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978-0-521-72181-3 - Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New World Order

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese

Excerpt

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Introduction

In everything, it is the nature of the human mind to begin with necessity and end in excess.

—Pliny the Elder¹

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and I long insisted that the presuppositions of the southern defense of slavery ended with Slavery in the Abstract – the doctrine that declared slavery or a kindred system of personal servitude the best possible condition for all labor regardless of race. Proslavery logic cast enslavement, broadly defined, as necessary and proper for much of the white race, as well as for practically all of the black race. A vital question has remained unanswered: To what extent did so extreme a doctrine take root among slaveholders and nonslaveholders?

The expression “Slavery in the Abstract” roiled southern politics. It had several meanings, the most intriguing of which referred to a social system abstracted from race and best for whites as well as blacks. We here follow that meaning, but the principal alternative requires identification and explanation. A good many Southerners used the term to distinguish between support for specifically black slavery and support for slavery in principle. They rejected the resort to philosophical abstractions as akin to ideological special pleading. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, a gifted American historian, remarks that the Old School Presbyterians – Calvinistic Baconian advocates of induction – used words like “abstract,” “theory,” and “metaphysics” as “virtual obscenities.” Bozeman’s observation also applies to Methodist Arminians and to secular intellectuals. Southern distaste for abstractions extended to all philosophic systems – Hegel’s for example. John Taylor of Caroline, Virginia’s prominent secular political philosopher, lauded Baconian induction and condemned abstract, deductive reasoning in natural and social science as the instrument of social oppressors.²

¹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History: A Selection*, tr. John F. Healy (London, 1991), Bk. 26:19.

² Theodore Dwight Bozeman, “Inductive and Deductive Politics: Science and Society in Antebellum Presbyterian Thought,” *Journal of American History*, 64 (1977), 718; John Taylor,

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Seneca, a southern favorite, mentioned the common Roman belief that gladiators planned their fights in the ring, watching intently for something in the adversary's glance or hand or body language: "No one will advise at long range; we must take counsel in the presence of the actual situation." Hugh Legaré of South Carolina – distinguished classicist and U.S. attorney general and secretary of state *ad interim* – repeatedly spoke out against "abstractions." Legaré invoked Quintilian's notion of "common sense," which he rendered as "public or general opinion." He spoke of Cicero's paean to the government of Rome as a repository of wisdom and patriotism, which "may be taken as his protest against that pest of our times speculative politics." In opposition to the U.S. Supreme Court's assumption of extra-constitutional powers to promote national consolidation, Legaré sternly criticized abstractions in political theory, complaining that Americans had "unbounded faith in forms." He expressed no confidence in "the science of politics, theoretically considered." He preferred to "judge the tree by its fruits."³

James H. Hammond of South Carolina – congressman, governor, senator, and wealthy planter – deplored "abstractions" but knew perfectly well that the word "abstract," as used by the advocates of Slavery in the Abstract, referred not to philosophical abstractions or to race relations, but to the general rather than the particular – to slavery as a normal condition of labor abstracted from race. Hammond, disclaiming any interest in Slavery in the Abstract, repeatedly embraced everything except the name. In 1845, he established his reputation as an intellectually acute polemicist in eloquent, lengthy, and widely read open letters to Thomas Clarkson, the British antislavery leader, in which he unequivocally endorsed the essentials of Slavery in the Abstract. And in his "Cotton Is King" speech in the Senate on the Kansas Question in 1858, Hammond dramatically asserted that every society rested on a "mud-sill" – a servile laboring class.⁴

An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States, ed. Loren Baritz (Indianapolis, Ind., 1919 [1814]), 346–347. See also [Thomas Caute Reynolds], review of Ticknor's *History of Spanish Literature*, *SQR*, 2 (1850), 95; Arnaud B. Levelle and Thomas I. Cook, "George Fitzhugh and the Theory of American Conservatism," *Journal of Politics*, 7 (1945), 152; "Slavery in the Abstract?" *Anti-Slavery Record*, 2 (Jan. 1836), 5; Thomas Roderick Dew, *Digest of the Laws, Customs, Manners, and Institutions of the Ancient and Modern Nations* (New York, 1884 [1852]), 658.

