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Only Nixon Could Go to China: L. Q. C. Lamar and the Politics of Reconciliation

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Southern Studies at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture
The University of Mississippi

BRIAN WILSON

May 2012

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ABSTRACT

Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar was a statesman with an almost unmatched career, serving on the President's Cabinet, in Congress, and on the Supreme Court. Lamar's work in government spanned one of the most tumultuous times in American history, and his transformation from secessionist to advocate for reconciliation in the post-Civil War period illustrates the complexity of politics at that time.

This thesis examines Lamar's life and provides an historiographic survey of Lamar scholarship to date. From this review, the thesis moves to new and necessary areas of inquiry, including Lamar's relationship with black Reconstruction politicians, his role in the early conservation movement, and his life as a source of inspiration for twentieth and twenty-first century public policy and reconciliation groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many wonderful people have contributed to the completion of this thesis. Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson, Dr. John Winkle, and Dr. Ted Ownby, three remarkable professors, graciously served as my committee. Dr. Winkle, Professor of Political Science, provided keen insight into legal and political issues and an encouraging voice. Dr. Ownby, Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and Professor of History and Southern Studies, encouraged me to ask the hard questions regarding slavery and labor, and Dr. Wilson, Kelly Gene Cook Sr. Chair of History and Professor of Southern Studies, chaired and guided my efforts with humor and patience. Although retired, Dr. David Sansing, Professor Emeritus of History, provided significant assistance with research and encouragement. I will always fondly remember Dr. Sansing as one of the very few lecturers gifted enough for me to enjoy attending 8 am classes in the summer during my undergraduate tenure years ago. Dr. Katie McKee, McMullan Associate Professor of Southern Studies and Associate Professor of English, offered kind advice and dignified leadership for battling the sometimes byzantine graduate bureaucracy as graduate student advisor. Becca Walton, Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, demonstrated skill as an unofficial writing coach, editor, and source of encouragement. These wonderful individuals created a mosaic of support for a project that has only just begun.

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CHAPTER ONE

REDEMPTION OF A LEGACY

Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar has been described as Oxford, Mississippi's second most famous resident. I would describe Lamar as the most famous Mississippian that most Mississippians today have never heard of. He may even be the nation's greatest statesman ever produced by Mississippi¹. Lamar's current obscurity is hard to explain, because, like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, the public once regarded Lamar as a national figure with celebrity appeal. Also like Jefferson and Franklin, Lamar lived the life of a Renaissance man, serving as lawyer, planter, diplomat, soldier, and politician. He even served as a college professor teaching his worst subject, mathematics. Lamar is one of only two men in American history to serve in the President's Cabinet, both houses of Congress, and the Supreme Court, the only Mississippian ever to do so.² Lamar's transformation from a slave owner and secessionist to a champion of reconciliation and defender of black voting and political rights and education is one of the great American stories of personal redemption.

Dr. James Silver, in *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, highlights Lamar as an example of the best in Mississippi and its potential.³ In September 1962, when President John F. Kennedy ordered 30,000 United States combat troops to occupy an American city to enforce federal court

¹ Frank E. Smith and Audrey Warren. *Mississippians All* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing House, 1968), 73.

² Ibid.

³ James W. Silver. *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), x.

orders, a fourteen-hour battle ensued. Many thought, and a few hoped, the conflict in Oxford, Mississippi, between the United States and the State of Mississippi over James Meredith's admission to the University of Mississippi was the beginning of a new American civil war. At the height of this madness, what author Willie Morris called "the last battle of the Civil War,"⁴ President Kennedy took to the airwaves to plead with Mississippians to stand down. Speaking to the nation on television and radio, the President invoked the name of Lamar: "This is the State of Lucius Lamar and many others who have placed the national good ahead of sectional interest."⁵ Vanderbilt historian Dr. Frank Owsley considered Lamar "one of the few truly great men of American history" and "had he not been born a Southerner would probably have been president."⁶

On Monday April 27, 1874, a 49-year-old Mississippian stepped to the podium in the United States House of Representatives. Referred to by many of his contemporaries as "Colonel" due to his recent service in an army that had tried to capture this capital city less than a decade before, the congressman, possessing a pale face but dark hair, prepared to deliver a eulogy on the passing of a longtime and famous senator.⁷ The galleries were packed with spectators for the series of eulogies that day. Knowing the congressman had fiercely supported Southern secession and lost two brothers in the carnage of the recent Civil War, the throngs gathered in the House chamber expected little more than a half-hearted tribute for the Massachusetts senator, a fierce abolitionist and "perhaps the most universally hated man in the

⁴ Willie Morris, "At Ole Miss: Echoes of a Civil War's Last Battle," *Time* (October 4, 1982)

⁵ John F. Kennedy, Radio and Television Report to the Nation on the Situation at the University of Mississippi, September 30, 1962. *The Presidential Papers of John F. Kennedy*. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

⁶ Frank L. Owsley, review of *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: Secession and Reunion*, by Wirt Armistead Cate. *The American Review* 5 (April-October 1935): 503-511.

⁷ Tribute of Blanche K. Bruce On the Life and Character of Mr. Lamar, *Boston Herald*, January 28, 1893.

South.”⁸ But the Colonel from Mississippi shocked and electrified the crowd with one of the most powerful and emotional tributes to the patriotism and sacrifices made by radical Republican Charles Sumner and those of the Union cause.⁹ Calling for the end of sectional bitterness and suspicion, the speaker closed his now famous speech with this charge: “My countrymen, know one another, and you will love one another.”¹⁰ Many members openly wept, including Maine Republican and Speaker of the House, James G. Blaine. New York Congressman Lyman Tremain exclaimed: “My God, what a speech! And how it will ring through the country!”¹¹ Thus strode Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar to center stage of the struggle for reconciliation.

John F. Kennedy’s *Profiles in Courage* features L. Q. C. Lamar of Mississippi, one of only two Americans to ever serve in both houses of Congress, in the President’s Cabinet, and on the Supreme Court, as an example of political and professional courage. Earning the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1957, *Profiles in Courage* highlighted the leadership of eight of the most prominent public servants in American history, such as John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, and Sam Houston. Kennedy described Lamar as “the most gifted statesman given by the South to the nation from the close of the Civil War to the turn of the century.”¹² Such an extensive career and inclusion in such an illustrious group by a Pulitzer Prize-winning future President of the United States would seem to guarantee Lamar a place in the pantheon of great and honored Americans.

⁸ Smith and Warren, *Mississippians All*, 63.

⁹ Wirt Armistead Cate, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: Secession and Reunion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 1-7.

¹⁰ Congress, House, Representative Lamar of Mississippi speaking to the House of Representatives on the death of Senator Charles Sumner, 43rd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 2, pt. 4 (27 April 1874): 3410-11.

¹¹ Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1896), 188.

¹² John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 154.

Lamar's post-Civil War advocacy of reconciliation and development of a new order in the South also earned him high praise from a group of progressive Southerners almost a century after his death. In the 1970s, a group of Southern writers, politicians, business leaders, and journalists, including Willie Morris and Hodding Carter, created an organization to improve race relations and encourage economic development. They named their new group the L. Q. C. Lamar Society in honor of Lamar, "...a Mississippi statesman who had been a fire-brand secessionist but who, in the 1870s, became a spokesman for reconciliation between the races and regions."¹³ Writing in 1970, Lamar Society founding executive director Thomas Naylor credited liberal former Mississippi Congressman Frank E. Smith with proposing Lamar as the society's namesake: "The rationale for use of Lamar's name is that the type of behavior exemplified by his struggle for reconciliation between the races and the regions of the country in the divisive 1870s is worthy of emulation by his fellow Southerners in the 1970s."¹⁴ The Society's conferences and books, including *You Can't Eat Magnolias* (1972), inspired the creation of several progressive organizations working for improved race relations, education reform, and economic development, such as the Southern Growth Policies Board.

¹³ H. Brandt Ayers and Thomas H. Naylor, eds., *You Can't Eat Magnolias* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 368.

¹⁴ Thomas Naylor, "The L. Q. C. Lamar Society," *New South* 25, no. 3 (1970): 22.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETATIONS OF A LIFE ON CENTER STAGE

Lamar is the subject of three book-length biographies, including *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893* (1896) by Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: Secession and Reunion* (1935) by Wirt Armistead Cate, and *L. Q. C. Lamar: Pragmatic Patriot* (1973) by James B. Murphy. He is included in a few more collections of biographies focused on Southern politicians, the occasional academic journal or paper, and brief mentions in general histories of Reconstruction and post-Civil War America. The biographies are generous to Lamar but grow less so the farther the publication is from his lifetime. When writers mention him in more recent scholarship, they are often critical, constructing Lamar as more of an opportunist or cynic than a patriot. The decline in interest and change of tone seems to occur in the last 40 years. This research argues that the dearth of recent scholarship on Lamar, as well as the critical tone of much of this recent scholarship, reflects an unwillingness on the part of New South scholars to address an enduring fact about post-Civil War America: flinty pragmatists initially sacrificed racial reconciliation to secure sectional reconciliation, while planting the seeds for future racial reconciliation.

Published only three years after Lamar's death, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893* by Edward Mayes is the first and most comprehensive to date biography of Lamar. Lamar's son-in-law and chancellor, or president, of the University of Mississippi, Mayes had a personal relationship and spent time with Lamar, allowing for more immediate detail of his entire life, both personal and professional, and a very sympathetic interpretation of Lamar's

career and intentions. The biography makes great use of contemporary newspaper accounts and letters to explain Lamar's view of himself in the world and his role in it and remains an unusually important repository of Lamar sources. While pointing out this sympathetic reading of Lamar, successive biographers relied heavily on the work of Mayes and complimented it for its thoroughness, although some complained that it was too tedious.

Wirt Armistead Cate published *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: Secession and Reunion* in 1935. Cate opens his biography at Lamar's famous eulogy of Charles Sumner, Radical Republican Senator from Massachusetts. Although he briefly covers Lamar's life and career before the Civil War, Cate devotes a predominate share of pages to Lamar during Reconstruction and afterward. Relying heavily on the biography by Mayes, Cate's work is complimentary of Lamar but accurately portrays Lamar as one of the most acclaimed Southern political leaders of his time. Cate's work duplicates much from Mayes. He uses too few primary sources and almost completely ignores newspapers in his scholarship. A more complete bibliography would have served Cate well.

