defenders tried to refute the Declaration of Independence by reading its provisions literally, then attacking the resultant absurdity. Southerners were not alone in using this strategy. One of the best examples of such a tactic was in a speech by Joseph Clay of Pennsylvania who exclaimed that the Declaration had to be taken with "great qualification." As he noted:

It declares those men have an inalienable right to life; yet we hang criminals -- to liberty, yet we imprison -- to the pursuit of happiness, yet he must not infringe on the rights of others. If the

¹⁶Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 301 (January 28, 1820).

¹⁷Ibid., p. 405 (February 15, 1820). In 1806 Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts had drawn a parallel between Africans and children. He pointed out that in every parish poor children were bound out without their consent and surely Negroes were as "helpless, ignorant, and incompetent as such children;" such laws were certainly no "infringement of the rights of man." Ibid., 9 Cong., 2 sess., p. 224 (December 29, 1806). Other Congressmen picked up Pinkney's same point and used it later, for example, John Randolph, Congressional Debates, 19 Cong., 1 sess., p. 125 (March 2, 1826), and John C. Weems, Ibid., 20 Cong., 2 sess., p. 184 (January 7, 1829).

Declaration of Independence is taken in its fullest extent, it will warrant robbery and murder, for some may think even those crimes necessary to their happiness.¹⁸

It was during these same debates that other slavery apologists began to formulate a proslavery argument based on the Declaration of Independence, as paradoxical as that may seem. Such congressmen as Alexander Smyth and John Tyler of Virginia, and Senators Richard Johnson of Kentucky and James Barbour of Virginia appealed to the Declaration of Independence for the defense of Missouri's whites. Like others, they denied that all men were indeed personally free and equal, but would apply the Declaration to the people of Missouri who wished to be free of Congressional control.¹⁹

Such a view of the Declaration of Independence was probably best presented by Louis McLane, the Representative

¹⁸Annals of Congress, 9 Cong., 2 sess., p. 227 (December 29, 1806). The St. Louis Enquirer declared that if all men were born equal then every slave was entitled to "instant freedom," but "necessity, policy, expediency, etc., forbid--and what then becomes of the maxim that all men are entitled to equal rights?" February 10, 1821. [Edward Brown], Notes on the Origin and Necessity of Slavery (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1826), railed against the "perverted application" of the idea that "all men are born free." He claimed: "fact denies it, scripture denies it, the constitution denies it, and common sense denies it." He suggested that slavery's opponents used the words so often that they must believe there is "a charm in the combination of the five little monosyllables," p. 40.

¹⁹See, for example, Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 325-26, 350 (February 1, 1820); p. 1005 (January 28, 1820); pp. 1383-84 (February 17, 1820).

from Delaware, who declared that since the Declaration of Independence preceeded the Constitution, if the "abstract principles" of the Declaration were to have "any reference" to the black population, "their practical effect must depend altogether upon the positive provisions of that charter." However, he found the truth to be that the Declaration had no effect on Negro slavery because "It was pronounced by the freemen of the country, and not by slaves." He concluded: "The Revolution found them in a state of servitude, the acknowledgement of our actual independence left them so, and the Constitution of the United States perpetuated their condition."²⁰ McLane then went on to apply the Declaration for the benefit of the white Missourians. Under its principles the people of Missouri had "the right to make their own constitution, and resist the imposition of any species of government deriving its powers from any other source."²¹

In some ways the appearance of this critical attitude toward the Declaration of Independence merely represented

²⁰Ibid., pp. 1154-55 (February 7, 1820). For similar sentiments see, for example, Ibid., p. 227 (January 20, 1820); Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, April 15, 1820; [Frederick Dalcho], Practical Considerations Founded on the Scriptures, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina. By a South-Carolinian (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823), p. 33.

²¹Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 1154-55 (February 7, 1820). Christopher Rankin of Mississippi was one of several who drew the parallel between the American Revolution and Missouri's position so fine as to threaten war. Ibid., p. 1342 (February 15, 1820).

one phase of the Southern defense of slavery in the face of the increasing antislavery sentiment. Another expression of the changing Southern response involved Jefferson's Notes on Virginia whose antislavery tone proslavery theorists tried hard to combat. Next to the Declaration of Independence itself, slavery's opponents were fondest of quoting from Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, particularly two passages from Query XVIII.

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this and learn to imitate it. . . . The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to the worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances.²²

The other section heavily relied upon was Jefferson's lament:

Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events: that it may become probable by

²²Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1788), pp. 172-73.

supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.²³

Advocates of slavery obviously had to find answers to such sentiments. A writer in the National Intelligencer was incensed that these passages were used so extensively and others ignored. He contended that people should not "select a sentence written nearly forty years ago, addressed to a foreigner, in one of those moments of feeling which all good men experience: moments in which the heart will dictate, and in which the judgment is not only not consulted, but not regarded." In an attempt to exonerate Jefferson, the writer explained that "in questions which touch our feelings, the best heart and clearest head are not always a security against error."²⁴

Senator William Smith of South Carolina, on the other hand, in his refutation of the Notes on Virginia did little to spare Jefferson. Smith insisted that the Notes "could not have been founded on facts." He called them "the effusions of the speculative philosophy" written "to gratify a foreigner." Smith discovered just the opposite condition between master and slave that Jefferson had found. To Smith the whole system was patriarchal. Likewise he contradicted

²³Ibid., pp. 173-74.

²⁴The National Intelligencer as quoted in the Richmond Enquirer, December 7, 1819.

Jefferson on slavery's effect on children proposing that the white and black children were such "constant associates" that in "thousand of instances" by the time they grew up "There is nothing but the shadow of slavery left."

In his analysis, Smith delivered the key to the pro-slavery attack on Jefferson's Notes on Virginia. If slavery were that bad, Smith asked, why did Jefferson continue to hold slaves? "It is impossible," Smith concluded, "when his mind became enlarged by reflection and informed by observation, that he could entertain such sentiments, and hold slaves at the same time."²⁵

Senator James Barbour of Virginia suggested that Jefferson had "imbibed a large portion of that enthusiasm" coming out of the American Revolution when he wrote the Notes on Virginia, but that

sad reality has since taught him, as his example shows, that the evil over which he wept is incurable by human means. By which will you be influenced, the undisciplined effusions of a benevolent heart, or the sober suggestions of cool deliberations, and ripened judgment?²⁶

In other words Barbour was arguing that Jefferson had been caught up in the liberalism and enthusiasm of the

²⁵Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 269 (January 26, 1820). John Taylor of Caroline in his Arator (Georgetown, D.C.: J. M. Carter, 1814) was just as harsh on Jefferson, see especially pp. 63-64.

²⁶Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 332 (February 1, 1820).

Revolutionary era, but soon backed away from this position for practical reasons. Undoubtedly Barbour had correctly pinpointed not only Jefferson's, but much of the Southern Revolutionary generation's motives and actions regarding Negro slavery. So too did Nathaniel Macon, Senator from North Carolina, who maintained in 1820 that Jefferson had to be judged not on the Notes alone but by his life also. Macon claimed that if Jefferson thought slavery a curse, he thought it a "greater curse to emancipate in his native Virginia." In a telling summary which explains much of Jefferson and his generation, Macon concluded: "His democracy, like that of his great countrymen . . . appears to be of the white family."²⁷

Except for a few dissenters, slavery was clearly acceptable to most Southerners, even the religious ones. The Virginia Baptist General Committee, for example, in 1793 decided that slavery was not a moral issue but a political one that should be left to the politicians.²⁸ Bishop Francis Asbury of the Methodist church professed in January, 1798,

²⁷Ibid., p. 229 (January 20, 1820).

²⁸W. Harrison Daniel, "Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the Antebellum Era," The Journal of Negro History, LVI (January, 1971), p. 1. Robert B. Semple, A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia (Richmond: John Lynch, 1810), pp. 303-04, said that the issue of gradual emancipation "excited considerable tumult in the churches" so that they finally "resolved to take no farther [sic] steps in the business."

that slavery would probably last "for ages" because there was "not a sufficient sense of religion nor of liberty to destroy it." He pointed out that even in the "highest flights of rapturous piety" the main Protestant sects of the South still maintained and defended slavery.²⁹ Patricia Hickin in her study of slavery and the Virginia churches saw a type of "situation ethics" involved in which agitation for abolition was worse than slavery itself. She found that "The major American denominations were thus clearly more interested in maintaining peace and harmony among their members than in waging a campaign against slavery."³⁰

The acceptance of slavery was so deep and widespread that intolerance towards abolitionism manifested itself very early in the South. The South Carolina Presbyterian Synod, for example, in 1796, refused to ordain James Gilliland unless he promised to quit preaching against slavery.³¹ The degree of this intolerance was indicated also by the tremendous opposition to John F. Crowe's abolition newspaper in Kentucky even though he insisted he had limited aims. He

²⁹Quoted in H. Shelton Smith, In His Image But . . . (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972), p. 69.

³⁰Patricia Hickin, "'Situation Ethics' and Antislavery Attitudes in the Virginia Churches," in John Boles (ed.), America: The Middle Period Essays in Honor of Bernard Mayo (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973), p. 194.

³¹Andrew E. Murray, Presbyterians and the Negro -- A History (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), p. 18.

only wanted, he wrote, "to prepare the public mind for taking the preparatory measures for the future introduction of a system of laws for the gradual abolition of slavery."³² Nevertheless, he still met hostility from his neighbors. Politicians frequently complained that they had lost elections by being represented as antislavery.³³ One European traveler to the United States claimed that Southerners were extremely "jealous" upon the question of slavery to the extent that any lawyer who even hinted at slave rights was in "imminent danger of being stoned."³⁴

Clearly, as the nineteenth century progressed, opposition to abolitionism became sharper. In 1819, for example, Georgia repealed its emancipation law. The National Intel-

³²Quoted in Merton L. Dillon, Benjamin Lundy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), pp. 50-51.