³ "On the Futility of Half-Way Measures," in Seneca, *Epistles*, 3 vols., tr. Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge, Mass.: LCL, 2002), 1:22, §2. In *HLW* see "Classical Learning," 2:30 (Quintilian); "Cicero De Republica," 2:253; "Kent's Commentaries," 2:104, 123–134, quote at 125; "Constitutional History of Greece," 1:421 ("fruits").

⁴ The texts may be found in [Clyde N. Wilson, ed.], *Selections from the Letters and Speeches of James H. Hammond* (Spartanburg, S.C., 1978); John H. Reagan, *Memoirs with Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War*, ed. Walter Flavius McCaleb (New York, 1906), 85. Hammond's sleight of hand is discussed more fully in Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820–1860* (Columbia, S.C., 1991), ch. 3. Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts parried Hammond's indictment of wage-slavery by boasting of northern superiority in the arts: *Are Working-Men Slaves? Speech of the Hon. Henry Wilson, of Mass., in reply to Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina*

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Southerners, like Legaré, who hated “abstractions,” considered South Carolina’s defiant doctrine of state nullification of federal laws unworkable. In the 1850s, Thomas Walton of Mississippi argued that, unlike state sovereignty, nullification never acquired popular support since an oppressed South could hardly expect relief from so abstract a doctrine. Although he believed that state sovereignty implied nullification, he did not explain the grounds for judging the one more abstract than the other. In a similar vein George Fitzhugh of Virginia, an extreme proslavery theorist, declared the doctrine of nullification valid in principle, but meaningless in political reality. He doubtless agreed with John H. Reagan of Texas, Postmaster General of the Confederacy, who suggested that secession posed not “the abstract right of man to personal liberty” but black capacity for freedom and assimilation into white society.⁵

The projection of the divinely sanctioned continuity of slavery from biblical times to the present encouraged assimilation of all dependent (unfree) labor to slavery or – what came to the same thing – assimilation of slavery to a pattern of social subordination in which chattel slavery served as the extreme form of dependent and unfree labor appropriate to time, place, and circumstance. Southerners reasonably took for granted that the widely revered Greek and Roman slaveholding civilizations supported their ideology. They referred to Greece and Rome frequently but rarely paused to explicate their boast of an obvious continuity between ancient and modern slave systems. In medieval Europe the categories “slaves,” “serfs,” and “unfree,” and even groups of those called “free,” reflected dependencies that shaded into one another in practice. Despite considerable ambiguity, a commitment to slavery led one writer after another to uphold the southern version as a modern variant of ancient and medieval social relations and to reject the social relations of the marketplace. George S. Sawyer, among proslavery theorists, assimilated villeins to slaves, and an English spelling book used in southern schools mistakenly equated “vassals” with slaves. Thus southern slaveholders fell into a contradiction from which they could not escape: They were fighting for a future based upon dependent labor relations and, simultaneously, on a material progress that had been effected by the overthrow of those very relations.⁶

in the Senate, March 20, 1858, on the Bill to Admit Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution (Washington, D.C., 1858), 10.

⁵ T[homas] Walton, “Further Views of the Advocates of the Slave Trade,” *DBR*, 26 (1859), 64–65; George Fitzhugh, “The Valleys of Virginia – the Rappahannock,” *DBR*, 26 (1859), 275; Edgar Allan Poe considered worthless a theory that could not explicate practice: Robert D. Jacobs, *Poe: Journalist and Critic* (Baton Rouge, La., 1969), 449. Yet, *Virginia Historical Register, and Literary Companion* warmly recommended H. A. Washington’s *Virginia Constitution of 1776* but respectfully disagreed with his assertion that the state constitution was purely historical and not dependent on abstract theories: 5 (1852), 107–110.

⁶ In support of these generalizations, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (New York, 2005), chs. 4–9; George S. Sawyer, *Southern Institutes; Or, an Inquiry into the Origin and Early Prevalence of Slavery and the Slave Trade* (New York, 1967 [1858]), 139; Thomas Carpenter, *The Scholar’s Spelling Assistant* (Electronic ed.; Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001 [1861]), 49.