L. Q. C. Lamar: Pragmatic Patriot by James B. Murphy began the revisionist interpretation of Lamar as something less than a principled and chastened leader of a lost cause looking to make the best of a bad situation. Released in 1973, this biography appears intent on balancing the scales regarding Lamar. Murphy brings very little new scholarship but provides a new interpretation of already known facts. Murphy's Lamar is far more calculating than Mayes's or Cate's. Murphy argues that Lamar's reputation as a statesman is contrived rather than a byproduct of courageous leadership. Perhaps a more balanced interpretation is deserved, but Murphy fails to provide new scholarship countering the earlier interpretations. His conclusions appear to be mere assumptions rather than proven facts.

The most recent revisionist history of Lamar finds little merit in his public pronouncements of national reunification or reputation as a statesman. Nicholas Lemann in *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (2006) and Michael Gattis in “L. Q. C. Lamar and the New South” (2009) argue that Lamar was a political opportunist furthering his own career, while providing cover for the violent suppression of black political participation by the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist factions. While not providing any actual correspondence or speech by Lamar validating their theory, they work on the assumption that Lamar’s pre-Civil War statements on race continued to govern his actions after the war. While some have hinted that Lamar may have unwittingly provided a diversion from the violence used to oppose black political rights, Lemann and Gattis condemn Lamar as a knowing accomplice, providing an extreme opposite interpretation of Lamar from his biographers of the first century after his death. But Lamar’s friends and political allies accepted his conversion as genuine. James Z. George, leader of the Redeemer Mississippi Democrats and prominent advocate of black disenfranchisement, did so. Writing to Lamar in 1874, George commended Lamar for his “splendid appeal for an oblivion of the past“ while conceding that he himself had “not outlived the prejudices of the past.”¹⁵ The revisionist interpretation also ignores the significant threat to Lamar’s career from the angry swarm of Mississippi newspapers, led by the *Columbus Democrat*, *Canton Mail*, and *Meridian Mercury*, and the “bitter attacks from the radical white leaders in his home state.”¹⁶

While it would have been far easier for him to follow the example of many of his successful contemporaries, both North and South, and run for office as a demagogue waving the

¹⁵ James Z. George to L. Q. C. Lamar, May 3, 1874, L. Q. C. Lamar and Edward Mayes Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

¹⁶ Smith and Warren, *Mississippians All*, 59.

bloody shirt of bitterness and spite, Lamar's own intimate correspondence with his wife refutes this new construct of him as cynical opportunist. Writing to Virginia immediately after the Sumner eulogy, Lamar reveals an acute awareness that his advocacy of reconciliation is unpopular to his constituents and represents a grave threat to his political career: "...the Southern press is down on me. I do not blame Southern editors. Our people have suffered so much, have been betrayed so often...that it is but natural that they should be suspicious of any word or act of overture to the North by a Southern man. I know *for once* that I have done her good, that I have won friends to her side who were bitter enemies, that I have awakened sympathies where before existed animosities. It is time for a public man to try to *serve* the South, and not to subserve her irritated feelings, natural and just as those feelings are. I shall serve no other interests than hers, and will calmly and silently retire to private life if her people do not approve me."¹⁷

Lamar's speeches and correspondence demonstrate views on race similar to the prevailing paternalism of the elite, both North and South, at the time. Paternalism argued that blacks were inherently unequal to whites and required guidance from well-intentioned whites. He defended the antebellum order and slavery with skill and vigor. But, unlike most of his peers, he emerged from the Civil War professing to accept black participation in public life and even spent enormous energy courting black votes. Lamar appeared to be more concerned with Radical Republican manipulation and domination of the black vote rather than the existence of the black vote itself.¹⁸

¹⁷ L. Q. C. Lamar, Virginia Lamar, 5 May 1874, in *Lucius Q.C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893*, Edward Mayes (Nashville, Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1896), 191-192.

¹⁸ James B. Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar: Pragmatic Patriot* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 155.

Two episodes in Lamar's post-Civil War public service are revealing of his broader significance. The first is an article by Lamar in the March 1879 edition of *North American Review* defending the right of blacks to vote and the necessity of that vote for blacks to defend their new rights. The second is Lamar's forceful advocacy of federal aid for state public schools, a novel opinion in the South. Lamar believed that the South, and blacks in particular, could benefit greatly from increased literacy and education. These actions have been mentioned by earlier biographers but not deeply examined. This thesis argues that, rather than being limited to facilitating national reunification at the expense of racial reconciliation, Lamar may have helped to lay the foundation for racial reconciliation taking place in the following century.

A close look at Lamar's biography reveals the experiences and historical context that led him to embrace reconciliation. It shows how he embodied the white Southern identity in the 19th century as to give him the moral authority to one day advocate reconciliation.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LAMARS OF GEORGIA

Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, the fourth of eight children of Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus and Sarah Williamson Bird, was born in Putnam County, Georgia on September 17, 1825. Both his parents were of recognized and prominent backgrounds, and both descended from families with large land holdings in Maryland and Georgia. Through the use of land records of Maryland, previous biographers established that the Lamars descended from French Huguenot heritage.¹⁹ Lamar grew up in a family of lawyers and public servants. Lamar's grandfather, John, produced two sons of particular distinction and extraordinary ability.

His father's brother, Mirabeau B. Lamar, born in 1798, attended school both in Milledgeville and Eatonton, Georgia, and began his career as a merchant and a planter. His literary abilities led him to establish the Columbus Inquirer in 1828.²⁰ Always seeking to expand his horizons, Mirabeau, in 1835, moved to Texas and supported the Texas independence movement. He soon joined the military and became known for leading a successful cavalry charge at the Battle of San Jacinto in April 1836. The military rewarded his battlefield accomplishments with a commission as major general. He rapidly advanced through the

¹⁹ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 3-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-26.

fledgling government as attorney general and secretary of war under the provisional president, David G. Burnett.²¹

In 1836, the Republic of Texas elected Mirabeau as its first vice president, along with Sam Houston as its first president. Two years later, Texas elevated him to the presidency, and he led the young nation's campaign for recognition of its independence by the major world powers. However, his ambitious nature and impulsive temper soon made him unsuitable to the public for such a task. As a biographer noted, "His extravagance, his visionary schemes, his bitter spirit of retaliation against the Indians, his opposition to annexation to the United States, and his many intentional acts of neglect and disrespect toward General Houston made him unpopular."²² Nevertheless, he is credited with having laid the "foundations of the educational system of Texas through the consecration of noble grants of public lands to the school and university funds. He also used executive power to abate a great tide of corruption and public plunder."²³

In his later years between 1846 and his death in 1859, he secured appointment as a division inspector with the rank of lieutenant colonel, commanding a company of Texans in General Zachary Taylor's army during the Mexican War. Also, he received diplomatic appointments as United States minister to Argentina, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. Although his career included life as a farmer, journalist, writer, poet, politician, soldier, lawyer, and diplomat, he never seemed to reach his full potential. He did, however, demonstrate sincere dedication to and admiration for his brother, L. Q. C. Lamar, who became father of our subject, Lucius II.²⁴

²¹ John Howard Brown, ed. *Lamb's Biographical Dictionary of the United States* (Boston: James H. Lamb Co., 1910), 610.

²² Brown, 610.

²³ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

L. Q. C. Lamar, the oldest son of John Lamar, was highly regarded during his brief but brilliant career at the Georgia Bar. Born July 15, 1797, near Eatonton, Putnam County, Georgia, he spent his youth helping his father as a salesman behind the counter of their store. After attending Franklin College at the University of Georgia for a short time, at the age of nineteen, Lamar began reading law in the office of Joel Crawford, in Milledgeville, Georgia.²⁵ After a year he continued his study at the famous law school of Judges Tapping Reeve and James Gould at Litchfield, Connecticut. An avid reader and a determined student, Lamar passed his examinations and secured admission to the Georgia Bar in 1819. Opening his private office that year, he set out to build a significant and lucrative practice. Subsequently he joined his earlier mentor, Judge Crawford, in partnership. Lamar's marriage, in 1819 to Sarah Williamson Bird, daughter of the prominent Dr. Thompson Bird, contributed to his social stature and strengthened his prospects as a successful attorney.²⁶ But his new partnership with Judge Crawford provided him with "great opportunities of exhibiting proofs of his great legal ability that he never afterwards wanted clients or fees."²⁷ Recognized for his legal abilities and his discernment for refusing petty political patronage, Lamar, upon the death of Judge Thomas W. Cobb of the Ocmulgee circuit, quickly accepted this post, equivalent to the modern state supreme court. Only 34 years old and already popular with the public, he seemed destined to reach the highest level of service in state, and possibly even national, politics.

Lamar's reputation surpassed his parochial area and spread throughout Georgia. The legislature chose him to improve the legal system by rearranging and compiling the laws of Georgia into one code. Lamar found his work commended by "Governor Clark in 1821 and was

²⁵ Brown, *Biographical Dictionary*, 609.

²⁶ Mayes, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

published in a quarto volume of thirteen hundred pages.”²⁸ He added to these accomplishments by producing in 1819 a revised and enlarged edition of Augustine Clayton’s Georgia Justice, widely used at the time but rarely found today.

Known to many as “the great Judge Lamar,”²⁹ Lamar’s family included five children (three others died in infancy) and a loving wife. Sadly, Judge Lamar suffered from severe and recurring bouts of depression. On Independence Day in 1834, he walked out into his garden and took his own life at 37 years old. Judge Lamar’s oldest son and namesake was only nine years old.

Fortunately, his affluent career provided his young 32-year-old widow with sufficient resources to continue the education and development of their children. Surrounded by friends and family, Sarah W. B. Lamar set out to provide a creative atmosphere for rearing and educating her children. Her own background provided the understanding of the importance of education.

Sarah Lamar’s father, Dr. Thompson Bird, graduated first at William and Mary, and later at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia.³⁰ Once settling in Milledgeville, Georgia, he became one of the most respected physicians in the state. His wife, Susan Williamson Bird, mother of Sarah, earned a reputation as a very graceful, intellectual, and esteemed lady.³¹ The entire Bird family included numerous relatives accustomed to the finer things in life as a result of their families’ education, economic, and social endeavors. Thus Sarah Lamar, widow of the Judge and mother of Lucius, sought to continue this tradition of the Bird and Lamar families.

