Shaking Reconstructed Apples from Secessionist Trees: Beyond Ordinances of Secession and Civil War

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“SHAKING RECONSTRUCTED APPLES FROM SECESSIONIST TREES:
BEYOND ORDINANCES OF SECESSION AND CIVIL WAR”

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
in the Department of History
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by
AUDREY M. UFFNER

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a social, political, and cultural biography of Mississippi’s secessionist generation, exploring the full arc of their lives over the course of the nineteenth century and the role of secession throughout their political careers. The life course of three Mississippians, James Lusk Alcorn, Jefferson Davis, and Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, placed in the broad context of the larger Nineteenth Century, reveals that secessionists and the secession movement have a power and significance beyond traditional historiographic interpretations and periodization. Antebellum institutions and organizations tied southern men together, providing them with space and opportunity to imagine and create an alternative vision for America’s future. Southerners embraced secession as the means to an end: the implementation of their collective and perverted vision of a more perfect and prosperous agricultural society rooted in the belief that all men are not equal. Secessionists utilized a period of profound national crisis to enact their vision. First promulgated by extremists, secession succeeded when moderates, who dominated Mississippi’s secession convention, voted for the measure as the last best option for defending the South’s and their own perceived freedoms and economic security. Secessionists backed up their votes by devoting their service and lives to the creation of a Confederate nation. After the war, a number of former Mississippi secessionists returned to the political sphere after a forced hiatus. Their antebellum vision remained the same, though the means changed. To fit the needs and conditions of post-war America, their definitions of secession and their role in the movement changed. Upon returning to the political sphere, former Mississippi secessionists played vital and
powerful roles in southern social and political communities and national definitions of the Civil War’s significance. Utilizing the language of reconciliation and capitalizing on northern exhaustion with Reconstruction in the South, former secessionists worked to limit African Americans freedom. The Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890 marked a dark moment in American history, providing for the creation of racial segregation and African American disenfranchisement. The legacy of Lamar and his compatriots would be long-lasting with severe repercussions for the lives of Americans for years to come.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Grandpa, Delbert Eugene Walls. The first historian I ever knew and loved, he encouraged me to become a lady and a scholar. He drew the first route from Pennsylvania to Mississippi and taught me much about life, love, and laughter along the way. This story is for him.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With few exceptions, everyone who supported the writing of this dissertation gave me a book they love. My library is a constant reminder of the relationships and friendships required to write a dissertation. Teachers, mentors, friends, and family are as essential to this work as the secessionists about whom I write. This is my novella of appreciation.

Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me in Pennsylvania, I thought I would drive about a little, see the South and get an education. I have no regrets. During my tenure at the University of Mississippi, I worked in two libraries and for NASA, which every nerd can appreciate. My forced labor in space and the Twentieth Century were a means to study the Nineteenth Century. Kris Gilliland assisted my Litchfield research and facilitated a visit to James Z. George’s home. Greg Johnson encouraged me to travel to the Delta on a quest to visit all three graves of Robert Johnson, which took an unexpected turn upon the discovery of James Lusk Alcorn’s beloved levees. I owe a profound debt of gratitude to Dr. Leigh McWhite and Dr. Jennifer Ford. They were my first friends in Mississippi, and no Yankee could ask for better tour guides and mentors. They convinced me that the South had much to teach me, especially about murder mysteries.

When Jennifer Ford asked me to transcribe a Mississippi plantation ledger, I learned the invaluable lesson of cowpeas, the nineteenth-century super food.

Three quarters of my Oxford library came from my coursework at the University of Mississippi, and I thank all of the faculty and staff of the Department of History for their
encouragement, support, and countless opportunities for scholarship and teaching. I would especially like to thank Drs. Chiarella Esposito, Lester Field, Susan Grayzel, April Holm, Ted Kathryn McKee, Ownby, and Jeffrey Watt. Dr. Winthrop D. Jordan’s life and work testified to his heart. His profound influence lives on, particularly in the lives of his students and my mentors. Dr. Joseph P. Ward ensured departmental support throughout my studies. He introduced me to the “real” Puritans and the English Revolution, which guided my ideas about secession more than most people would think possible. Marc Lerner reminds me constantly to call him “Marc,” so I have done so twice in a sentence as a note of appreciation. Dr. Charles R. Wilson introduced me to the South through its history. Classes on his porch with a glass of sweet tea taught this Yankee to appreciate the shade on a hot Mississippi day. Sheila L. Skemp almost convinced me to study New England Puritans, and without her, Federalists would not have seemed so fascinating. My love for Perry Miller never truly diminished. Her presence on my committee curbed my inner Dickens. Nancy Bercaw always caught me red-handed with a novel at Square Books when I should have been reading for class. She told me to “have fun” studying for comps and writing my dissertation, so I climbed onto some precarious limbs and followed rabbit trails in her honor. Dr. Charles W. Eagles guided one of my few forays into Twentieth Century America, and I still have not recovered. Over the years, he has inspired, provoked, frustrated, and humored me to no end. I cannot thank him enough for being him or for that bag of candy corn.

I can date this era in my life from the reading of a book: Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It was the first of many books I read for Dr. John R. Neff. One only has to experience a single “Neff moment” to understand how he inspires and teaches his students. For all the reasons I came to the university and Mississippi, Dr. Neff is the reason I stayed. His door
is always open to those he loves and respects, and his office is a haven from the stress and rigor of the academy. He has an uncanny ability to see the best part of his students and their work. He mends friendships over books about William Tecumseh Sherman and valiantly protects and defends his students as they navigate the gauntlet of graduate school and the dissertation process. I never learned how to properly “gut” a book, but I did learn that every history has a driving force. I also learned that every historian needs a steadfast champion, and I count myself blessed that Dr. Neff became mine. His most “unassigned” book, *Moby Dick*, finds its way into conversations, seminars, and lectures at every turn. Reading Melville for the first time this summer by the Atlantic was not so much the capstone of my graduate education, but the beginning of a new era. I owe Dr. Neff a debt of gratitude larger than any loan and paying it back means paying it forward. It also means reading more Herman Melville.

Dr. Rachel Smith Purvis and Benjamin Purvis began this journey with me in 2003. Beginning with the formation of the Breakfast Club and ending with its much later incarnation, the Dissertation Club, we fought the good fight and finished what we set out to do. Without their friendship, humor, and shared books and meals, this project would never have been completed. Rachel taught me as much about the South as she did the essential nature of what makes someone a dear and loving friend and colleague. Whenever I see a photograph of Sherman, I am reminded of that fateful semester Dr. Neff put us back in a room together. I am blessed that our stars in their courses aligned in a place like Oxford, and I am looking forward to the places our scholarship takes us, our lifelong correspondence, and the opportunities to send each other students.

Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter and life-saving medicine. Stephanie McKnight and Leanna McLaughlin are the heroines of this dissertation. Their wit and humor kept me going in
the tough times, and no one can match them in terms of steadfast love and friendship. Stephanie McKnight helped me to survive the last years of graduate school, NASA, wedding planning, and writing a dissertation. When she moved to Montana, trips to the Holy Trinity lost their luster. I miss my friend dearly. Jamie Banks, Megan Bartlett, John Basel, Amanda Bennett, Erin Davis, Melanie Foster, Betty Harness, Lucy Brown Jordan, Sara M. Langston, Connie and Joe McKnight, Tara Pawley, Dave Ray, Joseph Richardson, Lauren Rogers, Jonathan M. Roscoe, Renee Russell, Laura Schrock, Rachel Sherrie Smith, Jen Sollenberger, David Speicher, Marc Weaver, Alyssa Wilson, and Melissa Wilson provided much needed love and moral support for this project. I am in their debt.

Ten years in Momma Pat’s classes taught me a lot about trees, often in relation to strength and character. She required only one Bible for her classes, but over the years I’ve acquired a number of translations. She may never have understood my passion for secessionists, but she gave me a lens through which to view them, and it was her voice I heard when I wrote my conclusion. She cheered every success and soothed my fretting with her constant encouragement of “You’ve got this.” I realize now that one of the main reasons I came all the way to Mississippi was to meet my Momma Pat, and that even though I did not have Him in mind, He had my back.

Loogootee, Indiana, served as the stopover in my journeys between Pennsylvania and Mississippi. Loo-goo-what? Exactly. My Indiana family made clear from the start that I was welcome anytime, especially my Grandpa. Frequent tours of the countryside, Jug Rock, Amish cooking, baseball games, stories of how my mother and grandparents grew up, shelling beans, and making jam did wonders for my heart and soul in the midst of the toughest semesters. For their Hoosier hospitality, I would like to thank: Grandpa and Grandma, Aunt Marcia, Aunt
Caroline, John and Anne Marie, Uncle Mike and Aunt Sherrie, Uncle Del and Aunt Holly, Aunt Debbie and Uncle Jim, and all my Indiana cousins and their little people. God bless you.

Becoming an Out-Lau was one of my more brilliant life choices in recent years. I would like to thank Carol, Jeff, Maw-Maw, Emily, Josh, Abbie, Katelyn, Cecelia, and Caroline for their love and genuine support of the newest Lau. I am only sorry that this year is an off-year for the beach. I have earned Holden Beach 2014!

There is a nucleus of quiet support in Lebanon, Pennsylvania that never wavers. Years ago, my sister and I were photographed together on a cannon at Gettysburg. It was our first battlefield adventure, and despite what Sarah tells people, she loved it as much as I. It would make a lovely book jacket photograph. Those young smiling people with strange ideas of fashion became a historian and a journalist. My sister has sworn off battlefields in the years since, but she remains a true confidante. Her daughter Quinn may take more of an interest in history than her Mom, although right now I think she’s mad about sweet potatoes. My parents, Francis and Rebecca Uffner, instilled in me a love of reading and history. From the day we went to get my first library card to my hooding ceremony, they have encouraged my every step toward this goal. That the two people who introduced me to my first books want to read my “book” makes my heart full and means much more than any Bancroft. Their love and support made my efforts here easier and worthwhile.