³³See, for example, Dr. David Ramsay to John Eliot, November 26, 1788, in which Ramsay claimed he lost because he was represented as favoring abolition. Quoted in George C. Rogers, Jr., Evolution of a Federalist (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962), p. 166N. Edward Hooker, a Yankee living in Charleston, recorded in his diary how alleged emancipationist sentiments were used as political tactics. J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), "Diary of Edward Hooker," Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1896, p. 892. George Tompkins claimed that his whole political career was over in Missouri because he opposed slavery while "nine tenths of the people" favored it. George Tompkins to George C. Sibley, July 30, 1819, Sibley Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

³⁴[Charles Sealsfield], The Americans As They Are: Described in a Tour Through the Valley of the Mississippi (London: Hurst, Chance, and Co., 1828), p. 178.

ligencer, commenting upon the repeal, declared that the state had "acted firmly, wisely, and, I have no doubt, humanely."³⁵ In 1826, a North Carolina legislator introduced a motion to destroy the manumission society of that state by indictment.³⁶

Such opposition was especially strong when the abolitionist thrust came from non-southerners. The editor of the Southern Agriculturist in December, 1829, wrote a long editorial on slavery. He reiterated the usual feelings about the importance of slavery for the South, and then warned his readers to "reflect on the necessity of throwing aside all Northern notions on the subject;" He was especially concerned with the issue of slave control because "a slave in a state of insubordination is an enemy" but "in a state of perfect subjection, he is a kind, willing, good-humoured, and useful friend."³⁷

This paper was not alone in seeing Northern abolitionists behind slave insurrections. After the Denmark Vesey plot in South Carolina, Governor Thomas Bennett claimed: "Materials were furnished in the seditious pamphlets brought into this state by equally culpable incendiaries, while speeches of opposition in Congress to the admission of Missouri gave a

³⁵National Intelligencer, November 18, 1819.

³⁶Dillon, Benjamin Lundy, p. 109.

³⁷The Southern Agriculturist, December 1829, p. 575.

serious and imposing effect to the machinations."³⁸ Whitemarsh Seabrook, a South Carolina low-country planter, writing about this same time complained about the "prominent dangers" faced by the South. He went on to discuss eight of these, nearly all of which were greatly affected by Northerners. Seabrook's dangers covered everything. He specifically mentioned such items as Rufus King's proposal to use the proceeds from the sale of public lands to pay for emancipation, and the petition from the African Colonization Society to Congress asking for financial support. He then went on to declaim against such broad dangers as the "whole idea of abolitionism" and the "unbridled fanaticism" of the press, especially as regards emancipation.³⁹

³⁸Quoted in Joseph C. Carroll, Slave Insurrections in the United States 1800-1865 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), p. 88. Other South Carolinians also saw outside agitation playing a role in the Vesey plot. For example, see [Thomas Pinckney], Reflections Occasioned By the Late Disturbances in Charleston (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822) and [Edwin C. Holland], A Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated Against the Southern & Western States Respecting the Institution and Existence of Slavery Among Them By a South Carolinian (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), originally published in 1822. This theme of the connection between slave revolt and abolitionists was a common one even without the impetus of an immediate insurrection. See, for example, John Taylor, Construction Construed, and Constitutions Vindicated (Richmond: Shepherd & Pollard, 1820), p. 301; National Intelligencer, November 20, 1819.

³⁹Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, A Concise View of the Critical Situation and Future Prospects of the Slave-holding States, in Relation to their Coloured Population, 2nd ed. (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1825), pp. 6-8ff. Sometimes this antiabolitionism involved a grim humor. Hezekiah Niles proposed that it

The dominant theme of all these attacks was a defense of slavery and Southern society from interference, especially outside interference. It seems evident that there was a conscious linkage in the Southern mind between antiabolitionism and protecting their own life style. As early as 1804 the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery reported that public opinion in North Carolina was "exceedingly hostile to the abolition of slavery." Furthermore, the report continued, "at present, the inhabitants of that state consider the preservation of their lives and all they hold dear on earth, as depending on the continuance of slavery" ⁴⁰

It cannot be denied that many Southerners saw the maintenance of slavery necessary not only for their life style, but also life itself. It is both interesting and significant that Southerners had such a deep fear of their "perfect, natural slaves." Based on their reading of history but also

had become "very fashionable" with some people, "who never held slaves to make themselves very conspicuous by declaiming at every corner against slavery." Niles said they acted as if the freeing of a Negro would "alone be a passport to heaven, [and] maugre the omission or commission of a hundred other little sins . . .," Niles' Weekly Register, August 1, 1818, p. 382. The Richmond Enquirer of December 7, 1819, quoted an old "French saying" that "when a man is fit for nothing else, he will do for a philanthropist."

⁴⁰Gordon E. Finnie, "The Antislavery Movement in the Upper South Before 1840," The Journal of Southern History, XXXV (August, 1969), p. 327.

strongly reflecting their racism, Southerners drew certain object lessons from history. Clearly the favorite example of the proslavery forces was the lesson to be learned from the results of abolition in Santo Domingo.

Santo Domingo had been one of France's most thriving colonies. By 1790 it contained approximately 32,000 white settlers, 24,000 freedmen (primarily mulattoes), and 480,000 slaves.⁴¹ When the Revolution came at home, it soon spread to the colony, affecting the freedmen first. Much of the initial difficulty sprang from the vacillating policies of the National Assembly in Paris which first granted, then withdrew, full political equality for mulattoes. The confusion was compounded by Les Amis des Noirs, an abolition society pushing for full emancipation. Finally, in 1791, the mulattoes revolted in an attempt to secure their own political rights. The revolt was ruthlessly suppressed by the white settlers. Eventually the black slaves, aided by some of the mulattoes, revolted too. The result was years of horrible conflicts with terrible atrocities from all sides. Negroes, mulattoes and whites variously fought together and against

⁴¹By comparison the three states of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina had approximately the same number of slaves as Santo Domingo, but over twenty-seven times as many whites. Negroes outnumbered whites in Santo Domingo by more than fifteen to one. Donald L. Robinson, Slavery in the Structure of American Politics 1765-1820 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 362.

each other in a nightmare of slaughter.⁴²

This massacre of the whites and the destruction of the once prosperous colony left an unforgettable impression on the Southern mind. For years afterwards the fate of Santo Domingo was alluded to with a kind of morbid fascination. Senator James Jackson of Georgia vehemently declared in 1805 that slave insurrections might not be of concern to those "safe and remote from the scene of the action." However, he continued, the idea was a serious concern to him and "would be to the whole southern country, where the horrid scenes of that island [Santo Domingo] would be re[en]acted, their [Southern] property destroyed, and their families massacred."⁴³

The United States admitted approximately 10,000 refugees from Santo Domingo. These people obviously brought their tales of horror and their fears with them.⁴⁴ Besides such first hand accounts, the historians read in the United States also reflected the white fears and prejudices. Apparently

⁴²Ibid., pp. 361-76; Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 375-80; Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), pp. 467-69.

⁴³Annals of Congress, 9 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 37-38 (December 20, 1805).

⁴⁴Clement Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilization (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 128. Eaton referred to the contributions these French refugees made to Southern life but also concluded that "it is probably true that they increased the fear of servile insurrection wherever they settled."

one of the most popular historians was Bryan Edwards whose History of the West Indies was quoted extensively. He devoted nearly all of his third volume to Santo Domingo and the slave rebellion. The part which was so morbidly fascinating to the South was his focus on the destruction of the colony, and the barbarity of the Negroes. In his preface he referred to "this assemblage of horrors," and throughout the volume returned to this theme. At one point he wrote about "scenes the horrors of which imagination cannot adequately conceive nor pen describe;" however, he certainly tried his best:

Such a picture of human misery; -- such a scene of woe presents itself, as no other country, no former age has exhibited. Upwards of one hundred thousand savage people, habituated to the barbarities of Africa, avail themselves of the silence and obscurity of the night, and fall on the peaceful and unsuspecting planters, like so many famished tygers thirsting for human blood. Revolt, conflagration, and massacre, every where mark their progress, and death, in all its horrors, or cruelties and outrages, compared to which immediate death is mercy, await alike the old and the young, the matron, the virgin, and the helpless infant. No condition, age, or sex is spared. All the shocking and shameful enormities, with which the fierce and unbridled passions of savage man have ever conducted a war, prevail untrouled. The rage of fire consumes what the sword is unable to destroy, and in a few dismal hours, the most fertile and beautiful plains in the world are converted into one vast field of carnage; -- a wilderness of desolation!⁴⁵

⁴⁵Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of

All the elements were certainly there to indeed make the very idea of insurrection a serious concern to Southerners.

After writing about children being murdered, women violated, and the prosperous colony destroyed, Edwards wanted to make sure that people understood his point. He recorded all these scenes as a "faithful historian" so that they could "serve as an impressive lesson to other nations."⁴⁶ Such a warning was indeed what the St. Louis Enquirer tried to instill. It published an extract from Edwards declaring that the editor hoped it would lead people

to reflect upon the PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES which must result from the present wide spread system of inculcating the NATURAL EQUALITY of the BLACKS and the WHITES, and induce them to take MEASURES in time for the prevention of CALAMITIES which were produced by the operation of a similar system in the Island of Santo Domingo.⁴⁷

The example of Santo Domingo was so frightening that most Southerners wanted nothing whatsoever to do with the island. Diplomatic recognition, for example, was blocked until 1862 when Southerners obviously could not stop it. In 1799 Jefferson was fearful that trade with the island would open up the Southern states to black crews and "missionaries."

the British Colonies in the West Indies, Vol. III (4th ed., London: John Stockdale, 1807), pp. xvi, 67-68.

⁴⁶For a description of some of the horrible scenes, see Ibid., pp. 73-74, 79, 83. For the statement of his purpose: Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁷St. Louis Enquirer, August 26, 1820.

