Mastering America

Southern Slaveholders and the Crisis of American Nationhood

Mastering America recounts efforts of "proslavery nationalists" to navigate the nineteenth-century geopolitics of imperialism, federalism, and nationalism, and to articulate themes of American mission in overtly proslavery terms. At the heart of this study are spokesmen of the southern "Master Class" who crafted a vision of American destiny that put chattel slavery at its center.

Looking beyond previous studies of the links between these "proslavery nationalists" and secession, the book sheds new light on the relationship between the conservative Unionism of the 1850s and the key formulations of Confederate nationalism that arose during the war in the early 1860s. Bonner's innovative research charts the crucial role these men and women played in the development of American imperialism, constitutionalism, evangelicalism, and popular patriotism.

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Contents

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List of Illustrations

List of Abbreviations

AHR	*American Historical Review*
AQR	*American Quarterly Review*
Annals	*Annals of Congress*
BLY	Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT
CG	*Congressional Globe*
CMPC	James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861–1865* (Nashville: United States Publishing Company, 1905)
CMPP	James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Washington, D.C., 1897)
CWH	*Civil War History*
DBR	*De Bow's Review*
DHFFC	Charlene Bangs Bickford, Kenneth R. Bowling, and Helen E. Veit, eds. *The Documentary History of the First Federal Congress* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1992)
HEH	Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California
JAH	*Journal of American History*
JCCSA	*Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America, 1861–1865* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904–05)
JDC	Dunbar Rowland, ed. *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923)

JER	*Journal of the Early Republic*
JSH	*Journal of Southern History*
LSW	Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989)
LVR	Library of Virginia, Richmond
LWGS	Mary C. Oliphant, et al., eds. *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952–82)
OR	U.S. War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington D.C., 1880–1901)
OR-N	U.S. War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies* (Washington, D.C., 1903)
PJCC	Robert Lee Meriwether, et al., eds. *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959–2003)
PJD	Lynda Crist, et al., eds. *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971)
PMBL	Charles Adams Gulick Jr., ed. *The Papers of Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar, Edited from the Original Papers in the Texas State Archives* (Austin: A.C. Baldwin & Sons and Von-Boeckmann-Jones, 1921–7)
SHSP	*Southern Historical Society Papers*
SIN	*Southern Illustrated News*
SLJ	*Southern Literary Journal*
SLM	*Southern Literary Messenger*
SPR	*Southern Presbyterian Review*
SQR	*Southern Quarterly Review*
SR	*Southern Review*
TSC Corresp.	Ulrich B. Phillips, ed. *Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1911)
VMHB	*Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*
WMQ	*William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series*

Prologue: Confederate Common Sense

On the last Thursday of November 1860, as the worst political crisis in American history intensified, the churches of New Orleans filled to capacity. The slave South's largest and most vibrant city had marked Thanksgiving with sermons and prayers on earlier occasions. But never before had men and women left that city's noisy streets and squares with the same sort of expectancy, nor had they ever bowed their heads with such grave questions about their future. A wrenching presidential election had just raised fundamental doubts about the fate of American slavery. With a daily influx of news detailing South Carolina's sprint to secession, white New Orleanians had an understandable appetite for transcendent perspective.

Those who gathered in the Lafayette Square Presbyterian Church that November afternoon received a clearer message than they might have expected. Not long into his hour-long oration, the Rev. Benjamin Morgan Palmer cast aside his typical disavowal of "political" preaching and provided secessionists across the Deep South with the highest sanction he could muster. The native South Carolinian championed slavery, as he had when earlier speaking of Christian duties. His Thanksgiving address went much farther, however, in insisting that white mastery of black dependents involved a distinctive providential mission, which could only be pursued through radical political action. The highest responsibility of America's master class was "to preserve and transmit our existing system of domestic servitude, with the right, unchanged by man, to go and root itself wherever Providence and nature may carry it." With a Republican presidency of the United States now a certainty, Palmer urged his fellow slaveholders to heed his call for action. He wanted them to understand

that their proslavery mission would no longer be possible within a United States governed by Lincoln of Illinois.[1]