One book can change your life. Jeffrey Franklin Lau found me because I picked up a book on Alexander Calder. He offered to show me the giant Calder mobile at the National Gallery of Art, and the rest is history. I married a loveable, bearded curmudgeon who does not share my love for Charles Dickens or history. He has known from the beginning what he got himself into, and he is okay with that. His love and laughter make every day a delight.
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INTRODUCTION:

THE SHIFTING CHANGES WHICH CHEQUERED THEIR LIVES

On March 18, 1893, the Supreme Court of the United States recorded in its proceedings a tribute *In Memoriam* to Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar. Longtime friends and politicians spoke at length and spared no compliments concerning their recently departed colleague from the State of Mississippi. His passing signaled the loss of a generation’s keen mind, upright judge, eminent statesman, gifted orator, and delightful friend.¹ Mr. William F. Vilas, Lamar’s successor as Secretary of the Department of the Interior, stated at the beginning of the proceedings, “amongst the shifting changes which chequered their lives, few achieved more good.”² Such recognition from a fellow Democrat might be expected, but Vilas was also a former lieutenant colonel of the 23rd Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War. The shifting changes to which Vilas alluded included the generation’s passage through the gauntlet of war and Reconstruction. Vilas’s remarks as well as those from other northern mourners of Lamar’s death reflect a reverence for Lamar’s character as well as a shift in northern opinion by the late

² In referencing “their” in his quote, Vilas means southern statesmen of the Civil War generation. *In Memoriam: Lucius Q.C. Lamar*, 5.
nineteenth century about secessionists and the South. According to those assembled in 1893, Lamar accomplished much good as a southerner “who could be tolerated while the passions of civil war were still uncooled,” and who helped pave the way for a return to home rule and peace.

Lamar lived in extraordinary times. Vilas’s tribute reminded his contemporaries of their lives in “an era which inflicted extraordinary, marvelous vicissitudes upon tens of thousands who acted parts in its eventful scenes.” Lamar had come a long way to reach the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States. Vilas praised a career that war did not derail when “he seemingly had sacrificed all with the ruin of the cause, the country, and the people among whom his lot was cast, when triumphant war trampled them all beneath its foot.”

As an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Lamar’s career was as distinguished as it was unusual. He is one of thirty Americans who have served in all three branches of the Federal Government. Beginning his public service as a representative to Georgia’s State House of Representatives in 1835, Lamar subsequently served as a United States Congressman and Senator from the State of Mississippi, and as Secretary of the Interior in the cabinet of President Grover Cleveland before his appointment to the Supreme Court in 1888. What made Lamar extraordinary to his generation was that his role as a secessionist, Confederate officer, and official in the government of the Confederate States of America did little to hinder or tarnish an impressive political career.

3 Northern here denotes anyone who resided in the states consisting of the Federal Union during the war as well as neutral territories that did not secede, but sent troops to help with the Union war effort. Northerners who gave a tribute for Lamar were actually more mid-western and western by geographic region, but northern in their affiliation during the war.
5 In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar, 5-6.
His ailing health could not suppress the aspirations of his soul. Self-consecrated to a public life of duty to his country, Lamar died as he had lived. The remaining tributes offered distinct northern and southern portraits of Lamar. Each memorial showed how those who knew and loved him utilized his life as a window into the heart of a passing generation. Careful to downplay competing loyalties for the South with that of the Union, northern mourners noted how the events of a generation changed him as a man, but how his deep patriotism and sense of duty to the nation was only briefly broken. Northerners who gave tribute to Lamar were drawn to him for his character as well as his impressive ability to keep public attention from the more questionable parts of his resume, which would endanger his political career.

Introduced to Lamar during his contested election to the Senate, Oregonian John H. Mitchell testified that Lamar’s “comprehensive mind, erudition, fidelity to every public trust” would “forever embalm his name and memory in their enduring fragrance.” No stranger to controversy or a muddied past, Mitchell believed he shared bond with the southern. Arguing that Lamar was “identified prominently, conspicuously, and ably with the losing cause of the South in the late war,” such counts should not be considered against his later words and actions:

I think we may all well agree that it is to-day one of the grandest reflections of the American mind—one of the proudest glories of our time—that the men who were most conspicuous as defenders of the Lost Cause have, since that cause went down amid the

---

7 John H. Mitchell was born John Mitchell Hipple. The name change reflected a desire to leave behind his past as a Pennsylvania schoolteacher turned lawyer forced to marry a 15-year-old-girl he seduced. Upon his move to California then Oregon, he changed his name and became a professor of medical jurisprudence at Willamette University. He then went on to a career in the Oregon State Senate and the United States Senate, dodging scandal successfully in the 1870s when his second marriage caused political opponents to try to expel him on charges of bigamy. His luck ran out in the wake of the Oregon land fraud scandal, when he was conflicted of illegally using his position to aid fraud. His senatorial terms coincided with that of Lamar, and though he was a Republican, Mitchell seemed to genuinely revere Lamar. Charles Lanman, Biographical Annals of the Civil Government of the United States during its first century. From original and official sources, (Washington: J. Anglim, 1876), 206.
smoke and confusion of the battle-field, stood shoulder to shoulder with the friends of the old flag, and even their talents, their time, their public service, in sustaining, upholding, and defending the American name, and the integrity and indestructibility of the American republic.  

For Mitchell, Lamar proved to be a notable example of a secessionist, redeemed and reformed as an American, advocating national interests over that of state and section, and upholding the bond of Union. According to Mitchell and his fellow northerners, Lamar was worthy of national distinction as a countryman, loved by the nation and the “now Sunny South.”

A northerner turned westerner, William M. Stewart offered another positive portrait. Stewart was a proponent of the Free Silver movement, which Lamar opposed against the wishes of his own Mississippi Legislature leading to great controversy. He and Lamar were unlikely friends. Stewart authored the Fifteenth Amendment, a controversial amendment in the South which Lamar did little to support. Perhaps because of this, Stewart saw Lamar as a conspicuous character. In his tribute to Lamar, Stewart reminded the audience that the Civil War eradicated the cause of hostilities: slavery. Union victory cost an appalling sacrifice of life and property. The Union prevailed, and twenty-eight years after the last battle was fought, the bloody chasm between the two sections closed. The world marveled at what had occurred and what now existed. Lamar’s career was instructive, itself a volume of history. Stewart belonged to the body of men in the Federal government that sought to limit Confederate reentry into full citizenship.

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10 William M. Stewart’s interests in silver were far from pure. An Ohioan by birth, his move to California and later Nevada were motivated by mining interests. Despite claiming to withdraw from a career in mining upon becoming a lawyer, he continued to litigate mining cases and make personal investments. Like Mitchell, he found himself caught up in scandal, everything from bribing judges and juries to his own almost-disbarment in an international silver mine fraud scandal. Dan Plazak, A Hole in the Ground with a Liar at the Top (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 26-27. See also Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, last accessed February 2013, http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp.
rights at the end of the war, though Stewart did not believe protracted sectional strife was good of the country. An examination of Lamar’s life, he said, would help students of history “appreciate the causes which led to the war; the motives of the contending forces; the spirit of the final adjustment; the consummation of the aspirations of a liberty-loving people; the generosity and magnanimity of a race developed by the exercise of the rights and privileges of free institutions.”

If northern memorialists saw Lamar as a classic example of redeemed southern patriotism, southern memorialists heralded him as one of the best models of American manhood. J. Randolph Tucker spoke glowingly of thirty-odd years of friendship with Lamar, offering up his admirable attributes of intellect, humor, and faith. Le Roy F. Youmans of South Carolina brazenly compared Lamar’s antebellum life and spirit to that of John C. Calhoun. Considering the desire of most in the company of that day to keep references to slavery, secession and war to a minimum, the South Carolinian probably set the whole room on edge. A former secessionist and delegate to the Arkansas Secession Convention, Augustus H. Garland restrained his comments. Garland noted Lamar’s habit of giving life to the people and the advancement of their interests, without concern for his own. He noted “it quite unmans me to reflect he is no longer among us. . . . He has gone to his grave full of honors, with a name to live and not die in our

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13 Le Roy F. Youmans, a President Cleveland appointee to the position of Attorney General of the State of South Carolina and later recalled to the same office some twenty-five years after Republican rule, quoted Calhoun’s speech from February 19, 1847: “In the South I drew my first breath. There are all my hopes. There are my family and connections. I am a planter—a cotton planter. I am a southern man and a slaveholder—a kind and merciful one I trust,—and none the worse for being a slaveholder.” Youmans argued that the merits and demerits of the ante-bellum public men of the South could not be understood without the consideration of what was extinct, which were the very soul and marrow of that civilization. Youmans quoted liberally regarding Lamar’s ideas on slavery in his tribute, and he argued Lamar had never recanted his opinions on states rights, secession, and war. In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar, 35-41.
history, consecrated by the love of our people all over the land.”\textsuperscript{14} Unlike Youmans’s tribute, which heralded an unreconstructed paternal slaveholder, Garland’s comments reflect those of a man also redeemed and grateful for the second chance allowed to southerners to return to full communion in the Union.

Heartfelt tributes also came from Lamar’s adopted home of the state of Mississippi. Life-long friend Charles E. Hooker spoke of his delight in Lamar’s oratory and the high esteem in which Lamar’s students at the University of Mississippi held him. He noted Lamar often received criticism from Mississippians for his conservatism. Mississippi’s junior Senator James Z. George read the tribute of the ailing chair of the tribute’s committee and Mississippi’s senior Senator, Edward C. Walthall.\textsuperscript{15} Of Lamar, George Walthall wrote that it was a constant privilege “to look in through the open windows of his inner nature and witness the inspirations of the action and the secret of strength which wrought his great achievements for his people and his country.”\textsuperscript{16} To Walthall, Lamar was one of the most notable figures of the generation.\textsuperscript{17} Strong in thought and will, and graceful in expression, Lamar faced difficulty squarely with strength, facing adversaries fiercely with a fair fight. He offered, “What he saw he saw clearly; what he

\textsuperscript{14} In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar, 55.
\textsuperscript{15} Like Lamar, Walthall and George returned to the political realm as restrictions on former Confederates were lifted and pardons became available. George was a peer of Lamar’s in the Mississippi Secession Convention, and George had recently served as a delegate to the 1890 Mississippi Constitutional Convention. The Convention of 1890 regulated railroads and constructed levees in the Delta, but the convention is more infamously known for the creation of literacy tests and poll taxes as requirements for voting to keep black voters from the polls. For information on George, see: Goodspeed Brothers,\textit{ Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi} (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1891), 487. One of the best references for the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890 is a website created by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, last accessed March 2013, http://www.sos.state.ms.us/ed_pubs/constitution/constitution.asp.