²⁸ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁰ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Mrs. Lamar moved her family to the town of Covington, Georgia, in order to take advantage of the educational opportunities in the area. She sent her two daughters, Susan Rebecca and Mary Ann, to recognized boarding schools, such as Wesleyan College at Macon.³² She enrolled her two oldest sons, Lucius and Thompson, at Emory College. Thompson eventually followed in his grandfather's footsteps at Jefferson Medical College. The youngest son, Jefferson Mirabeau, attended the University of Mississippi. Although the family considered Jefferson Mirabeau, or "Jeffey," the most brilliant, he did not live long enough to prove it. He and Thompson became victims of the Civil War's carnage. Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar became the only brother to live through adulthood.

Lamar initially enrolled in the Methodist Manual Labor School, which eventually merged with Emory College. Mrs. Lamar spent a great deal of time encouraging Lamar to read and develop his intellectual abilities, but she sought to spark his physical growth through the school's farm labor curriculum. Despite a grudging admittance that the manual labor had improved his health, Lamar preferred to spend long hours reading and thinking. As historian Dunbar Rowland noted, "Lucius loved to be alone, cultivating the powers of abstraction and concentration, and without in the least deserving it, gained a reputation for moroseness."³³ His contemplative nature and strong will in later years allowed him to anticipate with caution and dread the South's path to secession and war. Mary Boykin Chestnut remembered hearing Lamar remark, "the young men are light-hearted because there is a fight on hand, but those few who look ahead, the clear heads, they see all the risk, the loss of land, limb and life; of home, children and wife..."³⁴

³² Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 20.

³³ Dunbar Rowland, ed., "Lucius Q.C. Lamar," *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History* (Madison: Selwyn Brant, 1907), II, 23.

³⁴ Mary Boykin Chestnut, *A Diary From Dixie*, edited by Ben Ames Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949), 70.

Lamar's experience at Methodist Manual Labor School offered him the opportunity to develop his intellectual skills and speaking agility. Engaging in debates and public addresses, he often bested the rugged farm boys, who grew frightened in front of a public audience. Lamar was at his best in debate and public speaking. This practice became valuable in helping to prepare him for his future role in public life.³⁵

When the Manual Labor School became Emory College in 1838 at Oxford, less than five miles away from Covington, Mrs. Lamar sold her property and built a home in Oxford. Lamar entered the freshman class in 1841.³⁶ Emory College brought Lamar together with a man who would have a profound influence on the rest of his life, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet.

³⁵ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 24.

³⁶ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 32.

CHAPTER FOUR

LONGSTREET ASCENDING

A staunch Southerner and admirer of John C. Calhoun, born in Augusta, Georgia, September 22, 1790, Judge Longstreet arrived to assume the presidency of Emory College in January of 1840. Having graduated from Yale in 1813, studied law at the school of Reeve and Gould in Litchfield, Connecticut, practiced law, served in the Georgia Legislature and as Judge of the Ocmulgee District, the highest judiciary level at the time, Longstreet appeared eager to try his hand as the leader of a college. A Methodist minister, he frequently delivered long and persuasive sermons in the guise of speeches to his student body. Nevertheless, Emory's faculty and staff increased at an impressive rate.³⁷

Longstreet brought to Emory hopes of developing a school of young students capable of propounding and promoting Southern "feelings, views, pursuits, and interests which were in all respects identical."³⁸ Warning them that he would not tolerate at Emory the "tricks of college boys," Longstreet argued for a Southern based education, which would prove his students "an intellectual, moral and industrious people." More specifically, he usually referred to the learning of Southern politics, which included states rights, anti-abolitionism, pro-slavery, and white supremacy arguments.³⁹ Using Biblical passages as a pivotal point of argument, he not only

³⁷ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 35-38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

disarmed his Methodist faculty and student body but also appealed to their emotions and personal family backgrounds.

The lawyer, judge, preacher, politician, and college administrator deeply impressed Lamar, who imbibed the older man's self-conscious Southern identity that would long give him regional authority throughout the South. Like Longstreet, Lamar exhibited no qualms over the ownership of slaves or the supremacy of whites. These traditions had been practiced for decades by Americans and were an integral part of the social and economic system of the time. Longstreet presented an unashamed image of these facts of life, which caused his students to glorify their traditions and customs. Lamar, like most of his young colleagues, carefully observed Longstreet's leadership and respected reputation, which went well beyond the Emory campus.⁴⁰

With the Methodist denomination in deep dissension between 1841 and 1845 over whether slavery should be sanctioned, Longstreet played an active leadership role in promoting its acceptance. The General Methodist Conference of 1836 met in Cincinnati, Ohio, and began the assault on slavery within its membership. In 1844, the abolitionist Methodists forced the issue at the General Conference in New York by taking the unprecedented action of demanding the Bishop of Georgia resign because he owned slaves. Longstreet responded by presenting his Declaration of the Southern Delegates, which warned that the Southern congregations would leave the denomination if continually harassed. When the abolitionist forces refused to compromise, Longstreet again led the way and presented the Plan of Separation, which created the Southern Conference of the Methodist Church.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

The students at Emory lauded their president upon his return to campus. Lamar's respect for Longstreet and deep affection for his family grew even stronger over the years. Many years later he wrote to a friend and confessed that "I don't know what I would give for old Judge Longstreet's faith and courage."⁴² Lamar never forgot the stern political and social education he received at Oxford, Georgia, and Emory College under Judge Longstreet. He constantly reminded his friends and family: "No spot on earth ... helped to form and make me what I am as this town of Oxford."⁴³

Although Lamar's academic record at Emory had not been exceptional, he graduated in 1845 and began the study of law under an established lawyer and his youngest aunt's husband, Absalom Chappell. Within two years he passed the Georgia Bar with distinction and established his first practice in Macon, Georgia. Lamar struggled to establish himself and began seeking opportunities elsewhere.⁴⁴ In the meantime, Lamar courted Virginia Longstreet, daughter of Judge Longstreet of Emory. They married on July 15, 1847.

Lamar's marriage to Judge Longstreet's daughter strengthened the already powerful influence of Longstreet over Lamar. While continuing his practice in Covington, only two miles from Emory and in the shadow of his mentor and father-in-law, Lamar eagerly observed and dabbled in politics. Lamar attended the 1847 and 1849 Georgia Democratic conventions and began to develop a social network with other politicians.

Longstreet became president of the University of Mississippi in September 1849. Almost immediately upon settling in Oxford, Mississippi, he began to write Lamar, encouraging him to move to Mississippi. Impressed by a combination of attractive law offers, teaching, and possible

⁴² Mayes, 561.

⁴³ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁴ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar* 37.

political opportunities in a newly settled region, Lamar, his family, overseers, and slaves made the long, weary journey to Mississippi by carriage and covered wagons.⁴⁵ Longstreet's other son-in-law, Dr. Henry Branham, soon joined them.

Since there were no available positions in Lamar's fields of politics, history, or law, Longstreet persuaded the mathematics chairman to appoint Lamar as an adjunct professor of mathematics, his worst subject. Lamar worked hard to compensate for his shortcomings by exchanging considerable correspondence with mathematics faculty at Emory College. He also qualified for the Mississippi Bar and began to establish a law practice. He also sought other jobs to earn extra income for his mother, who experienced financial difficulty.⁴⁶

In Oxford, Lamar enjoyed the close family relationship with the Longstreets and Branhams and often wrote to friends in Georgia of the opportunities available in Mississippi. Writing to his law mentor and relative, Absalom Chappell, he declared: "This is a magnificent country for planters. There are men here who left Newton County (Georgia) poor and in debt eight and ten years ago, who now have a good plantation and fifteen to twenty hands, and are buying more every year..."⁴⁷ While Lamar the planter appeared delighted with the economic prospects, Lamar the lawyer and professor began to express dissatisfaction. He also revealed homesickness for Georgia and the friends and family remaining there. Lamar wrote to a friend in Georgia: "You cannot be more anxious than I am that my return to Georgia should be a speedy one...I could get rich out here, at what I am doing now, but I don't care about it. The truth is I have no Mississippi ambition."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 34.

⁴⁶ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 45-46.

⁴⁷ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

Circumstances prevented his immediate return to Georgia. Lamar's duties as professor and lawyer caused many to notice his ability to debate and speak in public. Just as in Georgia, Lamar eagerly observed the state's political scene and attended many political gatherings. Lamar's first major introduction to the Mississippi public came in a debate with one of Mississippi's United States Senators, Henry S. Foote.

Opposed to upsetting the careful balance of slave and non-slave states in the United States carefully crafted over decades of Congressional compromises, the Mississippi Legislature instructed the state's Congressional delegation to oppose the admission of California as a single non-slave state rather than two states, one slave and one free. Senator Foote ignored the state's instructions and voted to approve the Compromise of 1850, which allowed for California's admission as a single non-slave state. Although not illegal, disregarding a state legislature's instructions to its Congressional delegation was rare and almost always controversial in the 19th century.⁴⁹ Foote's disobedience caused a firestorm back in Mississippi.

Immediately censured by the Mississippi Legislature and roundly criticized in the state's press, Foote countered by organizing a new faction calling itself the submissionists or Union Party. The statewide elections of 1851 became the major referendum on Foote and the question of further compromise with the North.⁵⁰ The regular Democratic Party chose Mississippi's other United States Senator, Jefferson Davis, to oppose Foote in the race for governor.

The two parties scheduled joint debates throughout the state prior to the election, including in Oxford. After Davis became ill and was forced to remain in bed, prominent Oxford politicians and friends of Lamar, such as Longstreet and Jacob Thompson, used their influence and

⁴⁹ Bradley G. Bond. *Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 100-102.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

grabbed the opportunity for Lamar to use his known powers of debate in this much-publicized event. Although he doubted “his own competency” to face a seasoned national politician, the 26-year-old reluctantly agreed to Longstreet’s and Thompson’s wish.⁵¹

Realizing the numerous obstacles of facing such a daunting foe and recognizing the doubt of even his close friends, Lamar acknowledged immediately his own lack of experience and proven ability to refute successfully a veteran of Southern politics. Nevertheless, he launched a spirited attack on Foote, making clear that Foote deviated from Southern traditions, principles, and thought while appealing to the emotions of his students, colleagues, and friends in the crowd. Foote attempted to frame the debate as a choice between union or disunion. Instead, Lamar successfully portrayed Foote as a desperate politician seeking to force the issue of disunion prematurely, while completely ignoring all of the broken promises to the South in previous Congressional compromises. Lamar painted Foote as a foolish victim of abolitionist propaganda, who failed to grasp the growing helplessness of the South in national politics.⁵²

Lamar impressed the majority of the audience with his eloquence and striking responses. His students were so delighted with his performance that they carried him away from the cheering crowd on their shoulders. The extremely positive response increased his confidence in himself and helped launch his political career.⁵³

Lamar’s wife exerted a profound influence on him throughout his life, and his connection through her to Longstreet shaped his career. During her last years, Lamar’s wife suffered from

⁵¹ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 39-40.