In coming weeks, Palmer's words became the most influential expression of a sacred understanding of masters' proslavery national mission. The New Orleans press circulated the address with the assurance that it rose "infinitely above the usual thought and rhetoric of a political speech" and was nothing less than "sacramental in its fervor." A Mississippi editor who published the entire speech the week after its delivery speculated how the thirty paragraphs might be "printed in letters of gold, and spread widecast among the people." Before the secession crisis was complete, Palmer's words would have been available to any of his 400,000 fellow slaveholders who sought the comfort of his prophecy. Nearly 100,000 copies of the sermon would ultimately appear in pamphlet form. These were less influential than the republication of his remarks in such important southern periodicals as *De Bow's Review*, the *Southern Planter*, and the *Southern Field and Fireside*. Several leading newspapers reprinted his entire address. Many others stitched together those choice passages that conveyed the sermon's main thrust. In towns, cities, and plantations across the region, men and women of the master class reflected in their diaries and letters upon the electrifying effect of Palmer's intervention.[2]

Palmer realized that far more people would encounter his message in print than hear it at the Lafayette Square Church. He thus emulated the revolutionary-era pamphleteer Thomas Paine by packing as much

[1] There was no one "title" for Palmer's sermon, which would variously be printed as: *The South, Her Peril and Her Duty* (New Orleans, LA: True Witness and Sentinel, 1860), *The Rights of the South, Defended in the Pulpits* (Mobile, 1860); "Why We Resist and What We Resist," *DBR* 31 (February 1861); "The Trust Providentially Committed to the South in Relation to the Institution of Slavery," *Southern Planter* 21 (February 1861) 115–19; *Thanksgiving Sermon, Delivered at the First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, on Thursday, December [sic] 29, 1860* (New York, 1861), and *Slavery a Divine Trust. The Duty of the South to Preserve and Perpetuate the Institution as It Now Exists* (New York, 1861). There are no major textual discrepancies between these printings, each of which largely match the text that has been conveniently reprinted as "The South: Her Peril and Her Duty" in Jon Wakelyn, ed. *Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November 1860–April 1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 63–77.

[2] New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, December 2, 1860; Thomas Carey Johnson, *The Life and Letters of the Rev. B.M. Palmer* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee, 1906), 196–223. Specific details on the context and response to Palmer have been taken from Haskell Monroe, "Bishop [sic] Palmer's Thanksgiving Day Sermon," *Louisiana History* 4 (1963), 105–18; Wayne C. Eubank, "Benjamin Morgan Palmer's Thanksgiving Sermon, 1860" in J. Jeffery Auer, *Antislavery and Disunion: Studies in the Rhetoric of Compromise and Conflict, 1858–1861*; and Mitchell Snay, *The Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 175–81.

meaning as possible into the key phrases he offered up that afternoon. He dramatized the "crucifying test" that faced all Americans and speculated how masters' current actions would color "the complexion of our destiny." Some clever writing helped him to hit upon a remarkably wide range of themes, as he took up the burden of civilization, the racial inferiority of blacks, the theological nature of providence, the harmonizing tendencies of slaveholders' republicanism, and even a discussion of the constitutional right of secession. There was just enough of reassurance in his tone to keep the pastoral dimension in evidence. What was by turns a treatise, a sermon, and a message of consolation closed with the simple assertion that "The Position of the South is sublime."

Palmer's sudden fame as the South's most notorious disunionist was unlikely. His prior career had been marked by political moderation and a scrupulous avoidance of fire-eating politics. Though he was raised in South Carolina, a hotbed of separatist sentiment, Palmer had shown little evidence during the 1850s that he would produce the nearest Confederate equivalent to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. His national stature came as the sort of theologian, pastor, and orator who could appeal to congregations in the free states as well as in the slave states. During the late antebellum period, he had received calls from prestigious pulpits in the urban North and was unanimously elected in 1860 to the faculty of the Princeton Theological Seminary. Palmer's decision to decline such overtures resulted not simply from his regional loyalties but from his appreciation of what might follow a successful ministry to those New Orleans merchants and planters in whose hands the seat of a continental American empire rested. In political terms, Palmer's Unionist credentials matched those of most of his fellow Presbyterian clergy, who had formed a particularly potent mix of proslavery dogma and American nationalism over the first six decades of the nineteenth century. It was thus with a distinct tone of melancholy that Palmer turned to the cause of disunion. One of the most arresting images of the speech conveyed his genuine regret at breaking ties with the United States and his desire to continue with the work begun in its name. "If we cannot save the Union, we may save the blessings it enshrines," he explained. "If we cannot preserve the vase, we will preserve the precious liquor it contains."[3]