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With or without embracing the extreme doctrine of Slavery in the Abstract, proslavery ideologists fell prey to the same substantial miscalculation that gripped the socialists. They took the brutal class warfare at loose in the industrializing countries as evidence of the imminent collapse of the free-labor (capitalist) system. Long before the Revolutions of 1848 – but especially in their wake – proslavery theorists sounded like socialists in predicting the unraveling of society in Europe and the North. But instead of expecting socialism to emerge from a general crisis of capitalism, they saw the reduction of the laboring classes to personal servitude.

A long list of prominent Southerners, including John C. Calhoun, joined Hammond in embracing the basic doctrine while denying that they were doing so. The denials amounted to expressions of regret that anyone could think of enslaving Caucasians. An astonished Thomas Colley Grattan, British consul at Boston, heard Calhoun assert, “Servitude is a necessity for civilization.” Like Calhoun, most proslavery theorists, especially those with national political ambitions, routinely declined to endorse Slavery in the Abstract, and, doubtless, some were deeply hostile to it. The strongly unionist A. H. H. Stuart of Virginia considered North and South economically complementary, with slavery entirely a question of race and climate, and he ridiculed the idea that the North would ever restore slavery. Yet, Henry Augustine Washington – protégé of James Madison, friend of Thomas Jefferson, and kin to George Washington – spoke for many:

One portion of the community always has and always will live upon the labor of the other portion. In every age and country *capital* has held labor in subjection, and always must hold it in subjection, and no where has the labourer received, or is he ever destined to receive, more than a very small proportion of the products of his own labor. . . . Bare subsistence, together with the means of perpetuating the race, is all that simple labor has ever received or can ever expect to receive.⁷

Proslavery Southerners drifted – some sprinted – toward an extraordinary doctrine that transcended race. The many who shrunk from public advocacy of the enslavement of whites in the capitalist countries warned against the possibility, if not inevitability. Neither did they have to predict restoration of chattel slavery among whites, for their notions of racial and class stratification encouraged a belief that a milder form of personal servitude would suffice for whites. Indeed, a great many defenders of slavery argued that southern slavery itself needed considerable reformation on behalf of the blacks.⁸

For medieval Scandinavia, see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (New Haven, Conn., 1988), ch. 1; and Snorri Sturlson, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, tr. Lee M. Hollander (Austin, Tex., 1964), 261.

⁷ Thomas Colley Grattan, *Civilized America*, 2 vols. (London, 1859), 1:182–185, Calhoun quoted at 183. “Address of Hon. A. H. H. Stuart before the Central Agricultural Society of Virginia, at Richmond, Oct. 28th, 1859,” *Southern Planter*, 20 (1860), 331; H. A. Washington, “The Social System of Virginia,” in Michael O’Brien, ed., *All Clever Men, Who Make Their Way: Critical Discourse in the Old South* (Fayetteville, Ark., 1982), 258.

⁸ Most southern commentators assimilated slavery to other systems of personal servitude. Among the exceptions, John Archibald Campbell of Alabama, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme

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Southern views on Slavery in the Abstract and the “social question” (the condition of labor in free societies) have to be teased out of diverse sources. Few slaveholders outside the ranks of the social, political, and religious elites left records of their deeper social views. Besides, there is no reason to think that ordinary slaveholders – any more than ordinary capitalists in our own time or the mass of humanity at any time – stopped to work out a coherent social philosophy in the manner of a Calhoun, a Fitzhugh, or a James Henley Thornwell. Slaveholders held several views simultaneously and lived with a good many contradictions. Some of the principal lines of dissemination do, however, emerge from churches, agricultural and scientific societies, and the press. And we may glean from the slaveholders’ diaries and family letters, as well as from the reports of those who observed them, evidence that the doctrine of Slavery in the Abstract was penetrating all levels of society.⁹

The strongest evidence of the spread of the doctrine among “plain folk” came indirectly. The speeches and pamphlets of the leading political spokesmen outside the plantation belts and especially in the up country spelled out the doctrine clearly, albeit discreetly. Among the more important were Andrew Johnson and Parson William G. Brownlow of Tennessee, Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina, Joseph E. Brown of Georgia, and Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi. We shall discuss the views of these and other such figures in Chapter 2. If it is difficult to discern the actual attitude of their constituents, no one with an acquaintance with those tough people could believe that they heard radical messages without reacting forcefully. That was just not their style.