⁵² Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51-54.

recurring illness that limited her mobility and required her separation from Lamar while he was in Washington.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 27-44.

CHAPTER FIVE

TERRAIN OF THE HEART

Losing his father at nine years old seems to have influenced Lamar in many ways. One way may have been to increase the influence Judge Longstreet held over him as teacher, mentor, and father-in-law, possibly seeing him as a surrogate father. Another way may have been to increase his natural nostalgia for Georgia as the cradle of the great Lamar men he heard so much about from those around him. Lamar revealed some of his thinking on this in a letter to a friend in Georgia: “It would not be hard to get to Congress from this district, but all my patriotism and ambition (these are synonymous words now, are they not?) is in Georgia. It is not only my native state but it is the home of most all that is dear to my heart. There is one circumstance which alone is sufficient to endear me to Georgia above all other places: in her bosom rests the sacred dust of my honored father whose blood, whose name, whose very temperament, whose everything (save his shining virtue and surprising genius) I have inherited.”⁵⁵

While clearly conflicted over where to permanently establish his family and career, Lamar’s views on slavery appeared just as complicated, presaging the complexity of his postwar views on race. Lamar’s family owned land and slaves for over a century before his birth, and he never missed a chance to defend the South’s honor against militant Northern abolitionist attacks and its right to own slaves as recognized by the Constitution. But he appeared ambivalent about his own personal role as a slave owner, evincing a somewhat Jeffersonian view of slavery as a necessary evil rather than a positive good. Discussing his upcoming move home, he wrote: “I

⁵⁵ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 41.

am somewhat embarrassed as to what disposition I shall make of my negroes. I have 15 and will have no place for them in Georgia.”⁵⁶

In 1852, Lamar moved back to Covington, Georgia, and opened a law practice with his old friend, Robert Harper. As he had anticipated, the law practice proved profitable. Lamar also renewed old friendships and expanded his network of social connections. His established family name and growing personal popularity led to his election to the state legislature as a Democrat.⁵⁷

The circle of mentors back in Oxford, Mississippi continued to encourage and advise Lamar. Lamar recalled that Judge Longstreet, Jacob Thompson, John Waddel and others contributed to political and professional development. Longstreet pushed him to strive for “imperishable fame.”⁵⁸ Jacob Thompson, a Congressman representing North Mississippi and a trustee of the University of Mississippi, successfully encouraged Lamar early in his career to improve his disposition and personality. Thompson’s own reputation and power increased his young ally’s profile. He spent a great deal of effort promoting Lamar, whose first nomination to Congress became possible due to Thompson’s influence “openly exerted in his behalf against very distinguished and powerful men in the district.”⁵⁹ Lamar often grew weary of politics and the demonization of the South by extremist abolitionists and sometimes spoke of becoming a Methodist minister like his father-in-law Longstreet. John Waddel, a colleague in the mathematics department of the University of Mississippi, who would later become its president, counseled Lamar: “No, sir; you will surely pass your life in the world of politics.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 42.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁸ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 55.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁰ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 57.

Lamar spent two years back in Georgia, but his wife and children remained with the Longstreets in Mississippi for most of that time. While his law practice did well initially, it began to falter as his partner became ill with tuberculosis. And Lamar's political career hit an unexpected snag.

Congressman David Bailey made it known he was retiring and would not run for reelection. Lamar's friends convinced him to run for the Democratic nomination. But Bailey changed his mind and announced for reelection. Although very disappointed, Lamar seemed to accept the situation as the nature of politics and withdrew his name. His friends went ahead to the convention anyway and fought a long nomination battle on his behalf but eventually lost to the incumbent by one vote.

Lonely for his wife and children, sick, dispirited, and suffering financial stress, Lamar returned to Mississippi in October of 1855 determined to find happiness. Seeking to avoid the congested Longstreet household, Lamar purchased an eleven hundred acre plantation along the Tallahatchie River in Lafayette County and named it Solitude.⁶¹

Most of Lamar's direct experience as a slave owner came with a few household servants and approximately a dozen field laborers supervised by other family members on their farms. Lamar's brief tenure at Solitude served as his only experience as the stereotypical Southern planter. He gave the orders for planting, cultivating, and harvesting to his wife who then passed them to the overseers. Displaying the conventional view of his peers of slavery as paternalism, Lamar viewed his role as a duty to preside over, as Edward Mayes noted, "a numerous body of dependents, for all of whom he felt himself responsible, about whom his anxieties were alive,

⁶¹ Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 60-61.

whose tasks he appointed, and whose labors he directed...⁶² Lamar seemed to appreciate his time there in “communion with himself, in the opportunities for continued study” of law, history, politics, economics, and philosophy. Taking seriously his intense studies in preparation for leadership, Lamar separated his personal office from the house under shade trees in a quiet area.⁶³

With Solitude never being very profitable, Lamar continued to practice law by forming a new partnership with Christopher H. Mott and James L. Autry in Holly Springs, Mississippi. They maintained a small but respectable business. Both men became close friends of Lamar, and he mourned their loss when killed later in battle during the Civil War. Lamar received several offers to join larger law firms in larger cities, such as Memphis. Responding to one such offer from an old college friend and former law partner in Georgia, Lamar stated: “I do not think I can go to Memphis to practice my profession. I do not look to be more than a village lawyer or a country gentleman. I have relinquished all my high hopes of imperishable fame.”⁶⁴ Lamar displayed a streak of melancholy throughout his life, earning the nickname Moody Lamar. His personality combined a complex mixture of ambition and intelligence along with depression and self-doubt.

Claiming to enjoy the peace of Solitude and resignation to the life of a gentleman scholar, Lamar’s political activities revealed one eager to be in the thick of events. While the Jefferson Davis Democrats he embraced in the 1851 campaign failed to defeat Henry Foote for governor, Lamar renewed his political acquaintances and maintained a large correspondence assessing the political environment.

⁶² Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 60-61.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 50.

CHAPTER SIX

FIERCE MODERATION

Lamar's opportunity came in 1857 when Congressman Daniel Wright announced he would not be seeking reelection to represent North Mississippi. Lamar's forces immediately went to work to help him win the nomination. Fortunately for Lamar, one of the region's most influential newspapers, the Memphis Daily Appeal, recommended him as a possible nominee in particularly strong terms.⁶⁵ Throughout this time, Lamar also received encouragement to return to the faculty of the University of Mississippi, this time as a professor of metaphysics. Although he had been influential in helping elect F.A.P. Barnard university president upon the retirement of his father-in-law and truly enjoying his time on campus, Lamar declined the flattering entreaties to concentrate on politics.⁶⁶

The Whigs formed a coalition with the Know-Nothings and nominated James L. Alcorn. A seasoned attorney known for representing Delta planters and helping create the state levee system, Alcorn appeared to be a formidable opponent for the Democrats. The Democrats did not have an immediate front-runner, but Lamar's friends, especially former Congressman Jacob Thompson of Oxford, worked tirelessly and successfully helped him win the nomination.⁶⁷

While Alcorn proved to be a capable speaker and tireless campaigner, the Whig program of moderation regarding the slavery issue failed to represent the public's indignant reaction to the increasing heated rhetoric and militancy of Northern abolitionists toward the South. The

⁶⁵ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 63

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 51.

Democrats seized on this anger and responded with its own boiling rhetoric, which struck a chord with the voting public. Although critics questioned him intensely about his affiliation with Howell Cobb of Georgia, a Unionist and close friend, Lamar prevailed in the general election. This question of Lamar's ties to Howell Cobb deserves greater scholarly research. Is it possible that a skillful politician like Lamar, although certainly an honest defender of states' rights and slavery, used stronger rhetoric than he might normally regarding these issues to compensate for the known close relationship to Unionists, who had fallen out of favor since their victories in 1851-1852?

On December 1, 1857, Lamar took the oath of office as a member of the United States House of Representatives. His Southern colleagues generally accepted him, but his conservative nature and temperament kept him somewhat distant. Lamar's speaking abilities and support of states rights and slavery helped overcome these personality differences, but questions about his affiliations with Howell Cobb and Georgia Unionists and a close friendship with Kansas Governor Robert J. Walker, considered by many to be anti-slavery, continued to cause skepticism among many Mississippians. Lamar responded to these concerns by denouncing Walker's position. Developing a reputation as "eloquent, impetuous, scholarly, and defiant," Lamar felt forced by expectations to speak out and clearly define himself as a strong defender of the South.⁶⁸

Lamar worked hard to prove himself. He spent hours praising Southern honor and traditions, vigorously defending the right to extend slavery in accordance with previous Congressional compromises and protect it wherever it already existed. Lamar acknowledged the influence of his family, education, and especially Judge Longstreet in forming his opinion on

⁶⁸ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 57.

these issues. His effective defense of the South soon earned Lamar compliments from the region's press as their "new eloquent champion."⁶⁹

In October 1859, the people of North Mississippi reelected Lamar without opposition.⁷⁰ Somewhat surprised by his immediate success, he was proud to share it with his father-in-law Judge Longstreet, now leader of the University of South Carolina, in an 1860 letter: "My position here is a far higher one than I ever expected to attain. The praises which I receive are so extravagant that I sometimes fear it is flattery." He went on to describe how the President of the United States, James Buchanan, sought his advice on speeches and the issues of the day to the exclusion of other prominent officials.⁷¹

While he enjoyed his work representing Mississippi and the compliments and support he received, the militant rhetoric and uncompromising political atmosphere threatening the nation stressed him so much that it began to affect his health. Although he resented what he viewed as the North's denial of the South's political equality, Lamar, unlike many of the South's leaders, clearly understood the stakes of separation, declaring: "Dissolution cannot take place quietly; the vast and complicated machinery of this government cannot be divided without general turmoil, and it may be ruin. When the sun of the Union sets it will go down in blood."⁷² While he resolutely defended the South's right to defend itself from Northern attacks, Lamar "preferred always a peaceable settlement of political questions."⁷³

Lamar continued to be conflicted by his dual nature of ambitious politician and thoughtful scholar. Resenting the social and political forces requiring a politician like him to

⁶⁹ Cate, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 58.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷¹ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 81.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷³ Cate, 59.

make false choices between the lesser of two evils, in this case the choosing of sides between the dishonor of Southern capitulation and the bloody honor of defending themselves, Lamar wrote to his wife in 1858: “I regret to say this for I would be glad to lay before you the record of holy thoughts and fervent aspirations and prayers. I want to be Christian but I fear that as long as I am bound up in public life my mind will be too much bound up in the affairs of this world.”⁷⁴

Lamar began exploring with friends, such as Dr. F. A. P. Barnard, options allowing him to retire from Congress and return home to Oxford.⁷⁵ As on earlier occasions when Lamar expressed doubts about his efficacy in Washington, Lamar’s friends and mentors convinced him to stay the course.