\textsuperscript{16} In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar, 15.
\textsuperscript{17} In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar, 10.
knew he knew perfectly, and what he said was clear as light.”\(^{18}\) intriguing statements considering Lamar’s and his fellow Mississippians’ support for secession and the Confederacy. Walthall noted Lamar’s motives for his actions were not rightly judged by the world, but he loved his country and his section and held great pride in his lineage and in the Government.\(^{19}\)

Mississippi’s Attorney General from Hinds County, T. C. Catchings, also separated Lamar’s service from his virtue as seen by Mississippians.\(^{20}\) The critical scrutiny Mississippians had for Lamar did not change the fact that all judged Lamar to have been lofty, high-minded, brilliant, patriotic, wise, courageous, and useful.\(^{21}\) His speeches touched the hearts, stirred emotions and swayed the judgments of many an audience. Missing was much discussion of secession and war, but ever present was Lamar’s fight in the post-war to bind up the nation’s wounds, destroy prejudices, end sectionalism, and stir patriotism in the hearts of all Americans. Touching the heart of the American nation, Lamar did nothing short of rescue the South from vindictive measures and the nation from further division. To Catchings, Lamar was the dawn in the depths of Reconstruction’s night.\(^{22}\)


\(^{19}\) Walthall was careful to capitalize the word “government.” Whether this was to specify the Federal government or make another point, is unknown. The word is not capitalized in a similar manner in the entire publication.

\(^{20}\) T. C. Catchings was an alumnus of the University of Mississippi and Oakland College and a veteran of the Confederate Army. After the war he worked his way from state senator in Mississippi to attorney-general. See the biography for Catchings’ material at the Tulane University Special Collections website, last accessed March 2013, http://specialcollections.tulane.edu/archon/?p=collections/controlcard&id=42

\(^{21}\) *In Memoriam L.Q.C. Lamar*, 15. Catchings refers to the moment in 1878 when Lamar famously ignored the instructions of the Mississippi Legislature instructing him to vote against the free coinage of silver. In good faith, upon his return to his state, he plainly made out his case to the legislature and opposition to his position ceased. John F. Kennedy would use this and other events in Lamar’s senatorial career to point to Lamar’s prescient vision for Mississippi’s future in the vital post-war decades.

\(^{22}\) *In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar* 17.
Days later, on April 24, 1893, the Supreme Court of the United States again joined with Lamar’s friends to offer its condolences for its recently departed colleague. Attorney-General Richard Olney, a President Grover Cleveland appointee from Massachusetts, spoke to the bench regarding the loss of the Court’s fellow Justice:

Under any circumstances the death of a Justice of this Court is of preeminent importance. . . . Thus, as one departs and another assumes his place, a new order of things arises, all the more surely because it comes insensibly and almost by stealth. . . . No court like it or even strongly resembling it has ever existed among men. To have sat upon such a Court without reproach and without discredit may well fit to the full measure of the loftiest ambition.

Olney’s words indicated he saw Lamar as man worthy of emulation, a leader for the entirety of his life—followed, obeyed, trusted, and sincerely loved. The condolence resolution submitted by the Court stated that upon the war’s end, “no one was more conspicuous than he in efforts to allay distrust, to do away with division and coldness, and to produce throughout the Union a feeling of confidence and good will.” Chief Justice Melville W. Fuller believed Lamar underrated himself because his ideal of life was impossible to achieve. He was obsessed with a sense of failure despite the fact that he managed to achieve a reputation that would last after his death. Fuller took heart that the self-deprecating Lamar spent his final days assisting in the “authoritative exposition of the wonderful instrument which binds together ‘the great contexture of this mysterious whole.’” From secession to war and beyond, the man who did much to break up the Union became one of its ardent champions.

23 In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar 55. Chief Justice the Honorable Melville W. Fuller presided over the bench, which included Associate Justices the Honorables Stephen J. Field, Horace Gray, Samuel Blatchford, David J. Brewer, Henry B. Brown, George Shiras, Jr., and Howell E. Jackson.
24 In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar, 56.
27 In Memoriam. Lucius Q.C. Lamar, 60.
After just a cursory glance at the life and remembrances of L. Q. C. Lamar, one is compelled to ask a series of difficult questions: How did a secessionist become an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States? How could it be that devotion to secession, participation in the creation of a southern nation and in the Civil War did not hinder a return to national politics? It is not difficult to understand why the nation required more than one hundred years to pull itself out of the morass created in the nineteenth century. The nation did little to prevent the return of former secessionists to power after the war. No one should express surprise that former secessionists acted to deny the freedoms and rights of hundreds of thousands of black and white southern men and women, which plunged an entire section into economic stagnation and ruin. The blame for many twentieth century southern social and economic troubles should be laid at the feet of those who allowed men who actively supported slavery, secession and war with little love for African American freedom or citizenship to return to leadership positions.

Secession and secessionists are not well understood by historians of early America. Secessionists and their contemporaries cannot be underestimated for their part in simultaneously defining and obscuring who imagined and promulgated secession as well as how they should be remembered in history. By 1860, there were three southern political stances: Secessionists, who would dissolve the Union without the cooperation of other states; Cooperationists, who desired secession only with the security of the knowledge of cooperation among their sister states; and Unionists, who desired to remain in the Union and work out the disagreements between the sections with full confidence in the United States Constitution. How people fell into one or more of these groups depended on their level of political involvement or interest. Even the most diehard of converts to secession experienced intense personal struggles before their decision.
Few southern men desired to appear enthusiastic about secession, and most blamed the course of events, northern actions, and a lack of alternatives for their final decision.

Northern contemporaries labeled every Southerner a secessionist when the war began. This broad indictment included those who could neither vote for secession nor fight to make the separation permanent. In Mississippi, such a definition meant that the decision of one hundred men created seven hundred thousand secessionists including all of its free men, women, and children. Theirs was not an active choice, and the label was an assumption, not an assertion of fact. As the war continued and well after its conclusion, well-meaning individuals tried to clarify the term “secession” with well-placed adjectives assigned to specific individuals, ignoring the conventions of men or voters who had actively chosen secession in each state. Words like “immediate” or “eleventh-hour” attempted to place individuals upon a more damning or forgiving timeline based on their moment of conversion. Such times were often assigned by secessionists themselves after the war or by their descendants in an attempt to lessen the level of their responsibility or extent of their supposed irrational beliefs and actions. Still others used terms like “moderate” and “reluctant” to express a sense of caution and well-thought out processes. The worst terms, “extremist,” “radical,” “rabid,” and “fiery” or names, “fire-eaters” and “fire-brands” were given to those who adopted the course of action early on, and pressed on until all was lost.

In an effort to remain true to secessionists’ and their contemporaries’ definitions, historians have utilized at least four interconnected principles to understand secession and

secessionists. First, they identify secessionists in mono-causal studies of the Civil War as representative examples of how a single factor—conspiracy, wealth, economics, gender, or the sweep of events—led southern men down the road to Civil War. Second, historians focus attention on secessionists deemed to be ringleaders hailing from specific states. Third, secession is understood to be an isolated political moment when secessionists appear on the political stage, secede, and exit, never to be heard from again and lacking importance beyond instigating war or providing a hated foil for abolitionists. Finally, historians relegate secession and secessionists largely to the antebellum period, making it difficult to understand the entire lived experience of the generation. In concert, the four principles make for an effective study of the secessionist generation and contribute mightily to larger historiographical interpretations of the Antebellum and Civil War eras. A thematic explanation of each principle is necessary in order to understand the basis for the inspiration of this study as well as the point from which it departs from traditional historiographic periodization.

To begin, mono-causal studies of the Civil War categorize secession as a conspiracy or a carefully planned independence movement, and often define or identify secessionists as members of a specific class bound by codes of honor or gender roles. Secession and secessionists are not the primary research interest of mono-causal studies. Those studies range from monographs on nineteenth century gender roles and masculinity in the South to works devoted to collective memory of the Civil War or arguments for a narrative-based synthesis. A number of the studies set up straightforward teleological arguments, concerning the social, cultural, and political origins of the Civil War. They also prove to be instructive concerning antebellum and Civil War historiographical concerns. In each study are a multitude of definitions of who was or what made
a “secessionist.” Historians base definitions on their understanding of the period’s political climate, assumptions about the inevitability of war, and contemporaries’ definitions of themselves or their political enemies based on their political actions.

Conspiracy theories regarding secession captured popular imaginations early on and dominated nineteenth-century histories. Contemporary charges of conspiracy cannot be easily discredited as a desire to root out treason. Twentieth and twenty-first century historians tested nineteenth century suspicions and found some truth to the accusations. As a result, arguments for conspiracy have earned a place in serious historiography. These tend to be wholly political in scope, arguing that secession was a concerted work of a few radicals. These men infiltrated high-level government, dominated state office, or gained access to power, information, and resources necessary to carry out a revolution against the federal government and create a Confederacy.