Hints, indecisive but valuable: Between 1840 and 1860 a technological revolution that included steam presses, railroad networks, and the telegraph created an explosion of information and propaganda. Printed material constituted, by weight, most of the material sent through the mails. An antislavery traveler found “plenty of books” in defense of slavery, especially scriptural. An irritated M. Stokes of Wilkesborough, North Carolina, complained that nine-tenths of the speeches in Congress were never delivered and were, instead, produced as pamphlets for constituents. Alexander Stephens’s supporters distributed some 40,000 copies of one of his speeches, many doubtless in the North. Diaries,

Court, reviewing slavery throughout world history, complained that a great many Southerners mistakenly believed that slavery could exist only in the form prevalent in the South and therefore opposed salutary efforts to reform law and practice. J. A. C. [John Archibald Campbell], “Slavery throughout the World,” *SQR*, n.s. 3 (1851), 317.

⁹ For the implicit relation of Calhoun’s political theory to Fitzhugh’s, see Robert A. Garson, “Proslavery as Political Theory: The Examples of John C. Calhoun and George Fitzhugh,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 84 (1985), 197–212. For the inability of southern judges and legal theorists to ground slave law in “race” rather than class relations, see Mark Tushnet, *The American Law of Slavery: Considerations of Humanity and Interest* (Princeton, 1981). On medical education, Steven M. Stowe writes: “Slavery and race, along with sexuality, floated obscurely throughout the curricula.” *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 49–52, 172–173, 208–218, quote at 51.

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including those of students, from across the South indicate widespread attention to the published speeches and political writings of Calhoun and other leading southern politicians.¹⁰

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, printed matter accounted for half the mail in the United States – more than half by weight. The South, with fewer cities and a spread-out population, had disproportionately fewer newspapers and depended heavily on the mails. Southern – and western – newspapers, in the words of Richard B. Kielbowicz, “avidly sought” distant publications. In 1844 President John Tyler complained that postmasters abused their franking privileges by free distribution of political materials. Since many Southerners, especially in villages and rural areas, listened to readings of the newspapers as they arrived at a tavern or general store, the elite and better-off residents had a significant advantage. The more affluent could afford the subscriptions and generally had the prerogative of choosing the publications and selecting the contents to be read aloud.¹¹

The proslavery theorist Henry Hughes urged the government of Mississippi to support editors, presumably by subsidies: “Now propagandism is self-preservation.” Not that Hughes had much to worry about, for at least by the mid-1830s southern editors stood together in defense of slavery and hatred of abolitionism. In 1857 the propagandistic side of the newspapers got the attention of Caroline Seabury, a northern teacher in Columbus, Mississippi, who read an advertisement from a new paper published near Aberdeen that declared, “It will be free from the ‘isms’ of the day, in direct opposition to the spirit of all agitators – on purely southern principles.” She recorded the last words of the advertisement: “Our first number will be issued as soon as we

¹⁰ Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight Teeter, Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-Eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana, Ill., 2003), 8, 11; on travelers, see, e.g., Horace Cowles Atwater, *Incidents of a Southern Tour: or, The South as Seen with Northern Eyes* (Boston, Mass., 1857), 57–58; M. Stokes to Col. Hamilton Brown, Apr. 29, 1822, in Thomas Felix Hickerson, *Echoes of Happy Valley* (Durham, N.C., 1962), 15; Rudolph R. Von Abele, *Alexander H. Stephens: A Biography* (New York, 1946), 159, n.79; Ebenezer Pettigrew to J. H. Bryan, Jan. 18, 1827, in Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, ed., *The Pettigrew Papers*, 2 vols. (Raleigh, N.C., 1971, 1988), 2:81. At UNC, see E. G. C. Thomas Diary, June 14, 1855; T. M. Garrett Diary, 1849; Agnew Diary, July 4, 1854 (Ersline); H. P. Griffith, *The Life and Times of Rev. John G. Landrum* (Charleston, S.C., 1992 [1885]), 240.