The rapid deterioration of public discourse between North and South allowed for self-promotion by extremists and opportunists on both sides by fanning the flames of hate.⁷⁶ While Southern extremists, or fire-eaters, such as Albert Gallatin Brown and William Yancey, advocated immediate secession and creation of a new slave nation, Lamar disagreed and took pains not to be publicly associated with these agitators. Trying to calm a divisive debate over the Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1859, Lamar revealed his stand on secession: “I am no disunionist per se. I am devoted to the constitution of this Union, and as long as this republic is a great tolerant republic, throwing its loving arms around both sections of the country, I, for one, will bestow every talent which God has given me for its promotion and its glory.”⁷⁷

In one of his most interesting and telling letters, written to close friend Dr. Barnard in 1859, Lamar says:

⁷⁴ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 559.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁶ James G. Randall and David Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*. Second Edition. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1961), 107.

⁷⁷ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 81.

The sectional war rages with unabated violence. No one started out with more honest indignation than I felt. But I begin to hope that there exists a mutual misunderstanding between the two sections, brought about by ultra party leaders and deluded fanatics. I think I can see, through all the rancor and madness of this struggle, the slow evolution of right principles. What is now the greatest need is some one man, one true man, who will present the controversy in its true light – who, rising above the passions and prejudices of the times, will speak to both sections in a spirit at once tolerant, just, generous, humane, and national. No one has shown himself to be that man yet. I think I know one (a friend of yours and mine) who might do it. I think he has clear perceptions of his duty, high and noble sentiment, and a heart big with pure and holy affection for his whole country; but his love for repose, shrinking from the uproar and confusion of party strife, will, I fear cause him to be, what he has always been, wanting in the energy and courage to execute what his reason designs, his conscience approves, or his duty dictates.⁷⁸

Lamar never gave that speech, his fears and self-doubt winning out. Would this stand, from such a leading figure, have altered the nation's course toward war with itself? His failure to act seemed to haunt Lamar later after the war, helping to drive him from public life for several years. But Lamar also appeared to have learned from this mistake by preparing for and seizing the moment to deliver a surprising and forceful speech for reconciliation during Charles Sumner's eulogy.

Lamar continued to speak forcefully in defense of the South and hoped the North would somehow compromise to avoid the approaching conflict. Upon the splintering of the Democratic Party into sectional factions, Lamar anticipated the abolitionist Republican Party would elect their first President of the United States and secure a majority in Congress. He knew that the entire federal government in the hands of a sectional party driven mainly by abolitionists would be unacceptable to most Southern states and would unavoidably lead to secession and bloodshed.

While feeling helpless and despondent over the future and seeking again to find a way to retire to a quieter life in Oxford, Lamar displayed his conservative nature by pursuing a course of

⁷⁸ Mayes, 81.

moderation over the question of secession. During a meeting convened by fire-eater Governor John J. Pettus with the Mississippi Congressional delegation to discuss the state's options, Lamar voted against two resolutions in favor of secession, one requesting the governor and legislature call a secession convention for Mississippi and the other advising South Carolina to secede immediately rather than wait four months until the Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in March. The six delegation members in attendance tied on both votes, but Governor Pettus cast the deciding vote in favor of both resolutions. The issue decided, the group agreed to formally make the vote unanimous.⁷⁹ The next day in Brandon Lamar delivered a speech that placed the blame of the coming bloodshed squarely on Northern radicals; so extreme they ironically forced their states to interpose themselves and nullify federal laws reached through compromise. The Jackson Weekly Clarion gave the following account: "He pictured in vivid colors the aggressions of the North upon the South since the enactment of the Compromise measures of 1850. Those measures were adopted by both sections as a final settlement of the slavery question, each agreeing that they be carried out in good faith. Yet we to-day see upon the statute books of fourteen Northern States enactments nullifying the Fugitive Slave Law, which law was the only advantage or concession that the South gained in the Compromise measures. He was unwilling to enter into any more compromises, or accept guaranties from a people who had so flagrantly violated former agreements of that kind."⁸⁰ Reluctantly and with much sorrow, Lamar joined the movement for a separate republic as the South's last line of defense.

Anticipating Mississippi's imminent independence from the United States, Lamar resigned his House seat and returned to Oxford. The people of Lafayette County elected him to the secessionist convention called for January 7, 1861. Lamar immediately sought to guide the

⁷⁹ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 87.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

process towards independence as smoothly and moderately as possible by assuming leadership of drafting the ordinance of secession. Lamar's conservative nature caused him concern over the more radical elements supporting secession, whom he feared experimenting with new models of government. He sought to highlight the South having been left behind by what he mourned as a now warped and foreign empire, as the retainer of the Constitutional principles of the Founding Fathers. Rather than uprooting the laws and institutions of the old United States, Lamar designed a process that he proudly described to a friend: "It will be observed that the plan proposed aims at no change in our form of government, but seeks to protect existing forms from destruction. It proposes to give us our old glorious Constitution in vigorous operation...It gives us all the laws of the old Republic, and those grand decisions of the Judiciary, which have grown up around the Constitution..."⁸¹ Lamar's ordinance mentions slavery as part of this existing form.

On January 9, 1861, the convention called up for final passage Lamar's ordinance declaring Mississippi's independence from the United States. Spectators packing the galleries and floor gathered to watch the solemn scene. With tears in the eyes of many, the delegates quietly answered the roll call with an aye or nay. The chamber remained deathly still while the final tally revealed adoption by eighty-four votes to fifteen. The profound silence continuing, the members and spectators bowed their heads and joined together in prayer seeking God's blessing for the momentous decision. Cannon fire and fire bells outside broke the silence, foreshadowing events to come.⁸²

⁸¹ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 631.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 92.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I SHALL STAY WITH MY PEOPLE AND SHARE THEIR FATE

Mississippi's secession convention appointed the state's Congressional delegation to continue to represent Mississippi in a future Confederate Congress, but the convention of states assembled in Montgomery, Alabama to forge a new national union decided to continue on and serve as the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States of America. Freed from his Congressional responsibilities, Lamar assisted his law partner and friend, Christopher H. Mott, in organizing the Nineteenth Mississippi Regiment for military service under the new Confederate government. With Mott leading as colonel and Lamar serving as lieutenant colonel, the regiment reported directly to the new national capital in Richmond, Virginia.

Although never complaining, Lamar's correspondence betrays his boredom with military life. His camp life consisted of "daily drill, its hourly demand of small details of police, equipment, and organization."⁸³ The stress, living conditions, and poor food soon started to affect his already fragile health. Lamar suffered his first stroke on July 1, creating paralysis on one side of his body and forcing his removal back to Oxford for recuperation. While rebuilding his health, Lamar received an offer of promotion to the rank of general, but declined in favor of Colonel Mott.

Lamar returned to the front and helped lead troops at the Battle of Williamsburg in the Peninsula Campaign of May 1862. The action stalled the United States advance, but Lamar's unit suffered terrible casualties, including Colonel Mott, his closest friend and leader of the regiment.

⁸³ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 96.

Having to assume direction of the campaign during the battle after Mott's death, Lamar demonstrated personal courage in the face of fire and received three citations for bravery and leadership.⁸⁴

Two days after the battle and on the eve of his next engagement, Lamar suffered another stroke, this time more violent. Sent to Macon, Georgia to recover with his family, Lamar received the shocking news of the death of his favorite brother, Jefferson Mirabeau Lamar, and his cousin, John B. Lamar, both in battle at Crampton's Gap, Maryland. Lamar eventually recovered, but decided his health would never allow him to effectively serve his regiment, so he retired from the military and offered his services to President Jefferson Davis.

Very aware of Lamar's abilities through years as political allies and colleagues in the Mississippi Congressional delegation, President Davis appointed him special commissioner, or ambassador, to the Russian Empire in November of 1862. So far unsuccessful in convincing England and France to recognize the Confederacy's independence, Davis tasked Lamar with convincing the Czar of Russia to do so. Gathering as much political, commercial, and diplomatic intelligence as possible during his six-month travel through Europe, Lamar nonetheless had to return when the Confederate Congress cancelled the diplomatic mission before he reached Russia to demonstrate their disapproval of Russia's inaction in the war after Confederate losses at Vicksburg and Gettysburg.⁸⁵

After a circuitous trip home, Lamar returned to work for President Davis, this time travelling the country and giving speeches to boost morale and defend Davis from critics, such as Vice President Alexander Stephens and Georgia Governor Joseph E. Brown. Ill health kept him with his family in Georgia for most of 1864. During this time Lamar endured one of his most

⁸⁴ Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 99.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

crippling periods of melancholy, or depression, triggered by a long list of deaths, which included his sister, last brother, another law partner, his aunt, grandfather, and numerous others.⁸⁶

Concerned that he may follow in his father's footsteps and take his own life, friends and family encouraged him to accept appointment as judge advocate of the military court of the Third Army with the rank of colonel.