Contemporary historians such as Henry Adams, as well as modern historians like Charles W. Dew, claimed an elite conspiracy in the South drove a wedge in the Democratic Party to achieve nothing short of a slaveholders’ revolution to secure the rights and privileges of the southern white elite. Their arguments are a product of their time, and the earliest historians wrote to satisfy an emotional response to their personal experience during the war as much as a desire to chronicle recent events. Historical distance allows scholars to revisit and test contemporary theses and add to them knowledge gleaned from an ability to consult material unavailable to nineteenth century historians. Adams, speaking as a man with a family history of involvement with the creation of the American nation, was in England during the Civil War and missed “the crucial American experience of his generation.”29 His absence from America at the time did not

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discourage his strong feelings for Southerners as “beyond all imagination demented,” as they were men “mad with ideas of new nation and met with their enemies as men they wished to part in kindness in separation.” Secession, to Adams, was a “wide-spread intricate conspiracy” spread by a class of men in the southern states who wished for disunion as a good thing in itself. Adams believed the breakup of the Democratic convention in Baltimore revealed the existence of a conspiracy, and that President James Buchanan and his cabinet members were under secessionist influence—as Adams believed Buchanan (as many Unionists of the period believed) played a role in the unraveling of events.\footnote{In writing the introduction to Adam’s book, historian George Hochfield believed Adams’s interest in secession to be personal. For Adams, a direct descendant of John Adams, secession proved the worth of the Constitution as a means beyond itself and revealed America received no special dispensation from Providence in terms of its safety from disunion. Southern claims to Revolutionary inheritance illustrated the dangers of idealism. See Hochfield’s introduction in Henry Adams, \textit{The Great Secession Winter of 1860-61 and Other Essays} (New York: Sagamore Press, Inc., 1958), 4, 8, and xviii.}

Biographies of President James Buchanan and his administration add to speculation regarding a secession conspiracy. Few Buchanan scholars connect Buchanan with secessionists or their circles of influence, but Buchanan’s actions, beliefs, and choice of advisors point to secessionist infiltration of Buchanan’s cabinet. Buchanan’s administration receives categorical derision. Buchanan scholars make a quiet and convincing argument about his almost-treasonous role in the secession crisis. Jean H. Baker’s most recent biography of Buchanan points out the President’s Federalist background prior to his joining of the Democratic Party, including the era of the Federalist threat to secede. According to Baker, Buchanan’s inaction was the result of his strict interpretation of federal powers. His actions relating to the Dred Scott decision as well as Bleeding Kansas betrayed a desire to protect the South. But, when the region decided for
secession, Buchanan believed it had gone too far. As the Union collapsed around him, he
instinctually deferred to the opinions of his southern cabinet members, including future
secessionists Howell Cobb and Jacob Thompson, and congressional advisors who would also
support secession: Jefferson Davis, Robert Toombs, John Slidell, and William Henry Trescott.
Their proximity to Buchanan, Baker argues, provided these future Confederate leaders with
information straight from the President’s cabinet meetings. His inaction bought the fledgling
nation precious time to secure forts, raise troops, and create a new government. When South
Carolina seceded, Buchanan paused to consider treating with South Carolina commissioners to
bring about a peace at least until Lincoln arrived in Washington. Buchanan’s northern advisors
Jeremiah Black, Joseph Holt, and Edwin Stanton used the threat of resignation to bring
Buchanan to his senses because they considered treating with South Carolina amounted to
treason. Buchanan’s ideology and belief relating to the strict construction of the president’s
constitutional powers made him a rather dangerous president in the face of a national crisis, and
he is an example of a Northerner who believed too deeply in the Unionism of some of his closest
and longest serving advisors and friends.  

Charles B. Dew’s *Apostles of Disunion* posited the idea of a secession conspiracy tied to
elite society, indulging secessionists’ contemporaries beliefs regarding how the South arrived
secession. In an attempt to maintain a slave society dominated by whites, elites sent

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31 Jean Baker, *James Buchanan: The American Presidents Series: The Fifteenth President 1857-
1861* (New York: Times Books, 2004); Frederick Moore Binder, *James Buchanan and the
American Empire* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1994); Michael J. Birkner, *James
Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press,
1996; Philip Shriver Klein, *President James Buchanan, a biography* (University Park:
Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962). James Buchanan approved the expenses of Jacob
Thompson as a secession agent to North Carolina with federal funds. See “Our Washington
Correspondence.; Ex. Secretary Thompson’s Infamy the North Carolina Election The Report of
the Committee of Thirty-Three the Inauguration Ball, Etc.,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1861.
commissioners to other slave states to preach secession and spread support for disunion. State governors, secession conventions, and secret meetings selected commissioners, primarily representatives from Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia.\textsuperscript{32} According to Dew’s research, twenty southern senators and representatives attended a late night gathering at the Washington, D.C., lodgings of Mississippi representative Reuben Davis in late December 1860 and hammered out what would later be called the Southern Manifesto. The manifesto claimed that there was no hope for an agreeable solution to protect slavery and prevent sectional division. They advised Southerners to listen to the call to action to preserve their honor, safety, and independence.\textsuperscript{33}

Historians portray also secessionists as wealthy members of an elite class who choose secession as the economically viable solution to perceived threats to slavery. Though a broad generalization, the connection between class and economic motivation gained popularity largely due to Reconstruction policies aimed at specific classes fueled by the desire to assign blame to specific guilty persons without punishing the whole of southern society.\textsuperscript{34} Dan Carter asserts, in \textit{When the War Was Over}, that many northerners, including Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, beginning in the 1850s and well into the war, were unwilling to acknowledge the broad support for the secessionist movement. Lincoln and Johnson’s plans for the reconstruction of the South focused—at times rightly—on a small population of the southern populace, treating the majority of Southerners as relative innocent sheep led by wolves.

\textsuperscript{32} Dew, \textit{Apostles of Disunion}, 18.
\textsuperscript{33} Meeting held in the Washington lodgings of Congressman Reuben Davis of Mississippi on December 13, 1860. Twenty southern senators and congressmen attended and reached unanimous decision that all slave-holding states were in danger and recommended immediate secession. See Dew, \textit{Apostles of Disunion}, 24 and 48.
Lincoln’s ten percent plan provided for the reentry of southern states into the Union once ten percent of the populace swore allegiance to the Union and acquiesced to emancipation. Johnson’s plan was similar but took a harder line on elite planters, which is understandable when describing the men of Mississippi’s secession convention.\textsuperscript{35} Frequently mentioning “traitorous aristocrats,” President Johnson felt that secessionists hailed from an economic class with twenty thousand dollars worth of property or more. Excluding this class of men from his amnesty policy, Johnson was able to bar men who fell into this category from political office, and he gave the impression to many planters that they would be subject to treason charges, which would ultimately result in a loss of property.\textsuperscript{36}

Some of the more interesting studies of the antebellum period highlight the interplay between socioeconomic factors and cultural attitudes during the secession crisis. James Alex Baggett’s research utilizes census records to illustrate how wealth translated into political power. Antebellum political leaders had personal stakes in the future of slavery and the course of political action concerning westward expansion and the economy.\textsuperscript{37} Regional studies illustrate how secession’s proponents succeeded in winning the votes of men whose interests were not as closely tied to or invested in those of the more wealthy classes. Elections for delegates to the secession conventions were votes for the future direction for the state as much as they were votes

\textsuperscript{35} From the data available, more than forty members of Mississippi’s secession convention owned twenty thousand dollars worth of real estate. What plays havoc with these figures is the fact that a number of Mississippians held equal if not larger amounts of personal estate. In the 1860 census, slaves were not considered part of real estate, land value, but personal estate. If one considers both numbers, than more Mississippi secessionists would have been barred from office.
\textsuperscript{36} Dan T. Carter, \textit{When the War Was Over}, 25-29.
\textsuperscript{37} James Alex Baggett, \textit{The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), Appendix, Tables 3 and 4.
secede from the Union. At least three historians have tied the rise of republicanism in Jacksonian American and fears of rapid change in the nineteenth century to secession, including Lacy K. Ford, Bradley G. Bond, and Anthony G. Carey. Bond also argues for the continuity of Mississippians’ dedication to a ‘false republic,’ founding its freedom and livelihood at the expense of an underclass, upon whose backs elites could stand. A white hegemony—united on cultural, and political supremacy and based on race—pervaded from 1830-1900, triumphing over more promising visions of the New South.

Recently, studies relating to the economic origins of the Civil War have resurfaced, touching briefly and specifically on secession or secessionists. In 2009, Marc Egnal revived Charles A. Beard’s argument that economic rather than moral outrage over threats to or the existence of slavery played a large role in the coming of the Civil War. Secessionists defensively chose secession to deal with political tensions produced by westward expansion or economic realities produced by industrialization and transportation innovations. Brian Schoen’s The Fragile Fabric of Union outlines the process by which cotton became essential to the American southern and European economies. Southerners’ defended cotton’s essential role in their version

38 James M. Woods, Rebellion and Realignment: Arkansas’s Road to Secession (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987). Woods’ argument for Alabama seems to run closest to the one made for Mississippi in that Mississippians tied their future economic and social prosperity to the preservation and even expansion of slavery.
40 Bond, Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century, 82. Bond’s “false republic” comes from Charles Dickens’s contention in 1842 that a false republic founded its freedom on the existence of an underclass. For Dickens’s argument see Charles Dickens, Pictures from Italy, and American notes For General Circulation (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1877), Chapter XVI: Slavery.
of a modern and innovative economy and society by choosing secession. What gave the South hope for economic and, thereby, national vitality was the preservation of slavery, cotton’s proven value, and the South’s economic ties to European markets.  

While economic and class studies focus on economic motivations of men who seceded, gender and race historians attempt to understand the means by which membership in a specific class created social and cultural motivations to secede among white southerners. Historians such as Bertrand Wyatt-Brown, Charles B. Dew and Christopher J. Olsen study the South or secession and secessionists as each related to gendered concepts of southern masculinity and honor as well as a long-standing tradition of anti-party and disunionism in southern politics. Their work emphasized the role of masculinity, concepts of honor, and the desire to maintain an underclass, as keys to southern political culture and identity.

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43 Bertram Wyatt Brown argued over a number of studies that secession was a southern response to an honor-insulting Republican and largely northern administration, which threatened every aspect of their person and culture. See Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); and *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace and War, 1760s-1880s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Walter L. Buenger’s *Secession and the Union in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984) argued for a similarly angered Texan community. Stephanie McCurry’s work *Masters of Small Worlds Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) pointed out how secession proponents played upon patriarchal fears. One of the more interesting studies is that the language of honor was also used as a means to secure Unionism in the antebellum Alabama. Certainly southern men of both sides in Mississippi’s secession crisis illustrate the validity of both sides usage of gendered language to persuade their peers and voters.
Bertram Wyatt-Brown was one of the first southern historians to define the Civil War as a “simple test of manhood,” though he would not be the last. Many historians recognize that the ideas of secession had their roots in the Nullification and subsequent sectional meltdowns concerning slavery in the territories, the admission of new states, and the Fugitive Slave Law. Christopher J. Olsen, in his work *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, tied Mississippi’s support for secession to a tradition of masculinity and honor as well as tradition of anti-party voter resistance when Southerners felt insulted or threatened. While Wyatt-Brown can be criticized for his view that honor as much as slavery caused the Civil War, his work cannot be so simply reduced. Wyatt-Brown argues that disunion resulted when the moral assumptions of the North and the South diverged. Secession was a means to protect one’s family, home, and slavery. As Mary Chestnut stated, “There are things worse than death,” and a loss of honor was a fate worse than death. Wyatt-Brown also asserts important ideas about the collective will and community, though the effect of Wyatt-Brown’s thesis is directed at discrediting slavery rather than the ability for an individual to be held personally responsible for his actions as a slaveholder or member of the southern elite community. With that said, Wyatt-Brown also saw clearly how individuals of the period held sacred what the community held sacred, that personal autonomy bent to the collective will, responding to the weight of the community. An individual of the period could only be what the community reflected, and one cannot know the individual without knowing the community.44