"If this combustion can be introduced among us under any veil whatever," he wrote Madison, "we have to fear it."⁴⁸ In other words, what Jefferson and like minds feared was having successful rebellious ex-slaves in their midst. All feared that such people would only serve as examples for their own slaves, showing what could be accomplished by a successful insurrection. Many feared that even trading with Haiti would, in effect, recognize the independence of the "black republic" and thus affect slave relations at home. Others, like Senator James Jackson of Georgia, felt that any sort of United States recognition could redound to the country's detriment later as foreign countries could use such recognition as a precedent for recognizing rebellious Southern slaves.⁴⁹

With the 1822 Denmark Vessey Insurrection Plot in South Carolina, Southerners believed they saw their worst fears realized. One of the conspirators, under questioning, had claimed that the people of Santo Domingo were going to assist them. Thomas Pinckney writing on the insurrection assigned as the first cause for it "the example of St. Domingo, and

⁴⁸Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, December 23, 1793 as quoted in Jordan, White Over Black, p. 381.

⁴⁹Annals of Congress, 9 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 37-38 (December 20, 1805). Joseph Clay of Pennsylvania talked in these same terms. He claimed that the United States could not trade with Haiti without acknowledging her independence, and such an acknowledgment he claimed, would be "a sacrifice on the altar of black despotism and usurpation." Ibid., p. 512 (February 26, 1806).

(probably) the encouragement from thence."⁵⁰

The threat of insurrection and the fear of Santo Domingo were thus very real to Southerners. Throughout the early national period, Southern newspapers abounded with stories of arson, of "horrid murders" of masters and mistresses by slaves, and of insurrections and rumored insurrections.⁵¹ Such attitudes even lay behind much of the opposition to the Panama Conference.

In 1824 Simon Bolivar had called for a meeting, to convene in 1826, of the newly independent Latin American states. The next year, Columbia and Mexico extended this invitation to include the United States. In his message to Congress in December, 1825, President John Quincy Adams informed Congress that this conference of representatives was to be held at the Isthmus of Panama and he proposed sending ministers.

Almost immediately this proposal came under attack. Adams' critics charged that he should have consulted Congress before deciding to send representatives. This "usurpation of

⁵⁰An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection Among A Portion of the Blacks of this City (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1822), p. 9. Pinckney, Reflections Occasioned By the Late Disturbances, pp. 6-7.

⁵¹For example, for just one small section of the country see Mirror of the Times (Augusta, Georgia), March 27, 1809, July 30, 1810, May 11, 1812, October 12, 1812; Georgia Statesmen (Milledgeville, Ga.), January 24, 1826; The Argus (Savannah, Georgia), January 22, 1829(2), April 16, 1829, April 23, 1829, July 2, 1829.

authority" coupled with Adams' proposals in the same message to expand the activities of the national government were viewed as a distinct threat to the interests of the states. Moreover, just as important to Southerners, participation in the Panama Conference, it was argued, was a threat to slavery.

Much of the Southern opposition was similar to that against trade with Haiti and was based on both self-interest and racism. They neither wanted to associate with blacks at the Conference, nor be forced to accept black representatives into the United States. The reason was clearly two-fold: social distaste of blacks, but also the fear of sparking an insurrection at home by having successful rebellious ex-slaves among them. John Randolph declared that the President should act on his own responsibility regarding this mission, but the people of the South should be informed what type deputies they would be likely to receive in turn. He claimed that there was a "great deal of African blood in old Spain" which had further "deteriorated" in the Creole Spaniards. This might not be important to some, Randolph declared, but it was of "vital importance" to the people of the South who did not want to associate as equals with "people of African descent." He concluded that the "principles of the American Revolution and the principle that is now at work . . . in New Spain, are principles as opposite as light and darkness."⁵²

Like so many times before, the spectre of Santo Domingo was thrust forward. Indeed, many Southerners objected to attending the Panama Conference precisely because Haiti would be one of the countries represented there. Clearly their own racism combined with their concerns over threats to their society to make them question United States participation in the conference. Thomas Hart Benton, Senator from Missouri, for example, labeled the whole issue "this black and mulatto question," voicing his concern over allowing "black Ambassadors and Consuls from Saint Domingo, from coming into the bosom of the United States!" Senator John Berrien of Georgia really played upon the fear of insurrection:

Is the emancipated slave, his hands yet reeking in the blood of his murdered master, to be admitted into their [Southern] ports, to spread the doctrines of insurrection, and to strengthen and invigorate them, by exhibiting in his own person an example of successful revolt? Gentlemen must be sensible that this cannot be. The safety of the Southern portion of this Union must not be sacrificed to a passion for diplomacy.⁵²

In the House, the same types of arguments were heard. James Hamilton of South Carolina asserted that any recognition of Haitian independence, "however qualified," would "shake

⁵²Congressional Debates, 19 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 112-13 (March 1, 1826).

⁵³Ibid., pp. 330, 291, 285 (March 14, 1826).

the South to its centre." John Floyd of Virginia called it a "moon-struck project" which would threaten a large portion of the country.⁵⁴

Operating under the same racial prejudice, it is interesting that Edward Livingston and William Brent of Louisiana reached just the opposite conclusion regarding the mission. They both supported sending an American representative because the future of Cuba would be discussed at the conference, and they wanted an American there to keep the other countries from interfering and creating another black republic in Cuba. Both pointed out that Cuba was just a "few hours in an open boat" from the South so could easily land insurgents to stir up the slaves.⁵⁵

In 1821 the National Intelligencer had used this type of logic to push for colonization of American blacks in Haiti. Not only was Haiti healthier than Africa, the paper claimed, but it was also closer; therefore, transportation costs were cheaper. Most importantly, however, the paper argued that such colonization would "help diminish any threat from Hayti to Southern states." As the American blacks mingled with the Haitians it would help ameliorate the latter's squalid condition; therefore, they would feel "gratified for our favors."⁵⁶

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 2150 (April 10, 1826); pp. 2449-50 (April 20, 1826).

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 2062 (April 6, 1826); pp. 2213-14 (April 12, 1826).

⁵⁶The National Intelligencer, March 17, 1821.

The unwritten assumption underlying this article is just as significant as what it was proposing. This assumption was that American Negroes, by the very fact of their having been in the United States and exposed to the white culture there, were better than Haitian blacks.

Beyond the fear that Santo Domingo engendered, it did have another vitally important consequence. The proponents of slavery throughout the antebellum nineteenth century used the example of Santo Domingo as the chief argument to show the impossibility of emancipation, or even a loosening of slave control. One Georgia newspaper summed it up quite succinctly: "St. Domingo furnishes us a standing example against a relaxation of our laws in relation to confining the rights of slaves within proper boundaries."⁵⁷ As Winthrop Jordan has noted, the disaster of Santo Domingo caused most Southerners increasingly to see slavery as a "closed subject, entirely unsuitable for frank discussion."⁵⁸ Thus very early Southern Congressmen began arguing against discussing slavery in public because it could be dangerous. The slave revolt in Santo Domingo thus did have a very important effect on the

⁵⁷The Statesman and Patriot (Milledgeville, Georgia), August 9, 1828.

⁵⁸Jordan, White Over Black, p. 384. During the Missouri debates, Representative Edward Colston of Virginia was one of several who objected to discussing the issue of slavery because of the "probability that there might be slaves in the gallery listening to the debate." Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1180 (February 15, 1819).

South: it had convinced most Southerners that they had to keep a tight reign on their own slaves to prevent such an insurrection from happening in the South. John Taylor of Caroline summed up the opinion of most Southerners when he declared: "There remains a right, anterior to every political power whatsoever, and alone sufficient to put the subject at rest; the natural right of self-defence."⁵⁹ John Randolph echoed this sentiment in 1826 when he declared that slavery "is one of those cases in which the suggestions of instinct are worth all the logic in the world -- the instinct of self-preservation. It is one of those cases in which our passions instruct our reason."⁶⁰ W. H. Daniel in his study of slavery and religion in the early republic discovered that this fear was one of the principal factors underlying the churches' opposition to emancipation. He found that from 1787 on, all official pronouncements referred to the dangers and evils which would accompany abolition. These denominations apparently believed that if the blacks were freed they would inaugurate a reign of terror like Santo Domingo.⁶¹ Slavery

⁵⁹Taylor, Construction Construed, p. 314.

⁶⁰Congressional Debates, 19 Cong., 1 sess., p. 114 (March 1, 1826). For similar sentiments see: Controversy Between Gracchus and Opimius, p. 108; Holland, Refutation of the Calumnies, pp. 8-9; Niles' Weekly Register, December 25, 1824 for a reprint of the South Carolina Senate Resolution on Attorney General William Wirt's decision regarding the Negro Seamen's Act.

⁶¹Daniel, "Presbyterians and the Negro," p. 304.

was thus seen as the most acceptable relationship for whites and blacks in the same society, that is, slavery was viewed as a type of social control.

In the face of such pressure, the typical Southern response was one that would continue to be heard for years: Leave the Negro problem to those who understand it. Governor John Tyler of Virginia, for example, declared in 1826 that the problems of the blacks and slavery should be left to Southerners because "They properly appreciate the delicacy of the subject, and know best how to manage it."⁶² A Missouri territorial newspaper in the midst of the statehood debate charged that slavery was a "matter of mere local expedience" and for those who lived a thousand miles off to legislate on slavery was a "kind of inter-meddling" which was "very needless, very ungracious, and very injudicious."⁶³ Senator James Barbour, anticipating later arguments, could even give such sentiments an antiabolition flavor. "Let us alone," he declared in February, 1820, "and we have nothing to fear. It is your pretended solicitude for our welfare that constitutes our danger. It is the doctor, and not the disease, we dread."⁶⁴

⁶²Quoted in Niles' Weekly Register, December 30, 1826, p. 283.

⁶³Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, February 18, 1820.

⁶⁴Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 330 (February 1, 1820). For other statements of leaving the Negro problem to the South, see, for example, Ibid., 1 Cong., 2 sess.,

Given such sentiments, it was not surprising that Southerners feared outside interference with slavery. Slavery and slave control were of such critical importance to the South's very survival that its regulation had to be kept a local concern. The South Carolina Senate voiced this concern in December, 1824, when it resolved 36-6 that it would not permit slavery "to be meddled with, or tampered with, or in any manner ordered, regulated, or controlled by any other power, foreign or domestic, than this legislature."⁶⁵ This concern over "intermeddling" was so great that when much of Savannah, Georgia, burned, the city council refused to accept relief money from New York because that city had requested its money be used "without distinction of color."⁶⁶

p. 1186 (February 11, 1790), p. 1457 (March 17, 1790); Southern Review, February, 1828, p. 232; Richmond Enquirer, February 8, 1820. The most refined statement was made by Frederick Dalcho, a South Carolina physician and clergyman who declared that "there is a chain which binds together the various orders of our community which must not be broken. Some of its links may require to be polished; but this must only be attempted by a master workman, who perfectly understands of what materials the chain is composed," Dalcho, Practical Considerations, p. 5.