Remembering this responsibility as "the most unpleasant duty I ever had to perform in my life," it led him to be present with the Confederate Army at General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. Well aware that leaders of most failed rebellions throughout history usually wound up hanged, shot, or at least in prison, a fearful fellow Confederate officer asked Lamar about the talk of fleeing the South for the safety of Europe or Mexico and if Lamar would join them. Lamar replied with a shaken voice and holding back tears: "I shall stay with my people, and share their fate. I feel it to be my duty to devote my life to the alleviation...of the sufferings this day's disaster will entail upon them."⁸⁷

Edward Mayes later characterized the benefits of the war as worth its terrible costs to his country and region. He wrote "the losses and sufferings endured were not an extravagant price to pay for . . . the assurance of an indestructible Union . . . [and] the extirpation of the deplorable cancer of slavery."⁸⁸ But it is doubtful whether Lamar could easily share such peace at the war's end. He had collapsed several times from the stresses of war. He had lost both his brothers in battle -- his younger brother Jefferson, a lieutenant colonel, died in September 1862 from wounds received in action, and his older brother Thompson, a colonel, fell in battle in 1864. He

⁸⁶ Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 560.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

had lost law partners, cousins, former students, untold friends and comrades, and most of his money.⁸⁹

The war and defeat were sobering experiences, and one can only speculate about their impact on Lamar's inner life. Lamar's Methodist background and contemplative nature may have helped to moderate his views on divisive issues, such as race. Although lacking any formal connection to a church throughout much of his life, Lamar appeared to take his religious beliefs and studies seriously. Dr. John Waddel, a professor and chancellor of the University of Mississippi, recorded a discussion he had with Lamar: "I remember a casual conversation I held with him during his first years in Oxford, in which, as we spoke of his future, he remarked that he would not be surprised if he should end his life work in the ministry of the Methodist Church."⁹⁰ He finally became an active communicant of the Methodist Church in 1891.⁹¹

Immediately after the war Lamar practiced law in Coffeetown with General Edward C. Walthall. However, his fragile health soon forced him to terminate the partnership. Needing an income, he returned to the University of Mississippi full-time as professor of ethics and metaphysics while also practicing law. In January of 1867 he was appointed professor of law. The law school, as the only professional school at the University until 1903, enjoyed administrative autonomy. From its founding, the law school emphasized the need to link the study of law with philosophy and history. Over four years, thirty-eight of his fifty-four students graduated and qualified for practice in the state.⁹²

⁸⁹ Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*, 139-140.

⁹⁰ John Newton Waddel, *Memorials of Academic Life* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1891).

⁹¹ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 564.

⁹² Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 88-93.

By 1869 he was sufficiently solvent to purchase thirty acres of land near the center of Oxford and to construct a six-room frame house, which local citizens recently purchased and renovated and donated to the City of Oxford as a museum. After the gubernatorial election of 1870, the new Republican governor, his former Congressional opponent James L. Alcorn, appointed a new board of trustees for the University, and Lamar resigned to protest the political interference in academic affairs.⁹³

Immediately after the war, many of Lamar's friends and allies advised him to leave the country to avoid retaliation from radical Republicans. Arrest warrants were issued for some, including fellow Oxonian Jacob Thompson, former Congressman and President Buchanan's Secretary of the Interior. While he chose to stay and face the consequences with his constituents, Lamar exiled himself from the political arena. He believed that he and the other antebellum leaders discredited themselves and were no longer fit for leadership. While eagerly observing political events, Lamar's self-imposed exile lasted for seven years.⁹⁴

⁹³ Murphy, 97-98.

⁹⁴ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 121.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RADICAL CENTRIST

Distressed by the actions of radical Republicans and the poverty of the South, Lamar resumed his national political career in 1872. A two to one majority elected him to Congress despite the Reconstruction-era Fourteenth Amendment bill of attainder prohibiting former Confederate public servants from holding office again. Supported by Mississippi's Republican Governor and Mississippi Senator Blanche Bruce, a former slave and Republican, Congress acted quickly to remove his disability, and Republican President Ulysses Grant signed the bill.⁹⁵ Lamar became the first former Confederate and Democrat from Mississippi elected to Congress after the Civil War. His first major speech in Congress was his eulogy on Charles Sumner, the abolitionist Senator from Massachusetts. Lamar's plea for an end to sectional hatred stunned the audience and electrified the nation. The speech quickly earned Lamar national reputation as the Southern spokesman for reconciliation and reunion.

Even his most critical biographers have praised the political timing and rhetorical brilliance of the eulogy on Sumner.⁹⁶ The speech also proclaimed the two, sometimes inconsistent, themes that motivated much of the rest of his career. On the one hand, he promoted his sectional identity and pleaded for "the impoverished and suffering people of the Southern States"; on the other hand, he stressed the principles that both North and South held in common,

⁹⁵ Cate, *Secession and Reunion*, 148-149.

⁹⁶ Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 115-120.

"the heroism, fortitude, and courage of Americans in a war of ideas."⁹⁷ His plea for mutual understanding and love at the end of the Sumner speech was a plea for acceptance of full Southern participation in the reunited country. But it was simultaneously a plea to his constituency for resignation in the defeat of the movement for Southern independence and for the renunciation of key values associated with it. For the rest of his political life, Lamar appeared conscious that with every word he addressed two audiences with two different, but complimentary, messages.

Lamar had further opportunities to play his role as the symbol of reconciliation. In 1881 in the Senate he would be one of the only Southerners to support a bill to preserve Ulysses Grant's military pension: "The general most eminent in a war which a majority of the American people do, as we all know, regard as sacred in its motives and as important in its consequences as the War of the Revolution, should be secured an honorable competence at the close of [his] long and arduous service." As in the speech on Sumner, Lamar conceded defeat, yet infused the war experience with meaning for all sides by identifying it with enduring values that transcended the politics of either side. He was ever careful to explain that such a broad, conciliatory perspective did not threaten any Southern interest.⁹⁸

The racism that Lamar expressed so freely in defense of slavery before the Civil War continued after the war. He shared with most white men of his day a complex view of racial character, which viewed blacks as inherently and naturally inferior in virtually every respect.⁹⁹ As with Lamar, such racism often existed alongside a benevolent paternalism, and Lamar was

⁹⁷ Congress, House, Representative Lamar, 43rd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 2, pt. 4 (27 April 1874): 3410-11.

⁹⁸ Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2006), 104-105.

⁹⁹ Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 203-204.

remembered for his anonymous charity to poor blacks. After Lamar's death, black Mississippi Republican Senator Blanche K. Bruce recalled one of many examples of Lamar's generosity while Secretary of the Interior: "On another occasion a poor old colored woman who held a minor position in the department ... was dismissed without his knowledge, and her place was given to another. She appealed to me, and I early the next morning called at the Secretary's residence and urged her restoration. He said: 'Bruce, tell the woman to come to me twice each month, and she will receive her salary'. I learned afterwards that her salary came out of the pocket of the kind-hearted Secretary, and not out of the public treasury."¹⁰⁰

The unusually close personal and political relationship between Blanche Bruce and Lamar is also telling of Lamar's evolving views on race. Representing Mississippi from 1874 to 1881, Bruce is the only former slave to ever serve in the United States Senate. Although belonging to two opposing political parties, the Mississippians worked very well together on behalf of their state. Lamar ignored social conventions of the Deep South white elite by entertaining Bruce at his residence. Writing to his confidant and former law partner E.D. Clark of Vicksburg regarding Bruce, Lamar declares: "He strikes me too as a man of truth, and the fact is I believed him to be a noble negro."¹⁰¹ Lamar even took the extraordinary step of publicly arguing in January 1881 that Bruce should be appointed to the Cabinet of President James Garfield.¹⁰² Although declining to appoint him to the Cabinet, President Garfield named Bruce Register of the Treasury, making his the first black's signature to appear on all the nation's paper

¹⁰⁰ Tribute of Blanche K. Bruce On the Life and Character of Mr. Lamar, *Boston Herald*, January 28, 1893.

¹⁰¹ L. Q. C. Lamar letter to E.D. Clark, March 15, 1877, in L. Q. C. Lamar Collection, Special Collections Library, The University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS.

¹⁰² *Jackson Weekly Clarion*, January 27, 1881.

currency.¹⁰³ Lamar's public stand on behalf of his black colleague could be considered radical in view that it would be another 84 years before President Lyndon Johnson appointed the first black to the Cabinet in 1966.

Interestingly, besides the few brief mentions of his cordial relationship with Bruce, Lamar's biographers pay little attention to his relationships and interactions with other black Republicans. Mississippi sent several well known black Republicans to Congress during this time, including Hiram Revels to the Senate and John Roy Lynch to the House of Representatives. Although ignored by Lamar sources, biographies of and writings by these black Republicans reveal positive relationships with Lamar that are important to them. John Roy Lynch devoted an entire chapter in *The Facts of Reconstruction* (1913) to complimenting Lamar for working to retain blacks in government jobs after Democrats returned to power.

His consistent opposition to federal civil rights legislation might be politically understandable. For Lamar, redemption of state sovereignty was incompatible with federal protection of black rights, a role he believed reserved to the states by the Constitution. But his persistent denial in national forums of the existence of serious racial conflict in the South and his denial of any interference with black voting rights have supported accusations that Lamar engaged in a deliberate and cynical policy of disinformation. But even his most critical biographer concludes that "nothing in his correspondence indicates willful hypocrisy, and no inconsistency appears between his public and private declarations."¹⁰⁴

A balanced judgment of his historical role must record that, unlike other leaders of the Confederacy, he did not retreat into a martyr-like conviction of the injustice of the defeat of the

¹⁰³ Maurine Christopher, *America's Black Congressmen* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1971), 23.

¹⁰⁴ Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 133.

Confederacy; nor did he flee his state and country, whose reunification pressed home the painful lessons of defeat. Lamar accepted the reality of defeat, and his return to national politics reflected his commitment to participating in a new national order. Besides championing appointment of the first black to the President's Cabinet, as part of the postwar status quo, he conceded both the need for and benefits of black voting rights. Lamar, writing in *The North American Review*, declared: "I concur . . . that the ballot has been in the hands of the negro both a defense and an education . . . If slavery was to be abolished, it must, I think, be admitted that there could be nothing short of complete abolition, free from any of the affinities of slavery; and this would not have been effected so long as there existed any inequality before the law. The ballot was, therefore, a protection of the negro against any such condition, and enabled him to force his interests upon the legislative consideration of the South."¹⁰⁵

Lamar rationalized the domination of the black vote by the Republican Party as manipulation by Northern radicals and the inevitable result of the fact that "at this stage of its progress, the negro vote can not intelligently direct itself." Yet in his campaigns, Lamar appealed to the vote of blacks, and he rejected the "color line" approach favored by extremist Democrats.¹⁰⁶ Lamar's acceptance of the black vote was not just a concession to the inevitable. Rather Lamar's recognition of black legal rights was a radical change from his pre-war views, and his brilliant rhetorical defense of black rights helped create the conditions for a national compromise in which his region's acceptance of the letter, if not the spirit, of the postwar Constitutional amendments was a crucial, and by no means assured, ingredient.

¹⁰⁵ L. Q. C. Lamar, "Ought the Negro to Be Disenfranchised? Ought He to Have Been Enfranchised?" *The North American Review* 128, no. 168 (March 1879): 231-239.

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 155-156.