Finally, historians discuss secession and secessionists through studies of the memory of the American Civil War and Reconstruction as well as syntheses of early American history. Memory studies can be instrumental in understanding the motivation behind the creation of a

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44 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 20 and 28; Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*. 
historical narrative by a particular generation as well as the impact of what a generation chooses to remember or forget. David W. Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* shows how post-war Americans struggled to define the memory of the war. Blight tied this definition to how Southerners arrived at the moment of secession. Secessionists and their champions believe that the memory of their cause ought to be included in the main public narrative. William W. Freehling’s synthetic works, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay* and *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant* cannot be ignored. Unlike many studies, Freehling’s work focuses on secessionists. His compelling narratives recreate the personalities and motivations of individuals, whose distinct voices are often lost in lieu of complicated theory-driven monographs or studies devoted to specific aspects of the larger antebellum period. His synthesis unites fractured arguments of other historians and incorporates them into his own argument as to the South’s motivations for secession and war. His argument of the existence of three Southerns—old, middle and border—places all three regions into the same narrative and helps us to understand how their distinctive economies, populations, and commitment to slavery, shaped each “south’s” vision of the future outside the Union. Secession’s delay in 1850 and its triumph in 1860 stridently underlines the fact that a united South is a fallacy and that secession was not a foregone conclusion even for the fiercest of secession’s supporters.⁴⁵

The second principle historians have used to understand secession is to focus on prominent individuals from important states. Often taking the form of political biographies, these

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studies identify secession’s most fanatical and radical adherents and attempt to explain their ideology and actions. The attraction of these studies is emotional, as secessionists famous for their issues with their relationships, fiery tempers, and blustering speeches are given a second-wind from beyond the grave. Contemporaries leveled blame for the Civil War on the extreme southern political extremists, so historians’ focus on individual secessionists or a specific group of “fire-eaters” is in keeping with nineteenth-century biases. Specific studies of particular secessionists abound in this group of studies: James D. B. De Bow, Edmund Ruffin, William Lowndes Yancey, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Laurence Keitt, William Porcher Miles, John A. Quitman, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, and Louis Wigfall.46 Jefferson Davis by virtue of his later self-identified persona as the last Confederate and as the president of the Confederacy could be included. The list, by no means complete, includes men most deserving of the moniker of “secessionist” for their radical and early stances in support of secession.

Studies of specific individuals or secessionists as a generation contribute to the historiography in three important ways. First, the biographical and sociological nature of this type of inquiry gives insight on the motivation and social pressure contributing to the formation

of social and political identities in southern white elite men. Second, it illustrates the importance of the intellectual element in the secessionist movement. In particular, Drew Gilpin Faust and Eric Walther show how a number of men who supported secession sometimes at odds with southern and American society, alienating their fellow southerners in their enthusiasm for education and industrialization and angering the North in their desire for economic independence to protect slavery. Finally, the studies point to a pervasive imagined community, particularly among southern intellectual and political leaders, which saw men working independently and then coming together to share their findings and envision an independent southern nation.

Related to studies focused on prominent men is a secondary focus on specific states. Historians center extensive antebellum studies of secession and secessionists on South Carolina and Virginia. South Carolina is popular because it was the first state to secede and had a troubled relationship with the Union, beginning with its delegates’ reluctance to accept the United States Constitution without provisions to protect slavery. The nullification crisis in the 1830s and the furor over the Compromise of 1850 strained the state’s already troubled relationship with the nation. Secession in 1860 served as the culmination of decades of struggle with the federal government, allowing the states’ visions of a separate South to attain fruition. Its elite sons were outspoken in regard to the protection of slavery and a state’s right to nullify or condemn laws and legislation unfavorable to its plight. Their confidence in their ability to argue and fight for positions on controversial issues, like Nullification and Secession, makes them attractive to historians as counterpoints to their equally radical opponents, abolitionists.

Next to South Carolina, Virginia and Virginians are the second favorite topic primarily because they were the Confederacy’s most prized convert. As the oldest southern state and one of the nation’s first colonies, Virginia’s withdrawal was monumental. Virginia is also the home
of a number of founders, including one of the South’s favored sons, Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson proposed his republic of farmers with the model of Virginia in mind. Virginia’s reluctant vote for secession and South Carolina’s long-suffering campaign for its reality are considered the two major secession story arcs, and other state histories fall by the wayside.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{47} More studies than would fit in an appropriate footnote mention secession in passing or as part of a larger study, but only a few studies deal specifically with secession in particular states or secessionists as a body. William Freehling and Craig M. Simpson’s study of Georgia’s secession crisis, \textit{Secession Debated: Georgia’s Showdown in 1860} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) is a notable and noble exception. Georgia’s secession crisis is particularly fascinating for the debates held during the convention. Percy Lee Rainwater wrote the first account of Mississippi’s secession crisis in \textit{Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession, 1856-1861}. Beyond his account, only William Lesko Barney’s dissertation “Road to Revolution: The Social Basis of Secession in Alabama and Mississippi” (Dissertation, Columbia University, 1971) and subsequent book, \textit{The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860} (New York, 1974) were written in the twentieth century. For Alabama, Eric H. Wather has done considerable work on filling in the gap for Alabama’s role in the secession crisis, working largely through portraits of secessionists, particularly William Lowndes Yancey. See Walther, Eric H. \textit{The Fire-Eaters} and \textit{William Lowndes Yancey and the Coming of the Civil War} (Charlottesville: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). One of the lone studies of Arkansas’s secession from the Union is James M. Woods’ \textit{Rebellion and Realignment: Arkansans’s Road to Secession} (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987). Timed to arrive on 150th anniversary of the beginning of the secession crisis, Mark K. Christ edited the volume \textit{The Die is Cast: Arkansas Goes to War} (Butler Center Books, 2010) which reflects an anniversary-timed interest in the field from points of view beyond that of secessionists, including women and unionists. Joseph Carlyle Sitterson and John C. Inscoe have done studies of the movement in North Carolina. Willie Malvin Caskey published \textit{Secession and Restoration of Louisiana}, which contains a forward by Frank L. Owsley. Despite the popular cry “Don’t Mess with Texas,” volumes about its role in secession are scarce, including \textit{Secession and the Union in Texas} by Walter L. Buenger. Modest searches turned up no specific state secession histories of Florida’s role in the secession crisis or its secessionists. Tennessee falls into a category best illustrated in relation to state studies on Maryland, Missouri, or Kentucky. The bipartisan nature of their representative population and continued interest in the perpetuation of slavery results in books that speak to the dual nature of the state, rather than a clear-cut study of disunion or union. In addition to the individual states making up the Confederacy, little to no effort has been made to understand how, why, or when Native Americans chose to cast their lot with the Confederacy rather than the Federal Union beyond Clarissa W. Confer’s flawed \textit{Cherokee Nation in the Civil War} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).
Secession is defined as a moment. This third principle seems so basic that it requires some explanation. The means by which historians adhere to this notion is found in the underlying structure of studies. More often than not, most studies do not devote more than a paragraph, sometimes a chapter, to secession. Flipping to the index of any book relating to early American history, even books dedicated to studying the causes of the Civil War, one is hard pressed to find more than a reference or two to secession or secessionists. Secession launches antebellum histories into the dead-end of the Civil War, and it serves as the stepping off point in most Civil War studies. Secession politics in the South are more complex than studies of the antebellum period allow, primarily due to their studies relating to causation of the war. Beyond a casual reference to South Carolina’s convention and the order in which other states followed suit, secession does not matter. Even the process of secession is overshadowed by the act itself. The means by which southern states authorized conventions, elected delegates, solidified the support of neighborings, and seceded from the Union remain unnecessary details without importance. Historians slight the nascent days of the creation of the Confederate nation to create a sharp transition from political to largely military histories concerned with Fort Sumter and mobilization for war.

Defining secession as a short-lived passionate political moment in 1860-1861 creates its own set of assumptions. First, only when secession is “successful” is it worth discussing, ignoring Americans’ romance with nullification and secession since the nation’s inception. Second, secession’s purpose was to instigate war. Mentioned in passing in larger works leading up to the Civil War or as a means to introduce the Civil War, historians reduce secession to a reflexive impulse intended to anger the North and start the war. Third, by focusing on 1860 and 1861, secession has no history or consequence in the lives of Americans or southerners before or
after the creation of the Confederate government and the subsequent defeat of its bid for independence. Separation and disunion, not war, had been secessionists’ goal, nothing more. Finally, secessionists as historical figures are only significant in relation to the moment of secession and the start of the war. With the death of the Confederacy, so too, the issue of secession and its proponents died.\textsuperscript{48}

The fourth and final principle means by which historians understand secession and secessionists relates to the artificial periodization of prevailing historiography. Historians lose track of secession after 1861. Such an accusation may seem faintly ridiculous. Antebellum studies often stretch from the signing of the Constitution to 1850 or 1860, taking events up to the critical decade of the 1850s or stopping at the point of secession. Civil War studies often overlap with antebellum studies, beginning as early as 1850 with a focus on 1861-1865, ending at the close of military fighting or including Reconstruction’s early constitutional promises of freedom and rights to African Americans. Reconstructions studies often begin with the end of the war and stretch to include a chapter on the bleak landscape leading to World War I.

While important for historiographic questions, artificially dividing the late nineteenth century proves troublesome for those interested in the continuity of lived experience and downplays the association between events before, during, and after the Civil War. The result is a fractured portrait, which produces questions about what occurred in American lives from 1850-1890. To trace the political careers of southern politicians who chose to become secessionists, one must consult at least eight historiographical fields: slavery, the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian

\textsuperscript{48} The only studies that illustrate the full trajectory of secessionists’ lives are biographers, though rarely do these portraits follow more than a single man, let alone an entire group. Eric Walther’s \textit{The Fire-Eaters} and William W. Freehling’s \textit{The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854} and \textit{The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant 1854-1861} are some of the more successful attempts to analyze secessionists as a group worthy of significant scholarly treatment, but their focus is largely on secessionists’ motives and work up to 1860-1861.
presidencies, Market Revolution (or Transportation Revolution), Reform, Old South, Causes of the American Civil War, Civil War, and Reconstruction. Few of these fields speak clearly to each other despite the fact that most men of the generation lived long and full lives well into the 1890s and some into the twentieth century.