⁶⁵Herman V. Ames (ed.), State Documents on Federal Relations, No. V (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Department of History, 1904), p. 15. Governor George M. Troup of Georgia similarly called Rufus King's plan to pay for emancipation from the sale of federal lands "Officious and impertinent intermeddling with our domestic concerns," quoted in P. J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 172.

⁶⁶The National Intelligencer, March 13, 1820.

Southerners did not want "intermeddling" in their affairs not only because of their fear of slave insurrections but also because they regarded their society, with its institution of black slavery, as better than a society built on free labor. In order to demonstrate the perfect nature of their society, many proslavery advocates began to attack Northern and English free society by comparing them to Southern society. Essentially Southerners argued that "slavery" and "freedom" were only relative terms. It might be a pleasing fiction to call Northern or English workers free, Southerners proclaimed, but in actuality they were slaves to the system. Moreover, they were slaves whose material comforts were in many respects much worse than those of real Southern slaves. "What are the operatives of England, or any other very populous country, even in health and an ordinarily prosperous state of business, but slaves?" vehemently asked the Southern Review in February, 1828. "How much free will is left them? But the moment they cease to be able to get or to do work, their bondage becomes complete and hopeless. A parish pauper is, to all intents and purposes, a slave . . ." ⁶⁷

Hezekiah Niles in 1815 played on this same distinction. He claimed that within the last twenty years the system of slavery had been greatly ameliorated in the United States, and he concluded, "I really believe their present state is

⁶⁷The Southern Review, February, 1828, p. 234.

preferable to that of the laboring poor of Great Britain -- except that the latter think they have freedom, and the others know that they have not."⁶⁸ A South Carolina Methodist Church used this same reasoning to justify their acceptance of slavery. This church declared that they "honestly believe[d]" that considering all circumstances, the Negroes in South Carolina and Georgia would be the "envy" of the peasants of other Christian countries. "Yea, more: we believe that many thousands of them are both better fed and clothed -- and labor less -- and are better attended to in sickness, than many of the white population of this, happiest of all countries."⁶⁹

From such statements the three mutually supporting propositions of the proslavery view of free society can be seen: (1) the free labor system enslaved the worker just as much as chattel slavery did, (2) the conditions of "wage slavery" were worse than those of chattel slavery, and (3) as bad as the conditions of free labor were, they could only get worse. This last point was not always explicitly stated, but it was nearly always there by implication. The usual comparison was between Great Britain and the South, but nearly every country of Europe was mentioned at one time or another.

⁶⁸ Niles' Weekly Register, December 2, 1815, p. 239.

⁶⁹ "Extracts from the Third Annual Report of the South-Carolina Conference Missionary Society," The Methodist Magazine, VII (May, 1824), p. 198.

England, however, remained the chief villain. An article in the National Intelligencer was typical. Not surprising, this article found the "hireling" in a "state of more absolute dependence than a slave, and proves that he is so by working much harder and faring much worse." It went on to talk about "scenes of want and woe," of people "clamorous for bread." These laborers were especially wretched from not only "a sense of present suffering, but from a gloomy anticipation of that still greater suffering which attends their wasted strength in the decline of life." Such conditions "present a spectacle unlike any thing that can be seen in America." The catalogue of misery continued on and on: the worker could be driven out at any time and "left to perish or to steal;" highways were "infested," military ranks "supplied," and jails "filled" by such "discarded" men, who suffered even more misery from the anticipation of the "poverty and wretchedness" which they knew would be the lot of their families. Of course, the slave was free "from all this anguish;" he was well taken care of and knew his family would receive the same care.⁷⁰ Later this same newspaper carried this theme one step

⁷⁰National Intelligencer as reprinted in the Richmond Enquirer, December 7, 1819. For other such examples, see National Intelligencer, February 3, July 30, November 3, 1819; Niles' Weekly Register, July 21, 1821, February 2, 1828; Southern Review, February, 1828; Holland, Refutation of the Calumnies, pp. 48-49; Robert Walsh, Jr., An Appeal from the Judgments of Great Britain Respecting the United States of America (Philadelphia: Mitchell, Ames, and White, 1819), pp. 408-10, 416-17.

further. After the usual declarations that slaves felt none of those "harrowing dreads" of English laborers because they were well fed and clothed and knew their children would receive the same treatment, it went on to discuss the concept of freedom. The paper finally concluded that slaves had never known what freedom was, therefore "it is absurd to talk of a man's pining for he knows not what." This article covered all the bases because it went on to attack the efforts of the abolitionists who had only succeeded in making "cheerful and happy" Negroes "discontented, gloomy, and ripe for the most desperate attempts." As "proof of their folly in desiring freedom" the article ended by referring to all those who once free were "the most miserable creatures on earth" and "return, and beg, as a favor, to be received once more into their original state of slavery."⁷¹

Since England was both in the antislavery vanguard and the most highly developed industrial nation of the time, most comparisons were to English society. Undoubtedly the anti-British feeling engendered by its two wars with the United States had a lot to do with it too. However, the conditions of labor in free society were then applied to the United States by claiming that this was exactly the direction the North was heading by the "inevitable tendency" of its policies. The high unemployment rates in some of the eastern cities were

⁷¹National Intelligencer, September 28, 1821.

then used as proof for this assertion.⁷²

Southerners particularly played upon the different conditions of poor whites in the two societies. Proslavery advocates based much of their defense in terms of Aristotelian social order, the idea that at all times in all societies there had to be a subservient class. This "fact" was a universal phenomenon and slave society differed from others only in that an inferior race had been found to fill the subservient role. Such a society was obviously better, they contended, than one based on other distinctions like wealth or position.

Defenders of slavery asserted that it created an identity of interests among all whites; color was really the mark of distinction and not other considerations. All whites felt equal, many argued, because black slaves formed the entire lower order of society. William Brown, Congressman from Kentucky, was one who used this concept of an ideal social order to defend slavery and Southern society. In February, 1821, he compared the Northern and Southern lower class whites and concluded that "the miserable, poor, and laboring white man is degraded and dishonored in the non-slaveholding States; whilst in those of the opposite character, he is saved and redeemed by the intervention of blacks." He summarized it all by claiming that

⁷²The Southern Review, November 1829, p. 259; St. Louis Enquirer, March 4, 1820; Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, April 15, 1820; Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 1 sess., p. 233 (March 6, 1818).

the "practical difference" between the two sections was that the South degraded only blacks while Northerners degraded many of "their white brethren" by forcing them to perform servile duties.⁷³ Of course, many other Southerners agreed with Brown. Kentucky Senator Richard M. Johnson related his "horror" upon seeing white servants when he first came to Washington, because in the South "slaves alone were servile."⁷⁴ One Southern newspaper went so far as to claim that crimes were less common in the South because of its social system. This paper particularly regretted "the exposed and degraded situation of the beautiful white girls employed as servants, who often fall a prey to seduction."⁷⁵

Slavery proponents used such comparisons to prove that Southern society with its slavery was indeed better than free society. These comparisons have been seen as everything from a cohesive philosophical critique of capitalism to an appeal to lower class whites for racial solidarity.⁷⁶ Undoubtedly

⁷³Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1204 (February 21, 1821).

⁷⁴Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 348-49 (February 1, 1820).

⁷⁵(Milledgeville, Georgia) Southern Recorder, August 22, 1820. For some other examples see: Richmond Enquirer, December 7, 1819, January 20, 1820; Controversy Between Gracchus and Opimius, p. 20. Nathaniel Macon was concerned about the effect of such an open society on gentlemen. He claimed that Southerners could be freer in front of their slaves than Northerners before "hirelings" without the fear of being imposed upon because of it, Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 226 (January 20, 1820).

⁷⁶See, for example, Eugene D. Genovese, The World The

such elements were present in the comparisons and could be emphasized to prove a particular point of view. However, the primary purpose of such comparisons, particularly in the early nineteenth century, was to meet a direct criticism head on. Slavery, and any society based on it, was being excoriated for being harsh, immoral, and unnatural; Southerners responded, almost reflexively, that the slave system was better than a free labor system because the laborers were happier and better taken care of; there was, therefore, no basis for criticism of it. Using such comparisons, proslavery advocates claimed that slavery was not only natural and acceptable, but also more humane than free society. Those seeking to make a coherent system out of the proslavery arguments at this time fail to see the ad hoc character of the defense. Such comparisons, like the appeals to Biblical sanction or historical precedent, were merely single guns in the Southern arsenal of defense. They were given to justify their society and themselves in response to an attack; they were not intended to be a philosophical paradigm. In the early national period most of these comparative justifications were voiced during the Missouri controversy and the concomitant attacks on slavery

Slaveholders Made (New York: Random House, 1969); Wilfred Carsel, "The Slaveholder's Indictment of Northern Wage Slavery," The Journal of Southern History, VI (November, 1940); William B. Hesseltine, "Some New Aspects of the Pro-slavery Argument," The Journal of Negro History, XXI (January, 1936); Ralph E. Morrow, "The Proslavery Argument Revisited," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVIII (June, 1961).

and Southern society, thus demonstrating their attack-response nature. Like the other early slavery defenses, they were significant because they were used as an important part of the later fully developed proslavery philosophy.

CHAPTER VIII: ECONOMIC DEFENSE

This chapter deals with the particular economic arguments proslavery advocates used to justify slavery, rather than that perennial historical question of the profitability of the institution.¹ Like the other slavery defenses, the economic argument was used to justify not just slavery but the Southern way of life. Slave labor was claimed to be absolutely necessary for Southern agriculture; destroy slavery, the argument ran, and you destroy Southern agriculture and thus the Southern way of life. Slavery was positively defended on the grounds that it was economically viable, but, more importantly, it was also defended in negative terms in that emancipation would bring economic ruin.