After Thornwell visited Britain in 1860, several of his articles from *Southern Presbyterian Review* were republished there, drawing favorable critical notice. For requests for copies and congratulations, see Reverend Philips H. Thompson (Presbyterian pastor at Memphis) to Thornwell, Feb. 8, 1861; N. Long [Lord?], president of Dartin [?] College; Long to Thornwell, Feb. 9, 1861; Mitchell King to Thornwell, Feb. 9, 1861; H. W. Hilliard (prominent politician in Alabama) to Thornwell, March 13, 1861; Samuel J. Harrington (of Texas) to Thornwell, March 24, 1861 – all in Thornwell Papers; also, John S. Palmer to Leora Sims, Feb. 6, 1861, in Louis P. Towles, ed., *A World Turned Upside Down: The Palmers of South Santee, 1818–1881* (Columbia, S.C., 1991), 291.

¹¹ Richard B. Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700–1860s* (Westport, Conn., 1989), 3, 44, 71, Table 4 on 112, 114, quote at 63. See also James Stirling, *Letters from the Slave States* (New York, 1968 [1857]), 276–281.

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can obtain press and paper from the North.” She could not resist commenting, “Verily, we are the people & wisdom will die with us.”¹²

Northern proslavery newspapers circulated in the South more widely than other northern newspapers. James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald*, with a daily circulation of 80,000 in 1861, the largest in the world, took a political line that pleased Southerners, especially popular in the Border States. Francis Terry Leak of Mississippi, among other planters, considered *Day-Book* of New York the best publication of its kind in the Union and had it sent to fifteen of his relatives and friends in Arkansas and North Carolina. After the War, Thomas Clingman of North Carolina shrewdly remarked that sad consequences followed: Many Southerners concluded that northern opinion was a good deal less hostile to slavery than it in fact was. Measurement even of the roughest kind will probably continue to elude us, but, unquestionably, the yeomen and town and city laborers were getting large doses of Slavery in the Abstract.¹³

A clarification: William W. Freehling has offered a model for an understanding of the regionally based political differences within the South. He identifies three regions: the Border South (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri); the Middle South (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas); and the Lower South (South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas). For our purposes, the Lower South constituted a slave society, and the Border South did not. Large portions of the Middle South and small portions of the Border South formed part of southern slave society, but substantial portions lay outside it, in effect, tolerating slavery but not dominated by it. Freehling writes, “Just as the Middle South’s whitest belts contained large antisecessionist majorities, so the Border South’s blackest belts displayed large secessionist pluralities.” Some immensely influential individuals in each region fell under the spell of proslavery ideology, including Slavery in the Abstract, whereas some notable figures in the Lower South did not. Thus, Border State or no, Missouri harbored some prominent supporters of Slavery in the Abstract.¹⁴

Across the South, men committed to Slavery in the Abstract had no difficulty in speaking as democrats since their kind of “democracy” meant constitutionally limited republican government. Staunch antidemocratic conservatives, especially those in the North, rejected Slavery in the Abstract, and some rejected

¹² Henry Hughes to R. H. Purdom, Oct. 9, 1858, in Stanford M. Lyman, ed., *Selected Writings of Henry Hughes: Antebellum Southerner, Slavocrat, Sociologist* (Jackson, Miss., 1985), 145; Hodding Carter, *Their Words Were Bullets: The Southern Press in War, Reconstruction, and Peace* (Athens, Ga., 1969), 10–11; April 16, 1859, in Suzanne L. Bunkers, *The Diary of Caroline Seabury, 1854–1863* (Madison, Wis., 1991), 56.

¹³ Leak Diary, March 26, 28, Dec. 31, 1857; *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina* (Raleigh, N.C., 1877), 233; also, W. C. Preston to George Ticknor, May 8, 1824, in Preston Papers. During the War, the Union government suppressed *Day-Book*.

¹⁴ William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 1: *Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York, 1990), vol. 2: *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854–1861* (New York, 2007), quote at 2:530.