One of the more illustrative examples of this principle is Freehling’s masterful works, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay* and *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant*. The two works straddle many fields of inquiry, reaching from 1776 to 1861. The synthetic nature of both volumes is admirable, but they do not break the mold. Spanning eighty-five years, Freehling’s work appreciates the passing on of political ideas and regional concerns from one generation to the next. Promising study in terms of scope and depth in his introduction, Freehling falls short of an expectation he creates. While appreciating secession’s origins, he ends the narrative with secessionists very much at the height of their movement in 1861, without concern for secession’s consequences. Freehling is just one example of the way historians have generated innumerable studies regarding men of a particular generation that represent a mere third or half of their entire lived experience. In adhering to traditional historiographic periodization, we have denied ourselves powerful narratives of continuity and change in the lives of a generation we argue was so utterly transformed by war. Left unspoken is a generation’s full life from beginning to end with all the mess in between.

In order to understand the power and significance of secessionists and their movement, we must explore the full arc of secessionist’s lives over the course of the nineteenth century, and we need to understand secession’s evolving trajectory over the same period. This requires four major changes in our conceptualization of secessionists and secession.
First, we need to define secessionists better. Contemporaries identified “secessionists” and articulated definitions according to their understanding of the political climate and individuals’ actions leading up to secession, conflating definitions from the 1850s through Reconstruction. Definitions of ‘secessionist’ and ‘fire-eaters,’ moreover, could be either inclusive or exclusive. In many cases, such terms say as much about the people who created or used them as they do about the people they were designed to identify or describe. Well-meaning historians utilized contemporaries’ definitions without much thought as to who created them, why they were created, or what purpose they served. The result is a great deal of adjectives and terms without any definitional precision.

For the purposes of this dissertation, a “secessionist” refers to white southern men who supported secession and actively participated in the sundering of the nation in secession conventions and the creation of the Confederate nation. Not every Southerner had the ability to choose secession at a secession convention; however, universal white male suffrage ensured that many white males had an opportunity to vote for their delegates.\(^49\) White women were prohibited

\(^49\) The Mississippi Constitution of 1832 clearly set out the terms of white male suffrage. Property ownership did not prohibit any white man voting, though criminal conduct could result in the removal of the right. Article One, Section Twenty states: No property qualification for eligibility to office, or for the right of suffrage, shall ever be required by law in this state. Article Seven, Section Four ensured. “The privilege of free suffrage shall be supported by laws regulating elections and prohibiting, under adequate penalties, all undue influence therein, from power, bribery, tumult, or other improper conduct.” Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Mississippi History Now website: http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/101/index.php?s=extra&id=268 last accessed September 14, 2012. Additionally, delegates at the convention ran for their positions on platforms that clearly stated how they would vote, and as a result, most delegates voted as the majority of their constituents desired. The few exceptions included some Mississippi counties where Unionists or Secessionists gained a position when votes were split among a number of candidates. See Chapter Four for specific elections.
from the franchise due to their sex, despite having opinions on secession and war.\textsuperscript{50} Enslaved men and women and populations of free blacks were similarly disenfranchised. Identifying every southern man and woman as a “secessionist” is inaccurate. In a similar vein, author makes every attempt to avoid utilizing adjectives to describe secessionists unless the label is self-assigned. I also use terms, such as “fiery,” “extremist,” or “radical” as well as names, such as “fire-brand” or “fire-eater” sparingly as they express judgment and perpetuate the idea of secession as an impulsive choice on the part of men without solid mental faculties.

The term “secessionist” as it is used in this work also suggests that an individual made a choice on the behalf of a larger body to remove his state from the American Union. Some white southern men who voted for pro-secession delegates could be included, as well as men from Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia who voted directly for a referendum supporting their state’s secession. Had the South won the war, secessionists would have been termed “founding fathers.” Just as the American nation differentiates “signers” of the Declaration from the average American supporter, so too does this dissertation separate “secessionists” from the majority of Southerners.

Second, in addition to a better definition, we need to understand the breadth of secession and its adherents. Secession was not an end unto itself, but the means by which southerners could create their vision of a more perfect society. The South’s attempt to pull away from the American nation was a bid for a separate nation, and secessionists imagined themselves as a

people distinct from their northern and western peers. Their community was largely bound together in the fight to preserve slavery and that institution’s central role in their social and cultural identity. As Benedict Anderson notes, the rise of capitalism is key to the development of nations, so too were the rapid changes brought on by industrialization and westward expansion essential to the growing belief in a distinct southern way of life and people. A number of social institutions and transportation innovations brought the South together and allowed increased communication and awareness of distinctions between the North and the South, but also distinctions between Southerners. Abolitionist Wendall Phillips argued, “Insurrection of thought always precedes insurrection of arms.”51 The American Civil War was a southern bid for a new nation, conceived in the belief that all men were not equal and such inequality was the lynchpin to the southern vision for future prosperity, within or without the American nation. The means by which they would create that nation and how its government, economy, and society would function differed according to individual and regional tastes and experience. In the end, the lack of unified vision and cooperation doomed the Confederacy from the beginning.

Secessionists were opportunists. They expressed and carried out their vision by playing on white Southerners anxieties concerning everything from the Compromise of 1850 to the 1860 presidential election. Secessionists’ popularity with southern voters and the larger populace should be viewed as an effect of Constitutional impasse. When the Supreme Court of the United States ruled on Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857), stating that Congressional regulation of slavery was unconstitutional, the Legislative and Judicial branches (the later by virtue of its function and ruling) fell silent on efforts to stave off national collapse. President James Buchanan’s southern

sympathies and reading of the Constitution prevented any assistance from the executive. At this juncture in both the North and the South, the extremes of the era found political viability. Though the Republican Party chose a moderate—Abraham Lincoln—as the head of their candidate, their platform that proposed an end to slavery in the territories—a bold and untried position by any national party prior to that point. In the South, advocates for secession helped prevent southern Whigs from rejoining a national party and split the Democratic Party into three pieces. Northern Democrats put forth Stephen Douglas, who was amiable to slavery. Thanks to the coalescence of southern unionists and former Whigs in the Constitutional Union Party, Breckenridge and radicals entered the fray and won because of their vision for renewed peace and prosperity through secession, preservation of slavery, and the creation of a Confederate nation seemed a bold choice in a time of uncertainty and fear.

Secessionists consisted of an imagined community, brought together through their familial, educational, agricultural, commercial, social, cultural, and political interests. Events from the signing of the Constitution all the way to Fort Sumter provided the impetus that convinced the South that threats to the preservation of slavery and the right to expand the institution were enough cause to dissolve the Union. Longtime advocates of states’ rights positions, secessionists argued states had a right to protect themselves from a federal government

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52 A number of biographers of James Buchanan and historians who study his administration quickly label the antebellum president as a weak executive. Implicit in the instructions to the presidency regarding the American Constitution is the imperative that the President must preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution. In light of the Supreme Court’s opinion in Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857), Buchanan believed the issue of making laws regarding the institution of slavery throughout the nation had been decided. He did not believe that he had the power to do much else but sit and watch his country fall apart. At one point, Buchanan seemed pursuaded by the idea that the United States might transfer ownership of South Carolina’s forts to the State in hopes of a staving off a confrontation. Only when the remainder of his cabinet put out such an action would be tantamount to treason, did he move away from the action. One is hardpressed not to suggest that Buchanan was a much more dangerous executive than history remembers.
encroaching on what they saw as their constitutionally protected freedoms and rights. In their view, the American Union was broken, and Southerners as the aggrieved party by default became the rightful heirs to the American Revolutionary legacy. Perceiving themselves as victims of northern aggression, secessionists saw that the South alone understood the spirit of the Declaration and defined themselves as the keepers of the true interpretation of the Constitution.

In the spirit of their forefathers, they fomented revolution based on a strong idealized notion of nationalism and natural rights. The demand for cotton world wide and its market price convinced them that they would have continued access to financial capital and access to foreign recognition and support for the fledgling nation.

Secessionists were moderates. Even if the idea of secession was first promulgated by men labeled as extremists, the men who carried out the process of seceding from the nation would have spurned the label of “fire-eater” and denied participation in a conspiracy. Their moderation in politics prior to the war kept them from standing out from their more vocal and “radical” peers. No less anxious about or invested in the future of slavery, their stances and actions favored working within the system and resorting to secession as the last course of action rather than the immediate answer to Lincoln’s election. Secession conventions on the whole were surprisingly devoid of disorder and chaos, reflecting careful adherence to formal procedure and debate. How secession’s earliest advocates came to convince their moderate peers to secede during the crisis is a bit miraculous. In addition to moderate Democrats, secession supporters needed Whigs and other splinter groups to throw off party affiliation to unite as Southerners. Anything less than unanimous action in favor of secession would have ensured the failure of disunion. Prominent supporters of secession were present at every secession convention, but they were not the majority. At the polls in the midst of the secession crisis, Southerners selected moderates over
strong advocates of secession to represent their communities at the secession conventions. As a result, delegates to the conventions represented each state’s best slate of men capable of understanding the gravity of the task at hand and choosing a clear and rational path. The question of secession was not about its legality for most of the men present. Many Southerners believed secession to be a patriot’s duty in the face of tyranny. But, secession was the last best option for securing slavery. The burning question at each secession convention in 1860 was really whether no compromise remained, and with all hope being lost, had the men and the hour of secession met.

Secession had long roots. A seemingly endless number of opportunities and venues brought Southerners together with men from their own region as well as men from the North. Antebellum familial ties, public forums and institutions brought Southern men into northern circles, though rarely the reverse. While antebellum events pushed Southerners together on the basis of their support and defense of the institution of slavery, regional ties grew stronger through familial ties and youthful connections made at northern and later southern educational institutions. Agricultural and commercial conventions and publications created forums and connections beyond social and political venues, where innocuous conversations among Americans from all regions regarding agricultural economy, the maintenance of plantations or farms, slave and free labor, advancements in science and technology, industry and manufacture, and commerce vital to the southern economy and the wealth of the American nation thrived. The number of men to rise to prominence in the secession crisis, civil war, and beyond came from these circles and communities, not from obscurity.