¹For a full discussion of the profitability of slavery, see: Harold D. Woodman (ed.), Slavery and the Southern Economy (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966); Hugh G. Aitken (ed.), Did Slavery Pay? (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971); Eugene D. Genovese (ed.), The Slave Economies, Vol. 2 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973). The latest entry in the debate, Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), p. 70, finds slavery quite profitable with an average rate of return of about 10% which compares very favorably to the 10.1% earned by nine of the most successful New England Textile firms, or the 8.5 earned by a group of twelve Southern railroads.

It is true that some Southerners claimed that slavery was unprofitable. Yet most such statements came during times of economic distress like the post-Revolutionary period. It is also questionable how many such statements, like the declarations that slavery was an evil, were voiced because they were expected, but were given with little conviction. When really pressed, most slaveowners rushed to defend the institution of slavery. This is not to deny that a few planters did sincerely believe slavery was unprofitable and maintained their own slaves because they felt trapped by the system and did not know what to do with their slaves. However, most slaveowners, and those who desired to become slaveowners, clearly viewed slavery as profitable as a long-term undertaking.

In the total corpus of proslavery literature, however, the justification based upon economics played a relatively minor role. Most slavery advocates seemed more concerned in defending the institution in religious, social, or racial terms than in economic ones. It almost seems as if many Southerners felt that to admit that they could make money from slave labor would seriously damage their cause; thus they defended the institution and themselves primarily on other grounds.

Such a posture serves to underscore the ambivalence in the Southern mind toward slavery which was discussed

earlier. Even while defending slavery on religious and social grounds, most Southerners drew away from that final step of openly proclaiming that they survived by exploiting someone else. Perhaps the avoidance was due to moral considerations, perhaps out of the fear of seeming to be too much like the opprobrious Yankee entrepreneur. Whatever the reason, slavery was usually defended in terms other than economic, and when defended economically usually on a broad basis and not solely on profitability. Apparently Southerners liked to think of themselves and the institution of slavery as being more paternalistic than capitalistic.

This is not the same as claiming, however, that planters were not economically motivated. They were far from being precapitalistic, even though some planters liked to talk in those terms. To a certain extent their rhetoric must be disregarded in the face of their actions. Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman in their mammoth study of slavery found that "there is considerable evidence that slaveowners were hard, calculating businessmen who priced slaves, and their other assets, with as much shrewdness as could be expected of any northern capitalist."² They go so far as to contend that the South developed a "highly capitalistic form of agriculture" whose "economic behavior was as

²Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, p. 73.

strongly ruled by profit maximization as that of the North."³ In more specific terms, the picture of the planters painted by Julia Floyd Smith in her study of slavery in Florida certainly bears out such an economic characterization. Her planters are far from precapitalists; they created large profitable plantations, attempted to become self-sufficient, loaned or borrowed money as the opportunity/need arose, and were as profit-oriented as any Yankee merchant was supposed to be.⁴ There is little question that the South perceived itself as being different from the North, indeed even relished that difference. However, the South also clearly perceived itself as having an economically viable system; and many further believed that that system was dependent upon the institution of slavery for survival, economic and otherwise.⁵

³Ibid., p. 129.

⁴Julia Floyd Smith, Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973). Although Smith's planters were basically operating in the post 1830 period, her findings on planter behavior would seem to characterize, in general terms, the Southwestern frontier too. See, for example, Joe Gray Taylor, Negro Slavery in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana Historical Association, 1963).

⁵For some contemporary statements of the connection between slavery and Southern economic survival, see, for example, [Edward Brown], Notes on the Origin and Necessity of Slavery (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1826); [Frederick Dalcho], Practical Considerations Founded on the Scripture, Relative to the Slave Population of South Carolina. By a South-Carolinian (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823); John Drayton, A View of South Carolina As Respects Her Natural and Civil Concerns (Charleston: W. P. Young, 1802); [Z.

No discussion of the economics of slavery in the early national period would be complete without examining the concept of the "myth of the cotton gin," the idea that slavery was dying in the South until the invention of the cotton gin in 1793. This myth has proven so persistent partially because, like all myths, there is a certain element of truth; but more significantly, it has persisted because of the delicious irony involved in the story: the ingenious Yankee inventor making possible the revitalization of the dying, unprofitable institution of slavery. Upon examination, like many others, this myth does not hold up. One of the best modern treatments of this issue is Melvin Drimmer's "Was Slavery Dying Before the Cotton Gin?" If slavery was dying, Drimmer asks, why the big push to import slaves into the United States in the last decades of the eighteenth century? He also points out that there was a steady market for slaves in the West Indies throughout this period, so American slaves could have been shipped there if the institution was really that unprofitable or dying; yet he found such trade negligible. Drimmer finally concluded that all the demand for cotton and the cotton gin had done was to shift land, slaves, and capital from other products

Kingsley], A Treatise on the Patriarchical or Co-operative System of Society as it now exists in some governments . . . under the name of slavery, with its Necessity and Advantages (n.p., n.p., 1829).

or enterprises into the cultivation of cotton. As he put it: "The cotton gin brought slavery from one plateau to one yet higher, not from the dessert to the mountain."⁶

Fogel and Engerman essentially agree with Drimmer's contention. They even insist that the "softening" of slave prices in the 1790's was not because the demand was declining but just the opposite, because the supply was increasing so fast. They claim that the proposition that slavery was declining rests partially on the widespread acceptance of Henry Carey's "erroneous" estimates of the number of slaves imported between 1790 and 1810. According to Fogel and Engerman, "revised estimates show that far from declining, slave imports were higher in this period than in any previous twenty-year period." They go so far as to assert that there were almost as many Africans brought into the United States between 1780-1810 as during the whole previous 160 years.⁷

⁶Melvin Drimmer, "Was Slavery Dying Before the Cotton Gin?" in Drimmer (ed.), Black History (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 115. Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 318 claimed the cotton expansion of the 1790's "merely whetted an existing appetite for slaves in the Lower South which was showing no signs of incipient satiation." Keith M. Bailor, "John Taylor of Caroline," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 75 (July, 1967), pp. 299-300 argued that the cotton gin did not help the upper South because it did not share in the cotton boom. He claimed that John Taylor wanted to maintain slavery for self-preservation and to use the slave labor to restore the exhausted lands. Bailor, however, ignored the whole issue of whether the cotton gin helped Virginia slavery by providing an outlet for surplus slaves.

⁷Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, pp. 24, 88.

Returning to the economic arguments that were used to justify slavery, the first line of defense was the technical basis that slaves were legal property, and recognized as such by various laws and customs. William Freehling in his study of slavery and the founding fathers, for example, contended that the "realization" of their "antislavery dream" was blocked by their "concern for property rights . . . the slaves' right to freedom [was] no more 'natural' than the master's right to property."⁸

This solicitude for property rights was clearly a major concern of the Revolutionary generation, and in the South property clearly meant slaves too. John Drayton in his View of South Carolina, published while he was Governor of South Carolina, reflected this view of property. After tracing the history of slavery in South Carolina and noting its acceptance as "vested property" by both the governments of South Carolina and the United States, he proclaimed:

With as much propriety might we request them to dismiss their horses from the plough; as for us to dismiss these people from labour. . . . And with the same reason might they be asked to give the money out of their pockets, in order to equalize the situation of every person; as the people

⁸William W. Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," The American Historical Review, 77 (February, 1972), p. 83. For a much more critical view of this connection between slavery and property rights, see Staughton Lynd, Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967).

of the southern states be requested to make changes in this property, which would materially affect the fortunes they possess.⁹

Drayton thus clearly showed too the linkage seen in the South between slave property and prosperity. British traveler Basil Hall saw the same connection. Commenting on emancipation, he claimed that "To enter the warehouses of the Planters, and rob them of their rice or cotton, would not be one whit more unjust than taking away the slaves whose labour brings it out of the ground."¹⁰

Even those few who favored emancipation tied it in with a "just compensation" for the property lost. Moreover, they saw not only the value of this lost property, but also the value of the land lost too as one of the principal stumbling blocks to emancipation.¹¹ Critics of emancipation continually claimed that an abandonment of some of the best lands in the South must of necessity accompany emancipation because only black slaves could work, or be forced to work, these impor-

⁹Drayton, A View of South Carolina, pp. 144-45.

¹⁰Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, Vol. III (Edinburgh: Cadell and Co., 1829), pp. 159-60.

¹¹See, for example, St. George Tucker, A Dissertation on Slavery (Philadelphia: printed for Mathew Carey, 1796), especially pp. 81-82. For the same argument used for a different purpose, see Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States (Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827), p. 16.

tant areas.¹²

Other slavery defenders carried this property argument further, insisting that since slaves were property so were their offspring who thus could not be emancipated at a given age as had been proposed at various times. Alexander Smyth of Virginia faced this issue squarely during the Missouri debates. Such a provision, Smyth charged, was "a direct violation of the Constitution which provides that 'no person shall be deprived of property without due process of law .

. .'" He claimed that

if you cannot take away that which is in existence, you cannot take away that which will come into existence hereafter. If you cannot take away the land, you cannot take the future crops; and if you cannot take the slaves, you cannot take their issue, who, by the laws of slavery, will be also slaves.¹³

In other words, Smyth, and those like him, took the extreme position of flatly rejecting any provision for future emancipation because of the property rights slaveowners had in even unborn slaves.

Most Southerners, however, argued less in terms of the legality of property rights as they did in the reality of

¹²For a fuller discussion of this theme of the necessity of black labor on the lands of the South, see the section on the "climatic" defense of slavery in Chapter V above.