News of Palmer's sermon quickly traveled through an increasingly nationalized network of print to reach New York City, where outrage rather than enthusiasm was the prevailing response to his separatist

[3] Johnson, *Life and Letters*, 147, 235.

ultimatum. The withdrawal of Louisiana from the Union would have drastic implications for the partisan system that had connected New York to the slave South, and for those increasingly intricate commercial, financial, and cultural ties on which the city's future viability depended. The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn was aware of these dangers, though he had more personal reasons to pause over Palmer's apparent apostasy. The two men had played chess with each other when they were fellow students at Amherst College in the 1830s, and each had since attained celebrity status as their region's most spellbinding pulpit orators. While Beecher's memories of Palmer surely tinged his readings of the New Orleans Thanksgiving sermon, he was unlikely to have followed the sermon's arguments with particular care or noted its tone of pathos and regret. Like many in the North, Beecher traced the current crisis to the failings of aberrant Southerners, who mocked the free states' more genuine version of American republicanism. Beecher noted in 1861 that he had "never heard a man from the South speak of himself as an American" and that "men from the South speak of themselves as Southerners." A year later, he explained how the rebels' overly narrow identities had even more sinister roots, reasoning that "men brought up under the influence of slavery" were "contaminated to the very root, and cannot make good citizens."[4]

Beecher spoke for the common sense of the free-state majority in joining the Confederacy's rebellion against the federal government with slaveholders' more long-standing rebellion against civic morality and global progress. With the outbreak of war in 1861, more and more Union partisans joined Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in arraigning white Southerners for a "triple-headed treason" that united their defiance of government sovereignty, their betrayal of national ideas, and, in their disregard for global progress toward universal freedom, their rejection of "those commanding principles of economy, morals, and Christianity without which civilization is changed into barbarism." The Union soldiers who captured New Orleans early in 1862 displayed similar understandings. For those enlisted under the

[4] "Thanksgiving Sermon of Dr. Palmer," New York *Evangelist*, December 20, 1860; "Dr. Palmer's Sermon," New York *Independent*, January 17, 1861; Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array" (first delivered April 14, 1861), "The Success of American Democracy," (first delivered April 13, 1862) both in *Patriotic Addresses in America and England, 1850–1885, on Slavery, the Civil War, and the Development of Civil Liberty in the United States* (New York: Fords, Howard and Hulbert, 1887), 276, 353; Johnson, *Life and Letters*, 48. Trish Lougren, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) offers important new perspectives on the relationship between networks of publishing and communications and the mid-nineteenth-century conflicts over nationalization, slavery controversy, and sectionalism.

Stars and Stripes, driving Palmer and his ilk into exile was a means of meting out punishment to selfish traitors and demonic brutes.[5]

These Union publicists and soldiers anticipated the judgment of many later historians, who have tended to conflate an understandable revulsion at proslavery ideology with a willful disassociation of bondage from prevailing American norms.[6] The popular sanction given to secession during the winter of 1860–1 has drawn attention away from dramatic reversals such as that taken by Palmer and toward long-term patterns through which southern slaveholders seemed to have become increasingly alienated from national ideas. Their cultivation of narrow identities that caused them to "speak of themselves as Southerners" has repeatedly been held up as the key problem to be solved.[7] Scholars who have documented the thoroughly "American" self-conception of Confederates have provided a cautionary note about such teleological assumptions and have reminded us how easily the fluid dynamics of nineteenth-century nationalism can be smoothed over in the quest to chart gradual developments. The following study of proslavery nationalism as it operated from the American founding through the Civil War builds on such work and thus

[5] Charles Sumner, *The Rebellion: Its Origins and Its Mainspring* (New York: Young Men's Republican Club, 1861), 6; Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

[6] Among those who posit a basic incompatibility between slavery and American nationhood are Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 186–7. James McPherson provides an intriguing alternative in "Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question," *CWH* 50 (December 2004) 418–33, though a stance closer to Greenfield and Wood is evident throughout *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001). The prevalence of proslavery republicanism across the South (a phenomenon distinct from proslavery nationalism) has been addressed by J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Lacy K. Ford Jr. *The Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and, from a slightly different angle, by James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