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slavery itself; many radical democrats, especially those in the South, embraced it. The most said safely is that flirtation with Slavery in the Abstract strengthened an antidemocratic undertow.

Support for Slavery in the Abstract – personal servitude for all laborers regardless of race – flowed from a confluence of three commonly held premises: Southern slaves fared better than most peasants and wage-workers in free societies; slavery was proving a more humane, stable, and morally responsible social system than its free-labor rival; and Christians had to accept responsibility to succor fellow human beings. The conclusion: Christians and all civilized peoples must accept some form of slavery as the solution of the conflict between capital and labor known as “the social question.” This conclusion plagued southern sensibility, for Southerners, even most slaveholders – writhed under a proslavery logic that pointed to reenslavement of whites. A long-building and widely held worldview nonetheless reached flood tide in the 1850s. George Fitzhugh of Virginia and Henry Hughes of Mississippi published treatises on “sociology” and thereby surfaced as the most flamboyant exponents of Slavery in the Abstract. Slavery in the Abstract, a distinctly southern ideology, did not take root anywhere outside the South. Neither Brazil nor Cuba nor any other ancient or modern slaveholding country produced anything like it on a politically significant scale.¹⁵

Marcus Cunliffe and Larry Tise have demonstrated that some of the basic ideas of Slavery in the Abstract went back a long way in England and America, becoming standard fare among Anglo-American conservatives. Tise has demonstrated that more defenses of slavery were published in the North than in the South before 1840. Although he insists that the doctrine of Slavery in the Abstract was present in other slaveholding societies, neither he nor anyone else presents evidence. Tise, Cunliffe, and others mistakenly equate militant proslavery doctrine with the specific doctrine of slavery as the proper condition of labor. With deep appreciation of our colleagues' valuable work, we must insist on a crucial distinction: Slavery in the Abstract became a common theme for the dominant class of the South, whereas abroad it remained the property of marginal intellectuals. Living through the triumphant march of industrial capitalism, notable British and continental conservatives and counterparts in the northern United States recoiled from the social and cultural consequences of

¹⁵ See George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or, The Failure of Free Society* (New York, 1965 [1854]); George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! or Slaves without Masters* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960 [1857]); Henry Hughes, *Treatise on Sociology, Theoretical and Practical* (New York, 1968 [1854]). These books appear to have been the first in America to have the term “sociology” in titles. Hughes may have scored another first in America by using “economics,” rather than “political economy,” in a chapter heading. On Fitzhugh, see Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969), Pt. 2; on Hughes, see Douglas Ambrose, *Henry Hughes and Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1996). For our explanation of the emergence of “Slavery in the Abstract,” see Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class*, ch. 3. See also the trenchant remarks in Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), especially 158, 169, 179–182.

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bourgeois ascendancy. Up to a point, they sounded like the proslavery theorists of the South, but they criticized prevailing social relations from the hopeless standpoint of moribund social relations that had been undermined politically and legally by the English revolutions of the seventeenth century and the French Revolution of the eighteenth. European conservatives drew much of their literary power from the critical standpoint generated by their alienation from the mainstream of their societies. In contrast, the South's leading intellectuals lived in a society that boasted one form of the organic social relations that European and even some northern conservatives lamented losing and muttered about restoring. Like literary men and scientists elsewhere, southern intellectuals often felt unappreciated, but, rather than repudiating the social system under which they lived, they held it up as a model for worldwide reformation. Although worried about the democratic tendencies that were infecting even the South, they celebrated God-ordained slavery as the best possible foundation for a civilized Christian society. By the 1820s an increasing number of Southerners – including propertied nonslaveholders – concluded that the solution to the social question lay in the formal exclusion of the unpropertied laboring classes from the benefits of individualism and their consignment to some form of personal dependency. The French Revolution consolidated previous and disparate strands of bourgeois individualism and set the terms for future battles. The struggle over the admission of Missouri as a slave state (1819–1820) drew the lines for an ideological battle that pitted self-conscious defenses of slavery and freedom against each other.¹⁶