Lamar early recognized the central economic role of the federal government after the Civil War, and he devoted serious attention to the chief economic issues that came before Congress. The policy he came to advocate was a mix of monetary conservatism -- he opposed devaluing currency or freeing it from the gold standard -- and fiscal activism. He supported federal projects to develop economic infrastructure, such as projects to reclaim and improve land along the Mississippi River and to develop canals. He took a special interest in legislation to support railroads.¹⁰⁷

In 1876, Lamar played a leading role in resolving a major political crisis. The presidential contest between Republican Rutherford Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden led to charges of electoral fraud, and officials disputed electoral votes in several states. There existed no clear method for resolving the dispute, and the crisis grew so hostile that Lamar feared an outbreak of civil violence. Two years later he remarked in a speech to constituents: "I believe that the most dangerous event in our history, not excepting the war of secession, was the contest over the result of the Presidential election of 1876."¹⁰⁸ Lamar promoted a bill that created a bipartisan Electoral Commission to arbitrate the disputed election. The Commission ultimately awarded the disputed votes to Hayes, the Republican. Bitterly disappointed by the outcome of the Commission, Lamar voted against some of the results, but he nevertheless defended the Commission's authority.

Profiles in Courage gave his role in averting a major crisis prominent attention: "Lamar, a man of law and honor, could not now repudiate the findings, however shocking, of the Commission he had helped establish. He supported the findings of the Commission because he believed that only force could prevent Hayes' inaugural and that it would be disastrous to travel that road again. It was better, he believed, for the South -- in spite of provocation -- to accept defeat on this

¹⁰⁷ Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 138.

¹⁰⁸ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 297.

occasion. He was skillful enough, however, to get Hayes committed to concessions for the South, including the withdrawal of military occupation forces and a return to Home Rule in key states.”¹⁰⁹

In 1877, Congress seated Lamar as junior senator from Mississippi, having been elected overwhelmingly and without serious opposition by the Mississippi Legislature in 1876¹¹⁰. He would be reelected again unopposed and serve in the Senate until 1885. The first major issue Lamar confronted in the Senate was the movement to return from a gold to a gold and silver standard for currency. The pro-silver position had gained much popular support, including in Mississippi, where people viewed inflation optimistically as a remedy for the depressed economy. Consistent with his monetary principles in the House, Lamar resisted devaluing currency, and he sided with Republicans opposing the silver bill. The Mississippi Legislature adopted a resolution supporting the silver bill, instructing Congressional representatives to vote for it, and criticizing Lamar for his opposition.

Lamar disregarded the instructions from the state legislature and, in opposing the bill, addressed the pressure from his constituents:

Between these resolutions and my convictions there is a great gulf. I cannot pass it. Of my love to the State of Mississippi I will not speak; my life alone can tell it. My gratitude for all the honor her people have done me no words can express. I am best proving it by doing to-day what I think their true interests and their character require me to do. During my life in that State it has been my privilege to assist in the education of more than one generation of her youth, to have given the impulse to wave after wave of the young manhood that has passed into the troubled sea of her social and political life. Upon them I have always endeavored to impress the belief that truth was better than falsehood, honesty better than policy, courage better than cowardice. To-day my lessons confront me. To-day I must be true or false, honest or cunning, faithful or unfaithful to my people. Even in this hour of their legislative displeasure and disapprobation I cannot vote as these resolutions

¹⁰⁹ Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*, 143-144.

¹¹⁰ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 272.

direct. I cannot and will not shirk the responsibility which my position imposes. My duty, as I see it, I will do; and I will vote against this bill.

The impact of the speech was magnified by the fact that the bill's adoption by a large majority was a foregone conclusion.¹¹¹

Lamar delivered only one major speech in the 48th Congress, and it is often overlooked. But his speech in support of federal aid to state public schools is one of the most powerful and revealing works of his public life. Stigmatized by its connection to Reconstruction rule, public education received little or no support from much of the Southern leadership. The Civil War destroyed the Southern economy, leaving few local financial resources to support education. So when Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire proposed millions in federal aide to be distributed among the states in proportion to the illiteracy rate in each, Lamar and a minority of Southern leaders embraced the controversial bill.¹¹²

Although somewhat unorthodox compared to the prevailing Southern attitude, Lamar's support for federal funding of state public schools was consistent with his support for federal funding for public works. Southern states had a special need for federal support because of the vast number of uneducated youth and the inability of the war-torn Southern states to properly finance their own educational systems. Because the revenues would be divided among states according to the number of illiterate persons, the Southern states also stood to benefit most from the program. One estimate revealed the South would receive \$11 million of the first \$15 million.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage*, 145-150.

¹¹² C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 63.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

Lamar believed support for education had a positive impact on race relations. Lamar explicitly linked the issue of support for education to the issue of the fate of blacks in the South. Though he had persistently resisted federal intervention rather than state intervention to protect black civil rights, he now forcefully defended federal support for education, emphasizing the benefits for blacks: “In my opinion [the bill] is the first step and the most important step that this Government has ever taken in the direction of the solution of what is called the race problem, and I believe it will tell more powerfully and decisively upon the future destinies of the colored race in America than any measure or ordinance that has yet been adopted in reference to it -- more decisively than either the thirteenth, fourteenth, or fifteenth amendments, unless it is to be considered, as I do consider it, the logical sequence and the practical continuance of those amendments.”¹¹⁴

Lamar confessed frankly the economic and social difficulties facing the delivery of education in the South. He convincingly supported black education: "The problem of race in a large part is the problem of illiteracy. Most of the evils, most of the difficulties which have grown up out of that problem have arisen from a condition of ignorance, prejudice, and superstition.”¹¹⁵ Lamar's support for education revealed in part his paternalistic view that Republicans manipulated the black vote because of the ignorance of blacks, and his motives in supporting the education bill have been questioned, but his speech evinces a passionate commitment to education that drew on his personal experience as an educator. His speech further expressed his conviction that political liberty and legal rights rested in a society's level of culture: “Liberty can not be manufactured by statutes or constitutions or laws. It is a moral and

¹¹⁴ Congress, Senate, Senator Lamar of Mississippi speaking to the Senate for national aid to education, S.398, 48th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 67 (28 March 1884): 2368-71.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

intellectual growth. It is the outgrowth of men's natures, and feelings, and passions, and instincts, and habits of thought. A people who remain ignorant and superstitious and debased can not be made free by all the constitutional guarantees and statutes that you surround them with. You may force power upon them and subject others to their rule, but the great attribute of self-government and that real liberty which comes from it you can not confer on them while they remain ignorant and in bondage to their own passions and to their own prejudices and superstitions.”¹¹⁶ To Lamar, education was a prerequisite and necessary foundation for real freedom for society in general and for blacks in particular: “Institutions and laws and governments and all the fixed facts of society are but the material embodiment of the thought of a people and the substantial expression of their inner life; and liberty, which is the culmination of them all . . . to be permanently possessed and enjoyed must be earned, as the reward of the development of our moral and intellectual faculties.”¹¹⁷

These arguments expressed some of Lamar's deepest personal values. Even before the Civil War Lamar had stated, "institutions and constitutions and laws and governments are at last but external structures whose roots are in the moral and intellectual life of the people for whom they exist . . . ”¹¹⁸ For Lamar, rooting of moral and political behavior in culture and education was not mere social theory; it was a personal conviction.

The speech on federal aid to state public schools was, perhaps, Lamar's most eloquent and personal expression of his political vision. In decrying the flight of good teachers from education in the South because of low salaries, Lamar spoke with personal experience, for soon after he had left teaching, state budget cuts to salaries had led to the closure of his law school.

¹¹⁶ Congress, Senate, Senator Lamar of Mississippi speaking to the Senate for national aid to education, S.398, 48th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 67 (28 March 1884): 2368-71.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 625.

He insisted on the moral obligation of government to play an active role in forming good character and nurturing citizenship. "For my part," he insisted, "I would leave no legitimate effort unused and no constitutional means unemployed which would give to every human being in this country that highest title to American citizenship -- virtue, knowledge, and judgment."¹¹⁹ Lamar did not view education as a panacea. He tempered his enthusiasm with pessimism about any immediate results. Suspicious of federal presence in the states, he rejected the idea of a separate federal education agency for distribution of the funds.¹²⁰

In 1884, Grover Cleveland won election as the first Democratic president since the Civil War. Recognizing Lamar's leadership position in the party, President Cleveland appointed him Secretary of the Interior in 1885. Lamar deserves credit for administering progressive policies in the Interior Department: he administered the Indian Bureau so as to protect Indian tribal lands and reservations from homesteading; he sought to conserve public lands against the pressure to exploit them commercially. Under Lamar, the Department recovered millions of acres of public land from private owners, largely railroads that held them under improper land grants.¹²¹ Conservationist and former Mississippi congressman Frank Smith declared that Lamar's enlightened environmental policy "was a major factor in preparing the way for the first conscious governmental conservation policy under Theodore Roosevelt a few years later."¹²²

Lamar made his final contribution to public service as a Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Appointed by President Cleveland in 1888, he became the first former Confederate and Democrat on the Court in the twenty-three years since the Civil War. Many

¹¹⁹ Congress, Senate, Senator Lamar of Mississippi speaking to the Senate, S.398, 48th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 67 (28 March 1884): 2368-71.

¹²⁰ Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 240-242.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 253-256.

¹²² Smith and Warren, *Mississippians All*, 72.

celebrated the appointment as a symbolic milestone finally burying the “bloody shirt” between North and South.

Although there is surprisingly little scholarship on Lamar's five years as a Supreme Court Justice, we are aware of his one last political battle in Mississippi which occurred while serving on the bench. By the mid-1880's momentum built to adopt a new state constitution for the express purpose of disenfranchising black voters. Led by U.S. Senator James Z. George, the majority of Democrats viewed “the present constitution, created back in 1868 during the height of Reconstruction, ... as a thoroughly Republican and radical document that, along with the Fifteenth Amendment, allowed blacks the right to vote. Few Democrats had been part of that convention, which had been dominated by ‘carpetbaggers,’ ‘scalawags,’ and blacks. The Democrats even named it the Black and Tan Convention.”¹²³ Lamar opposed the movement and warned it could possibly lead to another crisis with the federal government. Ignoring Lamar's plea, the call for a new constitutional convention won in a landslide in the 1889 election. The resulting 1890 Constitution, still largely in effect today, disenfranchised blacks through a new “understanding clause” and racial reapportionment, remaining in effect until seven decades later.¹²⁴

Lamar was often self-effacing, and he grew increasingly melancholy under the pressures of political life, his wife's ill health, and his own sickness and aging. He wrote his wife in 1884:

It was my hope to have been able to go home this last month but my duties here run all through each week so that I could not get home & stay long enough without being absent from an important committee meeting. I hope yet to be able to leave Washington before the adjournment. I am most anxious to get home. I have no idea what the cost of fixing up the store will be. I would like also to go to the farm & see how things are getting on there. I am tired of all this thing here. I

¹²³ Timothy B. Smith, *James Z. George: Mississippi's Great Commoner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 146.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 146-154.

feel my inspiration for effort gone. My ambition now is confined to being with my beloved wife & doing all I can to make her happy. Day follows day here without excitement or interest. A new generation of public men is coming here & I feel myself almost a superfluous veteran on the stage.¹²⁵

Losing much of his property and money to confiscation during the Civil War, Lamar depended on his salary, so he remained in public service.