Secessionists backed up their votes for secession by devoting their service and lives to the creation of a Confederate nation. Many helped form and held key positions in the Confederate
government as members of Jefferson Davis’s cabinet, representatives or senators in the Confederate Congress or state legislatures, and as judges. At the secession conventions and beyond, secessionists were appointed to high-ranking military positions in the Confederate Army. A number spurned desk duty or officer status, and more than a few fell in with regular troops and died fighting in the trenches. Some died of old age or sickness hoping their actions had contributed to the start of a promising southern future, though they did not live to see the end of war. A number of secessionists grew disheartened by the direction of the war and fledgling nation as wartime necessities inhibited the most basic national development of economy and commerce. A number tried to return home to wait out the war in disgust, or took it upon themselves to fight the existing Confederate government to mitigate the war’s effects on southern society. Ultimately, secessionists used their roles in public administration or the military as a means to continue their power and influence in their communities and to rebuild when the war ended. Few escaped feelings of personal responsibility for their role in bringing on the war, including South Carolina Governor John Hugh Means. Of his decision to join the Confederate ranks, Means stated:

I have been advocating secession all my life; by my conduction I have done much to bring it about; now it has come, age or not, I will myself go with them and share the dangers to which the boys have been brought by my advice.\(^\text{53}\)

Secession continued to play an important role in southern social and political communities after the war. Northerners, by virtue of victory and military occupation of the former Confederacy, initially affixed Southerners with the label of “secessionist” without much discretion and barred such men from holding public office and leadership positions. Every Southerner was a secessionist, and none could be trusted. Yet, the South needed leaders. The

\(^\text{53}\) R. A. Brock, ed., *The Southern Historical Society Papers (SHS)*, Volume XVI, January December 1888, 23 (hereafter *SHS*).
North knew that the southern men appointed to offices in the war’s aftermath failed to win the hearts and minds of their resident populations. Press accounts and personal correspondence of the era noted a return of antebellum political divisions during elections, including references to candidates’ prior positions as Bell Constitutional Unionists, Douglas Democrats, and Breckinridge Democrats, as well as to even earlier divisions between Old-Line Whigs and Democrats. Men could not escape their actions in 1860. Candidates’ actions as delegates to the secession convention were thoroughly reexamined as a means to test their regional loyalty. Though seemingly outdated, such distinctions became the difference between political success and demise in the South for viable candidates from 1865-1890.

In addition to a broader understanding of secession in the lives of these men, we need to understand secession’s motive force over time. This third change in our conceptualization of secession and secessionists asks us to transcend traditional historiographic periodization to understand how support for secession became a collective memory that changed to fit the needs of a generation as events required. Secessionists were forced to live with their choice to secede from the Union. They did not experience a nineteenth century version of Andy Warhol’s fifteen minutes of fame and then utterly vanish. Some did retire from public life, but their reasons for doing so are much more a result of choice than necessity. As the southern cause faded, the responsibility for living as members of a vanquished nation was too much for some secessionists to endure, and they chose an early demise. Edmund Ruffin sought suicide rather than face defeat.

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or the knowledge that his efforts were not only in vain, but caused such bloodshed.\textsuperscript{55} Mississippi’s secession convention’s president, William Taylor Sullivan Barry wasted away in heartbreak. Still others chose to live with defeat and take on the role of bitter losers. Diehard and unrepentant secessionists followed roughly three postwar paths: a solitary retreat from public life to die in great sorrow; bitter defense of the Confederacy’s cause and creation of the romance of the “Lost Cause”; and fighting the victors at every turn by terror and violence.

Those who fell during the war had a slight advantage over the war’s survivors—they died. The dead do not have to explain their actions, defend their principles, or attempt to move on with their lives or political careers. Surviving secessionists had the onus of living on, continuing their political careers and social lives in face of being identified as fire-eaters, secessionist, or traitors.

In the immediate post-war environment, it was impossible for former secessionists to gain political office or appointment. Four long years of civil war resulted in thousands of mangled bodies and memories. From 1860 to the 1870s, first the Federal government and then their fellow southerners forced Mississippians involved in secession to defend their actions with words carefully weighed and considered. Post-war attempts to keep them out of the political or public arena did not discourage them. Secession as a means to the creation of a separate southern nation failed, the fight lost; however their strange vision of a region of “independent republican farmers” remained intact. Emancipation freed their labor force and led to great losses in their personal estate, but few lost much or any of their land, legal or medical practices, or their businesses. In spite of their racial views regarding their former slaves, they coerced African Americans to remain in the area and pick up the hoe and the plow again. The South could rise from the ashes of war and still become all that visionaries believed was possible of it.

\textsuperscript{55} Walther, \textit{The Fire-Eaters}, 229-230.
Over time, the definition of “secessionist” and “secession” changes to fit a community-driven vision for the South from the antebellum period to well after reconstruction. Maurice Halbwachs, an early twentieth century sociologist of the Durkheimian school, suggests that human social networks and organizations are primary in the creation of a collective memory, which, without the memory’s continual commemoration, would be remembered differently or fragmented. Halbwachs believes that the past, as a social construction, is shaped by the concerns of the present. With the present in a constant state of motion, every generation continually reshapes its own past to fit its present. In theory, Halbawchs suggests that if a historian can locate an individual’s thought process, it might be possible to better understand the social context in which that thought had meaning.  

If secession and its use to the community changed over time to fit the needs of southern society, then it follows that secession is subject to the influences of the creation of collective memory. Analyzing how Southerners defined secession, and what secession meant to them over the course of three formative historiographical periods—antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction—is the key to understanding a collective memory of secession. A flurry of people discussed secession and all of its merits and benefits in 1860. As the war effort continued, early proponents of secession became disenchanted, either due to their lack of participation in the Davis Administration, or the new government’s weakness and inability to fight a war. At the war’s end, many men forfeited any hope they might have retained for secession and a new Confederate nation. While many southern states repealed their secession ordinances after the war in order to regain citizenship rights, many individuals continued to defend their actions in terms of revolutionary patriotism. Too many men had died for Southerners to concede secession had

been wrong. Southern men in the political arena troubled themselves to discuss how secession should be justified and, as Halbwachs argues, their changing perspectives on secession haunted southern world views long after the silencing of the guns of civil war. Reconstruction continued to divide southerners who had never really reunited during the war. Men arrived at secession’s table with different visions of how to accomplish the same goal, utilizing the same means to different ends. They agreed on secession based on their visions and fought a war to ensure its success. Upon defeat, they split into categories in the post-war based on their strategies for survival without losing their initial vision.

By broadening our understanding of secession’s force over time, we arrive at the final change in our conceptualization of secession and secessionists: the cost of secession. By ending studies about secession and secessionists in 1860-1861, historians have allowed secessionists their triumph. Their defeat is assumed, but there should be a real question as to whether this understanding of the historical narrative is accurate. Bitterness trumps redemption in the popular memory of secessionists. That twenty-first century Americans may or may not recognize secessionists’ names is not indicative of their role in events or importance to their own generation. Southern collective memory preserves romantic portraits of unredeemed champions of the Lost Cause, including Jefferson Davis and Nathan Bedford Forrest. Such men in their lifetime willingly invited public attention to their unreconstructed ways, and subsequent generations allowed them to carry blame disproportionate to their guilt or involvement. Such interpretations became an accepted part of American collective memory so much that the memory of the men who were personally responsible for secession and civil war fell into obscurity. The surprising nature of L. Q. C. Lamar’s postwar career, the inverse of Davis’s antebellum career, and northern contemporaries’ idea of a successful southern redemption story
earned Lamar not lasting fame or the laurels his peers believed he deserved upon his death: rather, he was forgotten, but the legacy of the world he and his compatriots created in the post-war South had long-lasting and severe repercussions in the lives of Americans for years to come.

To tell an unfinished story, I found inspiration in some unconventional individuals. Two novelists, a sociologist, a political scientist, and a historian prodded me to think about and write differently about secession and secessionists. Writing about secessionists should include a bit of scholarly rebelliousness. Each of these non-traditional sources challenged me to think about the trajectories of individual lives of secessionists and their missed or contrived intersections with various communities throughout the span of the nineteenth century. Without them, this journey through the nineteenth century with roughly one hundred Mississippi secessionists would have had no vision.

An undergraduate seminar on the Civil War at Gettysburg College introduced me to the use of narrative history to write compelling, detail-driven studies. Shelby Foote’s *Stars in Their Courses: The Gettysburg Campaign* served to illustrate how historians of the Civil War faced the challenge of arguing against flawed but popular novels. Foote’s novella proved instructive in an unforeseen way. In it, he mentions a meeting between General Robert E. Lee and his generals before the Battle of Gettysburg. Upon a table lay a map, which Lee used to point out where the armies would meet and fight. The literary brilliance of this moment—if you will—is that the town of Gettysburg lay under Lee’s hand, unnoticed and unmentioned. Foote consigns the meeting at Gettysburg of the Union and Confederate armies to fate, rather than the convergence of major roads utilized by both armies. In fact, the title of the book comes from the Bible, Judges 5:20, which speaks of the stars fighting in the heavens, from their courses. Gettysburg is a
moment of intersection for thousands of stars—or men and nations—in their courses. According to Foote, Gettysburg is the pivotal moment of his central volume, a capstone or arch of that whole narrative of the war. While it is easy to debate Foote’s argument about Gettysburg, it is more interesting to think about his understanding of people’s lives like stars in their courses and the various intersections each had with its contemporaries in the the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{57}

Keeping in mind the idea of an individual’s trajectory, I happened to read Italo Calvino’s \textit{The Castle of Crossed Destinies} around the time I wrote my prospectus. Calvino gave me inspiration for thinking about the secession convention and social and cultural institutions as contrived or chance intersections in larger personal narratives. In \textit{The Castle of Crossed Destinies} characters arrive at a castle from a myriad of separate adventures, taking shelter for the evening. They find they cannot speak, so to communicate, they utilize a deck of tarot cards. Each person tells his or her own story while interweaving it with the cards and stories used by his or her fellow travelers. The reader hears the stories through a narrator, who interprets the cards as he understands them. By the end, the tarot deck is spread before the players in an interlocking pattern, a physical map of individual adventures intersecting at one point. The last person, upon completing his or her story, scatters the cards and reshuffles the deck. Then, they begin again. In a similar way, I proposed to put together a study a group of men who came together as a body for a single moment in 1861, but who had come into contact with one or another at various other moments over the course of their lives and would continue to do so until their deaths. Calvino’s travelers tell their stories with a deck of tarot cards, which have been repurposed to tell not the future, but the present. While a single narrator explains the meaning of each card, the nature of

each person’s silence suggests there may be other stories, imagined and untold. The deck is
exhausted and the cards reshuffled. So too, one could argue about secession and secessionists. Each arrived at moments of intersection—education, professional life, the secession convention, the Civil War, and Reconstruction—with their own set of experiences. Their paths, despite being momentarily united also contained future paths that were as diverse as their pasts. When the experience was over, the deck was reshuffled. Each time the story is told, the constant is the men themselves. The deck, the intersecting moment, and the stories told, change.58