Slavery in the Abstract, notwithstanding its apparent impracticality, slowly insinuated itself into the very core of the slaveholders' worldview. Since the slaveholding South was embedded in the bourgeois world of the nineteenth century – against which it waged mortal ideological, political, and economic combat – the slaveholders needed new ground on which to defend the traditional values of hierarchy, particularism, and personal dependency. In their quest, they differed among themselves in pet notions and preferred policies. Fitzhugh alone recognized that slavery – or even an industrial serfdom – could not survive in a world dominated by an expanding world market. Hence, he concluded that the world market and the capitalist system had to be razed. He never got far in his effort to make capitalism disappear without the sacrifice of its economic achievements, much of which even he sought to preserve. Hughes, considering such a project utopian, sought a compromise, although he never demonstrated how his preferred form of servile labor relation (“warranteeism”) could survive in a capitalist world market, albeit with an “ethnic qualification.” Fitzhugh and Hughes thus represented two poles of corporatist thinking. Fitzhugh defended the disappearing values of organically unequal relations, while espousing a tortured version of the idea of progress. Hughes,

¹⁶ Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens, Ga., 1988); Marcus Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context, 1830–1860* (Athens, Ga., 1979); Eugene D. Genovese, “Larry Tise’s ‘Proslavery’: A Critique and an Appreciation,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72 (1987), 670–683.

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too, defended those older values but strove for a system of social subordination in a modern corporate state. Between the two poles staked out by Fitzhugh and Hughes lay a vast web of variegated proslavery notions.¹⁷

Southern proslavery theorists intervened dramatically in the transatlantic debate over capital-labor relations. That debate – like the debate over the contemporary “Woman Question” – bared the logic of capitalism’s modern individualism: Sovereignty was rooted in the individual, whose willing acquiescence alone grounded legitimate authority. In the late 1850s Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon of England – passionate campaigner for black emancipation and women’s rights – reported, “All these slave owners are very religious people” who linked abolitionism to women’s rights as “allied to atheism.” Alarmed proslavery Southerners, in effect, foreshadowed the conclusion advanced by Blanche Glassman Hersh in *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist Abolitionists in America* (1978): “Feminism was an almost inevitable outgrowth of a radical movement which had as its goal the emancipation of all enslaved humanity.” This modern individualism directly challenged time-honored notions of organic hierarchy and inequality. In Western Europe and America’s northern states it coexisted with a plethora of customary inequalities for women, children, and working people, which it slowly recognized as anomalies. “Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin,” declared Karl Marx, “where in the black it is branded.” As if paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln’s “House Divided” speech, Marx maintained that the War in the United States pitted one social system against another and that one or the other would prevail in all parts of the country.¹⁸

¹⁷ Douglas Ambrose, in an enlightening comparison of the thought of Henry Hughes and James Henley Thornwell, charts statism in the trajectory of advanced proslavery thought: “Statism in the Old South: A Reconsideration,” in Robert L. Paquette and Louis A. Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession, and Southern History* (Charlottesville, Va., 2000), 101–125. Chad Morgan writes: “In foreseeing that the South had to submit to a distasteful statism to protect slavery, the putatively unrealistic Fitzhugh and Hughes were the ultimate realists.” Morgan, *Planters’ Progress: Modernizing Confederate Georgia* (Gainesville, Fla., 2005), 29.

¹⁸ Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *An American Diary, 1857–8*, ed. Joseph W. Reed, Jr. (London, 1972), 61 (Dec. 11, 1857); Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist Abolitionists in America* (Urbana, Ill., 1978), 74; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 3 vols. (New York, n.d.), 1:301; Karl Marx, in *Die Press*, Nov. 7, 1861, in Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in the United States* (New York, 1961); David Hecht, *Russian Radicals Look to America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), esp., 33, 35, 65–66, 90, 111, 115, 125; for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, see Arnold Schrier and Joyce Story, trans. and eds., *A Russian Looks at America: The Journey of Aleksandr Borisovich Lakier in 1857* (Chicago, 1979), xxxiv. Educated Russians knew *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Russian radicals like Alexander Herzen, Michael Bakunin, and Nicholas Chernyshevski followed American events carefully, linking slave emancipation to the emancipation of serfs and women. Russians relied on the travelogues of Frederick Law Olmsted, John Abbott, Sir Charles Lyell, and John Robert Godley.