Lamar's appointment to the Court to fill the position vacated with the death of Associate Justice Woods in May of 1887 sparked a major political controversy due to his background as a Confederate leader. Lamar was more than minimally qualified. His experience included private practice representing individual and corporate clients in civil and criminal matters; law school teaching; legislative experience in a state legislature, the House and Senate; and administrative experience in the executive branch as Secretary of the Interior. Although subject of little judicial scholarship, Lamar is often characterized as a judicial conservative and strict constructionist.¹²⁶

Ill health dogged Lamar's career, and he died on January 23, 1893, during a trip to his son-in-law's home in Macon, Georgia. Newspapers throughout the nation carried the word of his death. Emory College and the University of Mississippi convened mass rallies to mourn his passing. Congress and the Supreme Court adjourned after receiving the news. Cate describes the national mood on Lamar's death: "Perhaps the death of no statesman since the Civil War had caused more genuine sorrow - such a feeling of personal bereavement - throughout the nation as well as in his native section. Demonstrations such as those in Mississippi occurred in New York City, Boston, Birmingham, Memphis, New Orleans, and elsewhere, while a number of State legislatures that chanced to be in session - as distant, even, as North Dakota - passed resolutions

¹²⁵ Mayes, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 342.

¹²⁶ Cate, *Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 469-508.

of praise for the dead statesman...”¹²⁷ Initially buried in Riverside Cemetery in Macon, Lamar’s family ordered his remains moved to Oxford in 1894 and buried in St. Peter’s Cemetery.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Cate, 522-523.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 514-526

CHAPTER NINE

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Fast-forward almost a century to a new Mississippi. After six rewarding years as an aide in the United States Senate, I returned home to create and lead a new public-private partnership dedicated to community and economic development in Noxubee County for five years. Some observers at the time of my appointment were intrigued that an almost all-black Democratic board of supervisors would hire a white Republican to represent a majority black and Democratic county. The board president, one of the first black Democrats to serve on the board since Reconstruction, led the effort for my appointment.

Only forty years earlier, this man endured vicious abuse from his white elementary school peers as the first black student to integrate the formerly all-white school. We worked closely together, and I observed the pressures and attacks he received from many in the black community while enduring my own from many in the white community. His ability to forgive the past and ignore racial distinctions for the greater good, even when it would be politically advantageous for him to do the opposite, inspired me.

I found this same remarkable ability in L. Q. C. Lamar. Having lost both his brothers, two close friends and business partners, and most of his family's property and money without compensation during the terrible Civil War, Lamar chose to forgo bitterness and revenge, rethink and adapt his views on the place of blacks in society, and take a stand for positive change. Both men seemed to have learned the hard lesson that drives reconciliation. Martin Luther King, Jr., heavily influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, described it this way: "The old law of an eye for an eye

leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert.”¹²⁹ There is no doubt that

Lamar’s views on race reflected the paternalism so prevalent by the elite of his time, and this may make many contemporary scholars wary of his complex legacy. But perhaps Lamar’s support of black voting rights and black education and the promotion of blacks to high office, such as the Cabinet, made these ideas palatable to a much wider audience of Southerners.

Charles B. Galloway and Frank E. Smith, two white Mississippians united by their reputations for promoting racial reconciliation but separated by approximately seventy years, believed this to be true.

Charles B. Galloway, Methodist Bishop of Mississippi and a founder of Millsaps College, used his considerable speaking skills to promote racial reconciliation in the late 1800s and early 1900s, “which he regarded as a mandate of the gospel itself.”¹³⁰ A forceful champion of black education and anti-lynching legislation, Mississippi Methodists recognized Galloway’s contributions by renaming the state’s flagship church in Jackson after him. Requested to speak on the topic of “The South and the Negro” before the 1904 Conference for Education in the South in Birmingham, Alabama, Bishop Galloway delivered a passionate speech in support of black education. After quoting several scientific and educational experts agreeing with his position, Bishop Galloway drove home his point by quoting Lamar from twenty years earlier: “There is nothing so unprofitable as injustice. There is nothing which will react with such deadly effect upon the character of any people as the practice of wrong and oppression upon the weak and helpless. The denial of opportunities for education to the Negro can be justified upon

¹²⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 213.

¹³⁰ William Larkin Duren, *Charles Betts Galloway: Orator, Preacher, and "Prince of Christian Chivalry"* (Atlanta: Emory University Banner Press, 1932), 269.

no good grounds. It ignores the teachings of Jesus. Nothing could ever justify it, even to our conscience.”¹³¹ Bishop Galloway’s next sentence directly connects Lamar’s advocacy to acceptance by the general public: “No man who ever represented my native State of Mississippi in the highest councils of the nation more correctly interpreted her truest thought on all great issues than did L. Q. C. Lamar. And no man among us ever had a more enthusiastic following. His great deliverances became the accepted doctrines of his people.”¹³² Bishop Galloway devoted an entire chapter of his *Great Men and Great Movements: A Volume of Addresses* (1914) to L. Q. C. Lamar.

Frank E. Smith served in the United States House of Representatives a century after Lamar, representing a district mainly comprised of the Mississippi Delta during the 1950s. Considered an anomaly at the time as a white politician supporting the civil rights movement, author Walker Percy blamed Smith’s defeat in 1962 on “the usual coalition of peckerwoods, super-patriots and the Citizens’ Councils.”¹³³ In recognition of his racial reconciliation efforts, the Southern Regional Council elected Smith a lifetime fellow in 1984. In his 1964 autobiography, Smith equated his work with Lamar’s as a “conflict between conscience and constituents” and praised Lamar as “the Mississippian of grand stature that I admired most.”¹³⁴ As described earlier, Smith and the other founders of the L. Q. C. Lamar Society chose to name their organization in honor of Lamar’s “struggle for reconciliation between the races and the regions of the country.”¹³⁵ In 1970, eight decades after Lamar’s death, the Lamar Society

¹³¹ Charles Betts Galloway, *Great Men and Great Movements: A Volume of Addresses* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1914), 320-321.

¹³² Charles Betts Galloway, *Great Men and Great Movements*, 321.

¹³³ Dennis J. Mitchell, *Mississippi Liberal: A Biography of Frank E. Smith* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 167.

¹³⁴ Frank E. Smith, *Congressman from Mississippi* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 208.

¹³⁵ Naylor, “The L. Q. C. Lamar Society,” 22.

promoted racial reconciliation by sponsoring forums on college campuses between students and community leaders in the wake of police shootings of two black Jackson State University students during campus unrest.¹³⁶

On February 17, 1972, President Richard Nixon began a historic trip to the People's Republic of China, the first United States President to do so. At the time, the United States found itself locked in a cold war with Communism around the world. Fearing being labeled "soft on Communism" by their political opponents, most successful political leaders rejected United States diplomatic recognition of China. Realizing this position's futility in view of China's status as the world's most populace nation and one of the world's newest nuclear powers, Nixon leveraged his reputation as a hard-line anti-Communist to normalize relations with China. The political metaphor "Only Nixon Could Go to China" developed to describe the ability of a politician with an unimpeachable record among supporters for representing their values to act in ways that would draw opposition if taken by someone without that reputation. Richard Nixon's record as a hardliner opponent of Communism gave him the political cover and moral authority to open relations with Communist China in a way few other political leaders dared.

L.Q.C Lamar earned an impeccable reputation before and during the Civil War for someone promoting reconciliation in the post-war bitterness. A pre-war planter who skillfully defended the South while under attack in Congress, Lamar served the Confederacy as a decorated military officer and international ambassador. But most importantly, he was a slave owner and a secessionist. Although reluctant to pursue secession until he felt it the only remaining choice, Lamar then personally drafted the ordinance of secession and moved for its adoption by the Mississippi convention. Lamar was a white Southerner's Southerner, allowing

¹³⁶ Naylor, 24.

him to advocate causes that would be unthinkable for other Southern leaders of the time. And he knew it.

Some scholars, such as biographer James Murphy, have attempted to explain Lamar's significant political transformation in later years as that of a pragmatic, moderate Lamar asserting itself over a younger, truer Lamar. Perhaps the reverse is true. Perhaps Lamar's early heated rhetoric reflected a pragmatic desire to win office by playing to the crowd and please his surrogate father, Judge Longstreet. Perhaps Lamar's later more moderate positions revealed his true thoughts once the charm of holding public office wore off and Longstreet's influence diminished with death and time. In light of the enormous amount of new post-Civil War scholarship in the four decades since the last Lamar biography, this question and the question of Lamar's forceful, even radical, support of voting and political rights and education for blacks helping to plant the seeds for reconciliation in the 20th and 21st centuries deserves new consideration.

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VITA

Brian Wilson grew up in Macon, Mississippi and holds an undergraduate degree in political science and history from the University of Mississippi.

Wilson spent a number of years working in politics at the local, state, and national levels. He was a senior legislative assistant to Senator Trent Lott for five years, managing issues related to appropriations, the environment, and natural resources. Wilson served as field director for Lieutenant Governor Amy Tuck's reelection, a field representative for Senator Roger Wicker's first U.S. House campaign, and has worked on other congressional and statewide campaigns. Wilson has served on local Republican committees since 1992 in leadership positions as well as a delegate to state and national Republican Conventions. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area.

Wilson served as founding executive director of the Noxubee Alliance, a public-private partnership promoting economic development, tourism, and community development in Noxubee County. Wilson for his leadership of the Alliance earned the 2008 Community Economic Development Award from the Mississippi Development Authority and the Mississippi Economic Development Council.

Wilson resides in Oxford where he is chair of the L. Q. C. Lamar House Advisory Council.