[7] Such tendencies are most evident in the literature on "Southern Nationalism" associated with classics such as John M. McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830–1860* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979); Rollin Osterweiss, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949); and Jesse T. Carpenter, *The South as a Conscious Minority, 1789–1861: A Study in Political Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1930). Whether pursuing the development of "identity" independent of other forces obscures more than it reveals about historical processes is a point helpfully addressed in Rogers Brubaker and Frederick A. Cooper, "Beyond Identity," *Social Theory* 29 (2000), 1–47.

remaps the relationship among nationalizing currents of the 1850s, the crisis of disunion, and the avowedly proslavery Confederacy of the early 1860s.[8]

At the heart of this book is the story of how slaveholders both before and after Lincoln's election in 1860 contributed to the American project of "becoming national." As was the case in other modern societies, this enterprise involved a "complex, uneven, and unpredictable process, forged from an interaction of cultural coalescence and specific political intervention," as two historians have recently put it. In approaching the slippery category of nationhood, there is always a temptation to focus more on issues of self-understanding than of power. In the case of American masters, it was the potential antislavery threats posed at the national, subnational, and international levels that predominated. My desire to address the high stakes involved in this maneuvering for advantage has led me to devote the first section of this study to those geopolitical issues that informed considerations of nationhood as well as of empire, state, and sectional initiatives. Only after establishing the intricacy of slaveholders' attempts to secure power within a federal Union do I turn in the second section to cultural developments, and in particular to assessing the increasingly ambitious plans to "nationalize" American slavery through variants of proslavery republicanism, evangelicalism, historical memory, and domesticity.[9]

[8] Drew Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); George Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); and Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Paul D.H. Quigley, "Patchwork Nation: Sources of Confederate Nationalism, 1848–1865" (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, 2006).

[9] Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, "Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation," in *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8. These scholars go on to explain how if "politics is the ground upon which the category of the nation was first proposed," then "culture is the terrain where it is elaborated." I have found such a formulation a compelling alternative to John Breuilly's overly stark emphasis on the political nature of nationalist claims (as set forth in *Nationalism and the State* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992]) and Benedict Anderson's more influential overview, whose search for alternatives to state-centered narratives at times obscures the workings of politics and power (see *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [Verso: London, 1983]). An older, but still relevant, warning about the connections between cultural analysis and the "hard surfaces" of those "political, economic, stratificatory realities within which men are everywhere contained" can be found in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 30.

My analysis of the nationalist visions of proslavery Southerners relies on three discrete bodies of scholarship. Most notable has been that ever more sophisticated work on the intellectual life of the antebellum master class. By recovering important texts and recasting critical episodes, this work has set a new standard in American intellectual history.[10] By demonstrating slaveholders' dexterity in shuttling between "American" and "southern" identities as they navigated the crisis of Union, historians such as Drew Faust, Eugene Genovese, and Michael O'Brien have also demonstrated anew the wisdom of David Potter's justly influential insight that Americans, by 1860, were "separated by a common nationalism."[11]

A second body of works has helped me to consider American slaveholders as one among several "master classes," who together witnessed the loss of their human property over a century-long "age of emancipation." Studies that compare American masters to their colonial counterparts in other plantation zones have helped me more fully to appreciate advantages that came with access to governmental power and to a series

[10] William Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991 and 2007); Eugene Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820–1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life in the American South, 1810–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a wider cataloguing of recent work in southern intellectual history, see Robert E. Bonner, "Ordering Southern Thought," *Reviews in American History* 33 (2005), 54–63.

[11] David Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848–1861* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 484; and "The Historians Use of Nationalism, and Vice Versa," in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968). O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order* delineates the alternately imperial, national, and colonial frameworks for proslavery efforts, as does Peter S. Onuf "Federalism, Republicanism, and the Origins of American Sectionalism," in Edward L. Ayers, ed. *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Peter S. Onuf and Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). The dynamic between the national, sectional, and federal issues beyond the slave South furnishes a central theme of Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Lewis Simpson, *Mind and the American Civil War: A Meditation on Lost Causes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Harlow Sheidley, *Sectional Nationalism: Massachusetts Conservative Leaders and the Transformation of America, 1815–1836* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998); and Susan-Mary Grant, *North over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

of signal triumphs in defining the United States' burgeoning republican order. We take for granted the extent to which slaveholders tried to shape the Confederate States of America in their own self-image. Both hindsight and a certain national provincialism obscure how successful men like Palmer were during the 1850s in framing a proslavery version of American nationhood that sought to assimilate bondage to republican norms.[12]