¹³Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 998 (January 28, 1820). Earlier the St. Louis Enquirer of April 21, 1819, had argued along these same lines; so too had the Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, July 2, 1819.

economic ruin facing the South if slavery were abolished. Proslavery advocates thus clearly regarded the perpetuation of slavery as necessary for the maintenance of the Southern way of life. John Rutledge, a South Carolina delegate to the Constitutional Convention, saw this connection clearly. He declared that "religion and humanity had nothing to do with the question. Interest alone is the governing principle. . . . The people of those States will never be such fools as to give up so important an interest."¹⁴ Although Rutledge's comment was directed specifically at the slave trade, the viewpoint given certainly represented most Southerners' regards for the institution of slavery itself. A Florida planter writing in the 1820's contended that most Southerners "understood and duly appreciated" the fact that agriculture was the "great foundation" of the wealth and prosperity of the Southern states; however, they did not appreciate fully the "primary cause and means" of that wealth. He made it quite explicit: "I mean the perpetuation of that kind of labor which now produces it, and which seems best adapted, under all circumstances, to render it profitable to the Southern capitalist."¹⁵ The Georgia Senate in 1827 went on record against the American Colonization Society whose plans for emancipation were characterized as "a purpose so expecti-

¹⁴Quoted in Drimmer, "Was Slavery Dying," p. 104.

¹⁵Kingsley, Patriarchial System of Society, preface.

ally ruinous to the prosperity, importance, and political strength, of the Southern States."¹⁶

Slavery was thus clearly seen by its advocates, not as a liability but as a distinct asset. Rawlins Lowndes, in the South Carolina Constitutional Ratification Convention, proclaimed: "Without negroes, this state would degenerate into one of the most contemptible in the Union. . . . Negroes are our wealth, our only natural resource."¹⁷ One Southern newspaper declared "black labour in time will be to us, what iron and coal are to Great Britain--a riches which will overstep all the bounds of Northern wealth."¹⁸ Frederick Dalcho, a Southern physician and clergyman, proclaimed that Southerners would never emancipate their slaves without some form of compensation because "our servants are our money; Exod. XXI 20-21. and we shall never choose beggary for ourselves and our families when it is left to our choice."¹⁹

¹⁶Herman V. Ames (ed.), State Documents on Federal Relations, No. V (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Department of History, 1904), pp. 19-20.

¹⁷Quoted in Drimmer, "Was Slavery Dying," p. 101.

¹⁸Charleston Mercury as quoted in the Savannah Argus, August 9, 1828.

¹⁹Dalcho, Practical Considerations, p. 6. In a similar vein, Nathaniel Macon said that slavery restriction for Missouri "may ruin us and our children after us . . ." Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 232 (January 20, 1820). In a letter to Frances Wright September 1, 1825, James Madison complained about the "blank in the general field of labor" which would have a "distressing effect" on the planters if the slaves were emancipated and exiled. Quoted in "James

Some proslavery polemicists went so far as to claim that talk of emancipation was really a plot by abolitionists to ruin Southern planters. One of the best voices of this paranoia was Robert J. Turnbull of South Carolina who charged:

The object of the abolitionists by holding out emancipation, has uniformly been, first to depress the value of negro property, and when it shall have arrived at its minimum . . . then to advocate a general emancipation, with a remuneration to individuals at a trifling cost to the Government.²⁰

"A Farmer" of Missouri saw an even broader conspiracy, claiming that "jealousy towards the West sparked the restrictions on Missouri." Such restriction on slavery would "seriously affect the prosperity" of Missouri.²¹

Clearly geographical and chronological distinctions

Madison's Attitude Toward the Negro," The Journal of Southern History, VI (January, 1921), p. 90. It is significant that Madison linked emancipation with some type of "exile;" like Jefferson and most other Southerners he simply could not visualize a truly biracial society.

²⁰[Robert J. Turnbull], The Crisis: or Essays on the Usurpations of the Federal Government (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827), p. 129. As early as the First Congress, Michael J. Stone of Maryland insisted "that if Congress took any measure indicative of an intention to interfere with the kind of property alluded to, it would sink it in value very considerably . . ." Annals of Congress, 1 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1185 (February 11, 1790). As late as 1820, a New England Senator, Prentiss Mellen of Massachusetts, was still talking about this connection. Ibid., 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 185 (January 19, 1820).

²¹St. Louis Missouri Gazette & Public Advertiser, April 7, 1819.

must be made, but available evidence indicates that most Southerners did see slavery and the plantation system as profitable in the long run. Charles Sydnor, for example, in his study of slavery in Mississippi pointed out that the "bare fact" that hundreds of slaves were imported into Mississippi was "perhaps sufficient proof that her citizens wanted slaves, believing that ownership of them would bring wealth." He went on to declare that "It was certainly the current belief that slave-owners were rich."²² Many Southerners, especially in the new lands to the west, certainly accepted the plantation life style as the model for their own life and ambition, confidently expecting to become a part of the slaveholding aristocracy. Moreover, it was not necessary to intend emulating the plantation ideal to desire slaves. Edwin Miles in his study of Jacksonian democracy in Mississippi, for example, pointed out the great animosity existing among the different sections of the state. Much of this hostility was directed towards the planter elite of the "old counties" of the Natchez area from the yeomen classes of the "piney woods." Such yeomen also sought to open up other areas of the state for people like them at the expense of the older region. This did not mean, however, that there was no desire for slaves on the part of these yeomen. There were several attempts in

²² Charles S. Sydnor, Slavery in Mississippi (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933), p. 194.

the 1820's, for example, to prohibit the domestic slave trade to Mississippi. This movement was generally supported by the old established plantation areas around Natchez, but, according to Miles, was opposed "almost unanimously" by the representatives from the "piney woods" sections of the state. Such opposition to closing the trade came even in the face of the generally held belief that the Northern section of the state, soon to be opened by Indian removal, would not support plantation agriculture, thus indicating that those opposing the prohibition did so not because they expected to become big planters but because they desired slaves for other reasons.²³ All of this is indicative of the degree of acceptance of, even desire for, black slaves in the South.

Slavery's proponents clearly saw slavery as not only profitable but also necessary on the local level. In "Slavery in Microcosm" Edward W. Phifer demonstrated how this perception operated in Burke County, North Carolina. He claimed that there is no evidence that the people of this county resisted the development of slavery. It had largely been settled by Scotch-Irish and Germans who, Phifer contended, gave "first priority to the acquisition of wealth." To them "property was paramount" and slavery thus appeared as a "bonanza" and they "accepted it as such." Phifer concluded:

²³Edwin A. Miles, Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), see especially pp. 18-26.

Accepting slavery as the fait accompli that it most certainly was, and seeing it as providing relief from backbreaking labor and a means for gaining property and wealth or advancement in social status, they were not inclined to question the instrument of "progress."²⁴

As another example of how this perception of the economic necessity of slavery operated on the local level, Patrick Brady in his analysis of the slave trade and South Carolina found that South Carolinians were especially fearful of slave insurrections after the one in Santo Domingo, but reopened their slave trade anyway in 1803 because of the "pressures generated" by the expanding agricultural economy and the desire for more labor.²⁵ In other words, an expanded slave system was viewed as necessary for their own economic well-being. Significantly, this perceived need was great enough to override their very real fear of slave insurrections. Merton L. Dillon in his study of the abolitionist Quaker Benjamin Lundy claimed that it was "financial motives" that killed antislavery in the Upper South before the onset of militant abolitionism. Moreover, Dillon declared that if the "philanthropy" of the revolutionary generation "had been compromised

²⁴Edward W. Phifer, "Slavery in Microcosm: Burke County North Carolina," in Allen Weinstein and Frank Gatell, American Negro Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 78-80.

²⁵Patrick S. Brady, "The Slave Trade and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1787-1808," The Journal of Southern History, XXXVIII (November, 1972), p. 612.

by the love of gain," then little could be expected from the newer generation which had been "born too late to share in the liberalizing traditions of the Enlightenment." He asserted that this younger generation envisioned a "rich future" for themselves based on slavery, and therefore were even less inclined than their elders to oppose slavery and thus imperil their own anticipated prosperity.²⁶

Such economic anticipation and pressures were clearly evident in the West. The people of Louisiana, for example, petitioned Congress to allow their territory the privilege of importing slaves since slave labor was so necessary for Louisiana.²⁷ In the 1790's and early 1800's there was a whole series of petitions from the territory that would later become the states of Indiana and Illinois begging a suspension of the Sixth Article of the Northwest Ordinance, the provision outlawing slavery. These petitions claimed that the directive against slavery was "contrary not only to the interest, but almost to the existence of the country . . ." The absence of slavery had prevented the territory from populating as it should, and had even forced "many valuable Citizens" to the Spanish side of the Mississippi where slavery was allowed; slavery would "enhance the value of the public lands," make

²⁶Merton L. Dillon, Benjamin Lundv and the Struggle for Negro Freedom (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), pp. 10-12.

²⁷Annals of Congress, 8 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1606.

their sale "rapid," and by thus increasing the population place the country in a "flourishing condition."²⁸

These same two states underwent another spate of pro-slavery agitation in the 1820's. Available evidence indicates that in both Indiana and Illinois the economic conditions of the state in the early 1820's contributed to this proslavery agitation. After the Panic of 1819 many citizens of these states began to advocate the introduction of slavery as a means of strengthening the economy by the infusion of Southern capital.²⁹ A British immigrant to Illinois reflected this sentiment when he declared "If slavery be admitted, it is the opinion of many that well-chosen land will double in value in one day; . . ."³⁰ Many citizens had advocated

²⁸See for example, the Memorials of Randolph and St. Clair Counties of January 12, 1796, December 18, 1805, and January 17, 1806; the Resolution of the Vincennes Convention of December 28, 1802; and the Report on the Petition of 1805 by the Ninth Congress. All of these are in Jacob P. Dunn (ed.), Slavery Petitions and Papers (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merill Company, 1894), pp. 447-508. Some of these same types of pressures operated in the older states too. See, for example, Brady, "Slave Trade and Sectionalism," p. 611.

²⁹Eugene H. Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), pp. 14-18ff. Berwanger flatly declares: "The poor economic conditions created by the Panic of 1819 provoked the renewed demands for slavery." See also Donald S. Spencer, "Edward Coles: Virginia Gentleman in Frontier Politics," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, LXI (Summer, 1968), pp. 152-54, 158.