Scholarship on the contours of modern nationalism has provided me a final means of honing my understanding of proslavery Americanism and its place within larger networks of power and meaning. Social scientists who write in a comparative vein have helped me to appreciate the depth of slaveholders' commitment to the "nationalizing states" of both the Union and the Confederacy. This perspective helps to remind how little masters had in common (except on perhaps a rhetorical level) with such classic "state-seeking nations" as Ireland, Poland, and other colonized peoples excluded from the meaningful exercise of political and cultural power.[13] Historians of nationalist projects in other times and places have similarly helped me better to understand the central role that politics, religion,

[12] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971) and *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) remain essential, though masters' remarkable power to shape federal policy is probed by Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States' Governments Relation to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Steven Hahn, "Class and State in Postemancipation Societies: Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective," *AHR* 95 (February 1990), 75–98. Recent studies that reveal the comparatively marginal political role assumed by other slaveholders include Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Antislavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833–1874* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999); David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics, and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Jeffrey D. Needell, *The Party of Order: The Conservatives, the State, and Slavery in the Brazilian Monarchy, 1831–1871* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[13] I borrow terminology first used by Charles Tilly, "States and Nationalism in Europe, 1492–1992," *Theory and Society* (February 1994), 133, and later refined in Rogers Brubaker, "Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism," in John A. Hall, *The State of the Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). My own attempt to pair power (in its multiple forms) with the articulation of meaning has been informed by Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and John A. Hall, "Structural Approaches to Nations and Nationalism," in Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 33–43.

racial stratification, and war making played in the consolidation of modern nation-states.[14]

The men and women featured in this book were "representative" of the southern master class in one basic sense – as a group, they helped to fashion a powerful set of ideas, images, and political programs that represented to the world at large a collectivity variously known as the "slave interest," the "slave power," or, most simply and most effectively, "the South." As public figures, these individuals enjoyed unusual access to power and publicity and they displayed a rare talent for systematic and nuanced expression. These qualities made them no more "typical" of the approximately 400,000 slaveholders as a class than Beecher and other free labor "nationalizers" were "typical" of the even larger white middle-class populace of the North. Making this basic distinction between "representativeness" and "typicality" helps to clarify a crucial point and to shed light on a related matter – the need to assess the historical significance of individual nationalists not only according to the cogency of their programs but also according to their effectiveness in touching a chord with a broader constituency of fellow masters.[15]

Proslavery Americanism circulated far from the bustle of southern cities, and beyond the realm of printed polemics (the two most important sites of "master class nationalism"). Its image of the world-historical significance of modern "Christianized" bondage increasingly shaped the sensibilities of a plantation world where a complex blend of challenges, struggles, vulnerabilities, and assertions confronted slaveholders on a daily basis. One particularly resonant locale for considering the links between widely shared ideas and particular practices was the costal rice-growing community of Midway, Georgia, where Lincoln's election was felt as deeply as it was in Palmer's New Orleans, or in Beecher's New York. Here, a remarkable testimonial record left by the prominent Jones family reminds us of how many intricate dramas and dilemmas emerged during the closing days of 1860. Such dramas need not have driven broader

[14] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Nancy P. Appelbaum, et al. *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona, eds. *Nationalism in the New World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

[15] It is important to note that while proslavery nationalists spoke to fellow masters, they employed language capable of appealing to southern white yeomen and to northern allies as well. These dimensions of proslavery discourse deserve further attention.

historical development in order to exemplify deeper currents of shifting allegiances and understandings.

We know from surviving correspondence that the fifty-two-year-old Mary Jones reacted to Lincoln's election with every bit as much alarm as her slaveholding husband (and first cousin) Charles, who had made a name for himself as the South's most celebrated white evangelist to southern African-Americans. The Joneses' Unionism had a sentimental dimension, reaching back to the patriotic martyrdom suffered by their grandfather, who had died while defending Savannah from the British assault in 1779. At least as important, however, was their intuitive sense of how much they had benefited from a Union that assured the viability of their world of slaves and rice and cotton. In the half-century that followed American independence, Low Country Georgia had profited as much as any region from the political stability fostered by a federalized American Union. Seen from the Jones plantation residences of "Liberty Hall," "Retreat," and "Montevideo" there was little contradictory about amassing republican wealth on the basis of rice cultivated by enslaved workers, nor was there any real incongruity in the fact that the Joneses' chief slave driver, Pulaski, had been named in honor of one of those revolutionary patriots whose actions had created North America's most powerful federal state.[16]

Wielding power in the realm of national politics was something that the Jones family largely left to others, however. Their contributions as nationalists came less in the establishment of a federal polity friendly to slavery than in the imperatives of American religious life and of patriotic culture. A counterpart to Charles' efforts to gain national support for his evangelical campaign could be seen in Mary's work on behalf of George Washington's Mount Vernon during the 1850s. It was altogether natural for her to join other "Southern Ladies" to preserve a working plantation as a national shrine. Having invested her energies in such patriotic endeavors made it just as natural that the crisis of 1860 would tug at Mary's heartstrings and force her to renegotiate commitments that had not only connected the North and the South but also unified a sense of Unionist political obligation within her white household. In 1860, Mary

[16] My understanding of the Jones family comes from the remarkable letters reprinted in Robert Manson Myers, ed. *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972) and in Myers, *A Georgian at Princeton* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) and from the still more remarkable context reconstructed in Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005) and discussed in Lacy K. Ford Jr. "A Paternalist's Progress: Insurgency, Orthodoxy, and Reversal in the Old South," *Reviews in American History* 35 (2007), 46–56.

Jones set about an especially difficult task in writing to her oldest son, Charles C. Jones Jr., who was then serving a term as the mayor of Savannah. She asked him to remember the day "when your brother and yourself were very little fellows" and had taken a trip to Independence Hall in Philadelphia. "At the foot of Washington's statue," Mary Jones had "pledged you both to support and defend the Union." With a full appreciation of imminent changes, Mary Jones assured her son that "*That Union* has passed away and you are free from your mother's vow." With this release came validation of her son's enthusiastic support for the state militia forces that the previous day had captured federal installations in Savannah harbor.[17]

The gesture of family unity must have been appreciated by Charles Jones Jr., whose secessionist leanings had become well known by this time. He reciprocated his mother's generosity a few weeks later, when he enclosed in a letter five chestnuts he had recently gathered from Washington's Mount Vernon estate. After suggesting that transplantation to Low Country Georgia would allow new trees to thrive, the young Jones explained his actions lest his mother mistake his broader meaning. "The memory of Washington is still as dear and . . . as sacred, as ever it was; and I know that no one more patriotically cherishes that memory or those relics than you." Moving into the future need not break all historical ties, he continued, noting that "the dissolution of the Union cannot silence those consecrated voices of the past, nor can it rob us of the relationship which we bear to . . . the Father of our Country." He closed with the simple observation that Washington "was one of us."

The fate of those chestnuts was uncertain. If Virginia transplants did survive the Low Country's summertime heat, they would grow to maturity amidst a world of free black labor rather than plantation slavery. In dissolving a union they had helped to shape, the Jones family followed other southern masters in precipitating a revolution that accomplished their own destruction. Mayor Jones suppressed all discussion of this possibility in 1861 and instead focused on how his mother, in rearing new trees, might maintain connection to a shrine suddenly separated from Georgia by a new international border. The family was elated by news in April that Virginia had finally joined the Confederate States of America and had thus brought Washington's home, along with the rest of that state's historical associations, into a new slaveholding nation. The day that Virginia

[17] All quotations from correspondence of Mary and Charles Jones Jr. appear in Myers, ed. *The Children of Pride*, 38, 48, 51.

seceded, Charles Jones shared his hopes once more with his mother and imagined how "a great Southern army" might make a Mount Vernon pilgrimage of its own before long. Jones spoke of the impending war in terms of national integrity rather than of slavery, though his diagnosis clearly rested on anxieties about the menace posed by a free-soil Republican party. Looking forward from 1861, he imagined how an invigorated Confederate populace might transform the process of "becoming national" from the traditional political, diplomatic, religious, and cultural initiatives toward a military effort. Southern masters seemed to be on the brink of a campaign for a new American nation, destined to enshrine elements of the past within a bracing new polity. To do so required making war on apostate Yankee Republicans, and thus to "redeem the tomb of Washington from the dominion of that fanatical rule."