³⁰Elias Pym Fordham, Personal Narrative of Travels in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky; and of a Residence in the Illinois Territory: 1817-1818, ed. Frederic A. Ogg (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1960), pp. 209-10. Berwanger, Frontier Against Slavery, pp. 14-16

opening the area to slavery precisely because they believed that the depressed state of their economy would be helped by the infusion of Southern capital. Looking back on the event, John Reynolds, who was later elected Governor of Illinois, wrote that the "foundation" of the proslavery agitation was the belief it would help "relieve the people from the embarrassment of debt, and put the country in a prosperous and growing condition." Reynolds maintained that, at this time, the free states of the northwest were poor and sparsely populated whereas their southern neighbors having slavery "flourished tolerably well" which had an effect on the public mind. "Wealthy and intelligent farmers" who passed through Illinois on their way to Missouri "regretted" that they could not stay with their slaves in Illinois with its "excellent soil." Such observations, Reynolds said, "fired our people for slavery." Reynolds went so far as to claim "If the deranged state of the currency had not existed, and the country had been in a happy and prosperous condition, a convention to introduce slavery would never have been dreamed of."³¹

The referendum on a constitutional convention to introduce slavery was defeated in both states. Other factors cannot be ignored, such as the yeoman farmer's animosity toward

claims that it was land speculators who were behind much of the proslavery agitation.

³¹John Reynolds, My Own Times, Embracing also the History of My Life (Belleville, Ill.: n.p., 1885), pp. 239-40.

slaveowners and prejudice against blacks, but it seems clear that the improving economic conditions in 1823-24 did much to deflate the agitation for slavery.³²

This same type of economic justification for slavery was used in Missouri too; indeed, it was painted as being even more necessary there. John S. Ball, a candidate for Missouri's constitutional convention, professed that he was opposed to the restriction on slavery because it was both unjust and impolitic. He saw "the present situation as well as the future growth and improvement of our country" as depending on slavery. By cutting off slavery, he claimed, emigration too would suffer, and Missourians had "no other source of much consequence at present, from whence we can derive or draw our cash supplies for our necessary and current expenses." Ball clearly saw a connection between slavery and prosperity. He concluded:

Exclude slavery, and you cut off our principle source of emigration and wealth -- the Southern and Western people; and not only the growth of our country would be retarded but we shall begin to realize former days, when you had to make as legal tender your furs and peltries.³³

Apparently such sentiments were common because one historian of Missouri has claimed that "Slavery was an important

³²Berwanger, Frontier Against Slavery, pp. 17-18ff.

³³St. Louis Enquirer, April 29, 1820. For similar sentiments see the statements of G. W. Ferguson and Wilson P. Hunt, Ibid., April 12, 1820.

factor in the economic life of Missourians at this time. Much wealth was locked up in slaves and much wealth was being produced by slaves." However, more significantly, slavery was seen as necessary for that prosperity. He concluded:

Criticism of slavery as a poor economic system in Missouri is not found in any of the source material of that day. We are driven to the conclusion that from an economic point of view alone, slavery in Missouri in 1820 was regarded as indispensable to the life of the State.³⁴

Even the antislavery forces in Missouri accepted the basic premise that slavery would increase land values, but they argued that this would benefit only the land speculators. One newspaper claimed, for example, that all the "uproar" from Missouri came from land speculators and slaveholders who "know their lands will not sell for perhaps one fourth as much if slavery be excluded . . ."³⁵ The significant idea here,

³⁴Floyd C. Shoemaker, Missouri's Struggle for Statehood 1804-1821 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), p. 116. Later he argued that it was not just the planters and land speculators alone who were tied up with slavery, but "businessmen, surveyors, politicians, believed that his business [and his future] was bound up with more southern settlers and more slaves," pp. 133-34. Another historian showed this linkage between immigration and the economy by pointing out the great wealth and social position of the Southern immigrants of the 1820's. Hattie M. Anderson, "Missouri, 1804-1828: Peopling a Frontier State," The Missouri Historical Review, XXXI (January, 1937), p. 4.

³⁵Edwardsville [Illinois] Spectator, August 28, 1819. The St. Louis Missouri Gazette & Public Advertiser, April 19, 1820 claimed that the "great land owners or speculators in

however, is the fact that the paper basically accepted the premise that slavery would increase the land values.

Slavery advocates also defended the institution in terms of its economic benefit to the country. In the midst of the debate over Missouri, for example, Charles Pinckney pointed out that the Treasury report of 1819 showed Northern exports of only eighteen million dollars while Southern exports amounted to thirty-two million. The South, therefore, furnished the Treasury double the amount of the North. Pinckney also pointed out that such exports were due to Negro slaves "without whom your very Government could not go on, . . ."³⁶

Two years later, Pinckney returned to this same theme. This time he claimed that the price fall in the North's major staple crop of wheat had to be a "serious evil" and there

in land" were doing everything they could to encourage Southern immigration "in order to raise the price of land."

³⁶Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 1314-15 (February 14, 1820). Edwin C. Holland used these same figures in his Refutation of the Calumnies, even paraphrasing Pinckney's observations on the Negro, pp. 38-45; so too did White-marsh B. Seabrook, A Concise View of the Critical Situation, p. 23. But the latter at least did give credit to Charles Pinckney. Perhaps there was some truth to the Southern clamor for credit. For example, Douglass C. North, The Economic Growth of the United States (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966) suggested that the export trade, particularly of cotton, was of prime importance as a stimulant to the American economy. Donald L. Robinson, Slavery in the Structure of American Politics 1765-1820 (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1971) also pointed to the critical role played by the capital derived from the cotton, sugar and tobacco trade.

was, furthermore, "little hope of its ever reviving." The North, therefore, Pinckney proclaimed, "must become more dependent now than ever" on the Southern states for not only "furnishing them with exports," but also for "employment of their shipping."³⁷ Thus by 1821 Charles Pinckney, and other like minds, was insisting that slavery was not only necessary for the South, but also necessary for the economic well-being of the North, indeed the whole country, as well.

Duff Green in running for Missouri's Constitutional Convention went even further in his economic declarations. He asserted that the entire economic well-being of the slaveholding states was in better condition than the free states. He claimed, for example, that the Northern cities "literally swarm with beggars," people were begging for work at twelve and a half cents per day. Such wages, he claimed, would not even "buy meat for, much less clothe and feed our negroes." Green's observations ended with an early critique of Northern capitalism. In the South, Green explained, the capitalists were "the owners of slaves and do work by their servants," and it was therefore in their interest to keep the price of

³⁷Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 2 sess., p. 1142 (February 13, 1821). William L. Smith of South Carolina had used similar arguments in the First Congress, Ibid., 1 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1459-60 (March 17, 1790). He declared that if there were no slaves in the South, there could be no whites, and if no whites, no exports, and if no exports, no imports, and thus everyone would suffer. He also tried to court Northern support by pointing to the great market for Northern goods among the slaves for shoes, clothes, etc.

labor up. In the North, however, the capitalists were merchants or manufacturers who hired their servants and therefore sought to reduce the cost of labor which led to such horrible conditions.³⁸

Most of the economic justifications were based in terms of agriculture, but there were a few in terms of industrial development too. Interestingly enough, the American Farmer ran a whole series on how profitable it would be to use slaves as mill operatives in the South. Slaves were "more docile, more constant, and cheaper" than free labor which was often "refractory and dissipated." Furthermore slaves did not waste time by visiting public places, or attending musters or elections. This paper even made a virtue of the slaves' "deficiency of inventive genius" because they could thus better endure the monotonous labor required.³⁹ This journal calculated that white mill labor in New England cost \$125 per year. Slave labor, on the other hand, would cost only \$44 per year, with the added benefit that the slave would yearly increase in value.⁴⁰ Later, using an elaborate system for

³⁸Franklin (Missouri) Intelligencer, April 15, 1820.

³⁹The American Farmer (Baltimore, Md.), October 5, 1827, pp. 225-26.

⁴⁰Ibid., October 12, 1827, p. 235. Using a long complicated formula the Charleston Mercury calculated that hired slave labor was cheaper by \$169.18 $\frac{2}{3}$ per year than white labor, and mill-owned slaves would make the expense even less; reprinted in the Savannah Argus, August 9, 1828.

calculation, this paper determined that a mill using 5000 spindles in ten years would save \$342,605 by using slave instead of free white labor.⁴¹ The claims of the economic superiority of slave to free white labor culminated in the Charleston Mercury's declaration that the major difference was that a slave "lives to work" whereas a white laborer "works to live."⁴²

Thus slavery proponents portrayed the institution of slavery as not only economically viable on the plantation, but also in the mill. It seems clear that the latter emphasis had a two-fold purpose: (1) to prove that slaves could be used profitably in manufacturing, thus tying the institution to the future as well as to the past, and (2) to encourage Southern manufacturing and thus end the economic dependence on England and the North -- those areas which were attacking slavery and the Southern life style.

The economic justification fit in very closely with the defense of slavery based on the preservation of Southern society. Slavery's defenders insisted that the institution of slavery and the labor of black slaves were necessary for the

⁴¹The American Farmer (Baltimore, Md.), January 25, 1828, pp. 353-54. For other examples of defending slavery in terms of industrial development, see Ibid., December 7, 1827, April 4, 1828, and April 25, 1828; The Statesman and Patriot (Milledgeville, Georgia), August 30, 1828; and (Augusta, Georgia) Chronicle, April 24, 1828.

⁴²Charleston Mercury as quoted in the Savannah Argus, August 9, 1828.

continued survival of the Southern economy and thus the Southern way of life. As discussed earlier, however, aside from any economic considerations, slavery was viewed as necessary to Southern society. Even had slavery not been economically viable, it appears certain that it would have been kept as a social system anyway. Kentucky Senator Richard M. Johnson, for example, claimed in 1820 that only the large plantations were profitable but the slaves were kept anyway as "a matter of convenience."⁴³ Johnson's economics are certainly open to question, but not his conclusion regarding Southern attitudes about protecting the institution of black slavery for societal reasons. U. B. Phillips in his monumental study of American slavery has the best one-line summary as to why Southerners so doggedly defended slavery: "But in the large it was less a business than a life; it made fewer fortunes than it made men."⁴⁴ The majority of Southerners clearly believed slavery was economically viable and profitable, especially for the select few, but in the final analysis slavery was also defended because it represented the foundation upon which Southern society was based.

⁴³Annals of Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., p. 350 (February 1, 1820).

⁴⁴Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 401.

CHAPTER IX: CONCLUSION

This study has been concerned with the proslavery sentiment in the early republic, not only the various arguments used, but also the rationale behind them. Proslavery sentiment was not a monolithic and unchanging creed during the period, but a pattern of belief, an evolutionary development that was affected in significant and diverse ways by the same political, economic, and social currents that influenced other basic aspects of American thought and experience during the years 1790-1830. At the same time slavery was being affected by these forces, the institution of slavery itself, in turn, had a tremendous influence upon the development and direction taken by these currents.

One of the truly significant aspects of proslavery thought in the early national period was its almost phenomenal rate of growth and acceptance in the South. In 1790 there was very little open, avowed proslavery sentiment. Admittedly, some, like Richard Nisbet and William Loughton Smith defended slavery openly, but most Southerners were still publicly apologetic about the existence of the institution, and there were at least some antislavery undercurrents. It has been the contention of this study, however, that these

undercurrents were never very strong, especially in the Lower South. As Stanley Elkins found, this antislavery feeling never reached the point of creating pro- and antislavery factions within Southern life. The closest the South ever came to such a condition was, in Elkins's terms, "a kind of schism in the Southern soul, a schism which at one time made for complexity -- as opposed to the relative simplicity of later times -- but hardly for decision."¹ As Elkins indicates, at best what did exist for most Southerners in the early nineteenth century was a feeling of ambivalence about slavery, but very little was done to try to resolve the dilemma. Indeed, this study has tried to show that many Southerners who decried the existence of slavery did so because it was the accepted pattern, but there was little conviction and less action behind such rhetoric.

In the post-Revolutionary South, this ambivalence regarding slavery could continue to exist because the institution was hardly under attack. The liberals of the age could still make pronouncements against the institution and offer vague or future programs of emancipation, but little concrete action was undertaken. Such sentiments and actions were luxuries the later South could not afford. By the time of the Revolution, the institution of black slavery, whether

¹Stanley M. Elkins, Slavery (2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 207-08.

fully accepted by everyone or not, was an integral part of the Southern way of life. Both economically and socially most Southerners regarded it as necessary. They accepted black slavery as a practical good if not as a positive good. Economic stability depended on slave labor; social stability depended on the disciplines of the institution of slavery. Furthermore, success against the worst abuses of the system, such as brandings and the foreign slave trade, only served to strengthen the hold of the institution itself.

In the early years of the nineteenth century the defense of slavery continued, for the most part, to be apologetic because internal and external attacks on the institution were not particularly aggressive and, more important, antislavery advocates accepted these apologetic defenses as genuinely antislavery in nature and intent. Most slaveowners simply continued in their ways, little disturbed by questions about the institution of slavery, accepting it as a matter of course. Believing themselves wise and humane masters and believing the blacks better off in America than Africa, they saw little wrong with the existing arrangement. One British traveler observed that Southerners "acknowledged" the evils of slavery but that "habit, early prejudice, and other concurring causes" had produced "a torpor on the subject" among them. He concluded: "It is true that few or none will advocate slavery abstractedly, but most are willing

to defend it under existing circumstances."² John Quincy Adams recognized as few others did the Southern psychological commitment to slavery. At the time of the Missouri controversy he recorded in his diary:

The discussion of this Missouri question has betrayed the secret of their souls. In the abstract they admit that slavery is an evil, they disclaim all participation in the introduction of it. . . . But when probed to the quick upon it, they show at the bottom of their souls pride and vainglory in their condition of masterdom. They fancy themselves more generous and noble-hearted than the plain freemen who labor for subsistence.³

As Adams recognized, what changed the Southern mute acceptance of slavery was the strident attacks upon not only the institution of slavery but also slaveholding itself. For much of the South this change came in the 1820's. Under most circumstances how people perceive objective conditions is more important in determining their attitudes and how they act than the "reality" of the situation. Many Southerners did perceive themselves to be under attack in the 1820's. The series of events of those years, the most important of which were the Missouri controversy, the Denmark Vesey insur-

²Isaac Candler, A Summary View of America (London: T. Cadell, 1824), p. 249.

³The Diary of John Quincy Adams as quoted in Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), p. 473.

rection, and the various proposals for national emancipation/colonization, convinced many Southerners that the institution of slavery and thus their way of life was being threatened. Such events also unquestionably brought home to them the dangers inherent in unrestrained criticism of the peculiar institution. Thus they turned to both a more aggressive defense of the institution and a more aggressive attempt to stifle criticism.

The great Southern opposition to the antislavery forces after 1820 came not only because of the increased severity of these later critiques, but also because slaveholders by that time had become thoroughly aware of the danger they faced. By 1820 antislavery criticism could no longer be viewed as simply the vagaries of eccentrics, and proslavery proponents moved to meet the attack openly and publicly by justifying the institution of slavery on all levels: moral, social, economic, and political. Proslavery belief had always strongly existed in the South. Often, especially in the earlier years, it was just beneath the surface or hidden behind an apologetic tone, but the sentiment was always there. Between 1790 and 1830 there was not so much a change in the acceptance of slavery in the South as there was a change in the public nature of that acceptance, a public avowal that slavery was here to stay, and moreover, was beneficial. Throughout these four decades, however, most Southerners, accepting and believing slavery to be at least a

practical good, were determined to defend the institution by whatever means needed.

It was because slavery was seen as so crucial to Southern existence that it was defended so vigorously. For most Southerners, and the percentage increased as the nineteenth century progressed, slavery was identified with everything distinctive in Southern life. Slavery was perceived to be related to the survival of the traditional attitudes, customs, and institutions from the past, ranging from the plantation ideal to economic patterns and racial adjustments. From wet nurse and mammy through childhood companions to the old servants around the house, slavery was seen as an acceptable and necessary part of life. Southerners continually played upon the mutual depth of the relationship between master and servant.

It seems evident that most Southerners sincerely believed that they had a better society than one based on free labor. Their claims that slavery made a stronger republican government by releasing the most qualified men to govern the state was proof to them of this assertion. It was also proven by the fact that Southern society did not have the unemployment problems, nor the crime rate of free society. Unlike the "hirelings," who were in reality slaves themselves, chattel slaves were well-cared-for, even in old age, so Southern society was really more humane than free society.

Thus it was because slavery was perceived to have such a central, crucial role in Southern life that it was justified so unreservedly. The attack on slavery was believed to be, probably with some justification, an attack on the South; logically, therefore, Southerners felt that by defending slavery they were defending themselves. As the attack became more insistent, so too did the Southern commitment to slavery. What started out as a desparate combination of arguments to meet specific attacks, eventually became a full-fledged philosophical system in defense of slavery and the Southern way of life. Such a development was well underway by 1820. In the years following, by repeated assertions and elaborations of earlier arguments, the various elements of the proslavery defense were welded into a unified system. Later proslavery statements added very little in terms of new arguments but merely refined and expanded on those that had been used and accepted in the early republic. The concept of slavery as a positive good and the inequality of the races as the central construct of a philosophical system obviously reached its height in the South in the years just before the Civil War, with its apogee perhaps coming at Savannah, Georgia, in March, 1861, when Alexander H. Stephens, the Vice-President of the Confederate States of America, remarked that the Confederacy's "cornerstone rests upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man."⁴

The point this study has tried to make is that pro-slavery sentiment did not originate as a response to the abolitionist attack upon the institution of slavery. Admittedly, many of the arguments and the strident tone used came in response to the attacks, but the underlying proslavery sentiment had always existed. For most Southerners slavery was regarded at least as a practical good from the very beginning of the introduction of black slaves. They were, after all, not forced to purchase slaves. Even in the late eighteenth century, proslavery sentiment was just as prevalent in the thinking and actions of the South as any anti-slavery action or sentiment. Because of the morality involved, however, the latter has received more attention and a much better press; besides, few people like to write about losers. It is clear, nevertheless, that any time the institution of black slavery was threatened, proslavery sentiment rose to defend both the institution and practice. In many respects, even the claim that slavery was a "necessary evil" can be viewed as a passive positive good argument. In the years of the early republic, Southerners used the argument that slavery was a necessary evil so often because this position alone was usually sufficient to quiet, if not fully to satisfy, opponents of slavery. It is significant that both sides

⁴Clement Eaton, A History of the Southern Confederacy (New York: The Free Press, 1954), p. 55.

used this concept of necessary evil so often. However, while the emphasis of slavery's critics was on the idea of slavery as an evil, advocates always emphasized the necessity of the institution of black slavery. Thus while saying the same thing on the surface, the two sides were, in actuality, far removed from each other. Southerners used the disclaimer of necessary evil as long as it was effective in protecting themselves and justifying their practices, then abandoned it when it no longer served its purpose. In retrospect it seems that slavery's advocates were as proslavery as they needed to be to defend the institution. Proslavery postures were so muted in the early republic because the institution was essentially accepted and slavery's advocates felt no real need to justify that which was so little questioned. As the attacks on the institution became more aggressive and pointed, so too did the defense and justifications for slavery.

In the final analysis, the difference between the proslavery sentiment of the early republic and that of the post-1830's was not the degree of the acceptance or commitment to black slavery, but the degree of public acknowledgment and emotionalism attached to that commitment. Proslavery sentiment had always been present in the South; what the attacks on the institution did was to bring the proslavery sentiment, and commitment, out into the open, and unite most of the South behind that commitment to the institution.

The period 1790-1830 was thus not the "quiescent" period of proslavery described by other historians. There was certainly plenty of proslavery activity during these years, both in formulating various defenses and justifications for black slavery, and in undertaking basic actions to stop the thrust of antislavery. Moreover, the arguments and positions developed during these years served as the foundation upon which the later militant "positive good" philosophy was based.

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