In addition to literary sources, Benedict Anderson and Maurice Halbwachs challenged me to think about the communities to which secessionists belonged, whether to aid them in state-making or creating memories of secession to fit their changing needs over the course of the century. Anderson’s work pushed me to consider some of the intellectual communities created prior to the war and the evolving means by which southern men used them. Without the real and imagined communities to which they belonged—whether they be educational, agricultural, or political—they could not have imagined the creation of the Confederate Nation. Their identity as secessionists, even after the defeat of the South, continued to play a role, and their collective memory of secession continued to change as their present demanded. Halbwachs in particular inspired me to challenge popular historiography and examine secessionists’ ideas of secession over time to determine how, why, and in what context secessionists changed their definitions of secession, and to try to understand their personal motivation for supporting secession and the impact of that decision on their personal and political lives during and after the Civil War.

The final piece of the inspiration of this study occurred at a rather sad moment in my graduate career. A beloved professor passed away. At the time of his death, early American

history students from our program were given an opportunity to choose a few books from his library for our own collections. The books we selected said as much about our research interests as it did our desire to have a physical memory of a great educator and historian. Some contained his name, a location and date. With me that day were a number of my peers. The discussions, discoveries, and laughter in that library would have given him great joy. Arriving home, I placed those books upon my shelves to be given away some day to one of my students, perhaps with a story of how it came to be there. The experience caused me to think about the relationships between students and mentors as well as the history of ideas and books. Much like Foote’s “stars in their courses,” we intersect with a great number of individuals for short, intense periods of time in graduate school, creating lifelong friendships and learning a lot more than the history we chose to study. The effect of those relationships can only be gleaned from academic records, tangible objects like books or papers, and memories committed to paper. Lamar and his secessionist generation were students and mentors. In addition to personal recollections and correspondence, they left behind books. The University of Mississippi owns an 1840 copy of James Madison’s papers from the Constitutional Convention. Inside the front cover, L. Q. C. Lamar wrote his name. It is a simple thing for Lamar to have written his name in his book, but he has left us to wonder when and where he acquired or read it. As a piece of material culture, it does not fail to produce a chuckle from those who come to know him, but it also reminds us that at their core, secessionists were Americans, complete with texts of the Constitution on their shelves. In spite of this and because of this, they chose secession.

Inspired by these individuals, I have endeavored to write a social, political, and cultural biography of a generation of Mississippians who chose secession as a means to attain a larger vision of commercial, social, political, cultural, and familial stability. They dominated politics
before, during and after the war. Some really were obscure men of property and slaves, and their attendance at the secession convention was their first and last public act. Some men did not keep personal records or their correspondence was not preserved by family or others. A number of men died from natural or war-related causes. Those who survived the war had no idea if the federal government would punish them for treason or crimes against the state. A number of men’s papers were lost in the war, enough surviving records allow for a rich portrait of a very interesting men.

The following pages attempt to create a coherent portrait of a generation. It is not a love story about dead white privileged southern men or a romance extolling the virtues of the Old South, states’ rights, and the Lost Cause. No effort or attempt to aggrandize their actions, excuse their prejudices, or cover up their personal or collective injustices will be made. David Hackett Fischer understood his book about “a dead white man on horseback” might not gain universal praise, and I am similarly aware that writing a book about dead white southern men acting to accomplish a vision of an America infused with the belief that slavery was the most vital institution to the nation may suffer similarly. And yet, theirs is an untold story. Collectively they struggled with the fruits of their actions, the effects of which and with which they and the South and the American nation continued struggle, and still continue to struggle.

The difficulty scholars have in writing about the diversity of southern experience in the secession crisis as well as throughout the war and Reconstruction drove much of the research for this project. Mississippi was the second state in the Union to secede, and the decision to do so related to its vision of its future role in the American South, in relation to its sister states, as well as the nation as a whole. Unlike South Carolina and Virginia, Mississippi had been in the Union for a mere forty-four years before it decided to leave. Native-born Mississippians were
outnumbered at the Mississippi Secession Convention by those who had migrated to the state in hopes of greater prosperity. Both sets of Mississippians embraced the need to preserve the institution of slavery to maintain their wealth and to promote and expand their investments to the west and beyond, and to ensure their future prosperity and that of their progeny. Mississippi is considered a southwestern state, as its settlement reflects movement from the old South into the West. Settlement to the state only picked up as the Choctaw and Chickasaw ceded land to the United States, beginning in 1820 and continuing until 1829. Men who settled in the territory at the time of its founding shared the country’s financial and economic losses during the panic of 1837 as a result of heavy reliance on a single cash crop. Adopting better land management and agricultural practices allowed them to recover and to enjoy immense economic successes and a short rise to political power in local and state affairs. By 1860, Mississippi was the fifth richest state and its slave population exceeded that of South Carolina.\(^\text{59}\) Natchez was home to one of the country’s most thriving slave markets. Secession to Mississippians was a means to a greater end, rather than a storied break-up with long-abiding northern friends.

The Federal Census is an important source in this dissertation. As each of the chapters touches on information gleaned from the 1850, 1860, 1870, and even 1880 censuses, it is important to include in the introduction a note on terms. The 1860 and 1870 United States Censuses record two sets of data for each household’s estate. The first column asks for the value of Real Estate, and the second column asks for the value of Personal Estate. Real estate was the value of the home or land, regardless of where it was located. Personal estate included the value of all property, possessions or wealth, which included bonds, mortgages, slaves, livestock, plate, plate.

\(^{59}\) Virginia continued to lead the nation, followed by Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and then South Carolina. U. S. Census Bureau, \textit{1860 United States Federal Census}, Population schedules, pages 598-599.
jewels, or furniture. Related to estate values is an important observation about the 1860 and 1870 Censuses “occupation” column. Census administrators were specifically instructed to identify anyone as a “farmer” if his chief occupation and source of income was agricultural. By 1870, the term “planter” is allowed, but the word does not signify what it does to historians. The word “planter” is used in the antebellum period to denote a man with twenty or more slaves, but in the census, most men that historians would label as a planter are identified as “farmer” in the 1860 and sometimes even in the 1870 census. The 1870 Census makes spare use of the word “planter,” and often the word is that chosen by the census taker or the individual interviewed and does not correspond to larger real or personal estates in relation to those men identified as “farmer.” The distinction between types of estate as well as individuals’ occupation help us understand the changing economic status of secessionists from 1860-1870.

Included in the larger portrait of this generation of Mississippi secessionists is a triptych of men: James Lusk Alcorn, Jefferson Davis, and Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar. Each is the best example of his generation. Each has a strong narrative voice and a careers that waxes and wanes over the course of the era. Secession was integral to their political and social identity. Davis, Alcorn, Lamar and a few other Mississippi secessionists presented a vision of the Civil War, which made them peculiarly odd-shaped pegs in a post-war society dominated by individuals with reconciliationist, white supremacist, or emancipationist visions of the Civil War. Secessionists, such as Davis, Alcorn, and Lamar, make fascinating post-war studies. They ignited antebellum passions, fought in the Civil War, expressed volumes in their silence.

60 These categories are the much contested though helpful categories of post-war visions of the Civil War utilized by David Blight in Race and Reunion, 2. Though this could include abolitionists, for the purposes of this paper it refers only to Confederates and secessionists.
and patience upon defeat, and returned to the political sphere to use the climate of the post-war to attempt to fulfill their persistent vision of a southern future.

Beginning with Davis, the eldest of the three, secession was a part of his political vocabulary beginning in the 1850s. Davis’s role in this study is that of a national Mississippi character dealing with the burden of secession. Highly visible before and during the war, Davis’s correspondence and public remarks concerning secession are well-documented, and as one of the highest ranking Democrats, he was integral to the overall process of defining secession, not only for himself, but in his shady dealings with secession advocates from other southern states in the months leading up to secession.

Davis’s definition of secession changed dramatically in the middle of the Civil War, moving from the position that secession was a necessary aspect of America’s founding ensuring the protection of life, liberty and property, to secession’s value as an action—largely posturing—of last resort due to the Union’s attack on the institution of slavery, to his final position that secession was a state’s inherent right to check the excesses of government. Image conscious after his premature and highly involved support of secession in the 1850s, Davis tried to spin his involvement in secession as that of an eleventh-hour or reluctant Confederate—though much of the evidence points to a rather heavily involved proponent of secession who never quite lost the taste of fire. Davis’s thirst to prove the righteousness of secession’s cause ultimately caused his political and social demise, in the form of military defeat in the Civil War, but also in the form of political and social banishment in the post-war as a traitorous Confederate leader. Davis died unrepentant, unpardoned, and proud of his life-long belief in a state’s inherent right to secede and his status as the Confederacy’s last Confederate.
In contrast, James Lusk Alcorn was also a veteran of the secession crisis of 1850, but as a Whig had pushed for Unionism in the face of growing regional tensions over the expansion of slavery into the territories. While Davis was the national face of Mississippi’s secession movement, Alcorn and his compatriot Lamar, engineered secession on the state level. Alcorn’s role in this study serves as a foil to the characters of Davis and Lamar, as a Whig and later Republican, but also because of his own independent use of his role in secession and the Civil War to shape his legacy. A Unionist in 1850 and a reluctant secessionist in 1860, Alcorn was the social equal of both Davis and Lamar, in terms of the amount of slaves and property he owned. Alcorn became an experienced state and national Mississippi politician. His adherence to Whig values placed him on the outside when it came to political and military position during the war, which placed him, for a brief time, in a position after the war to inherit political power.

Alcorn claimed that his role in secession was directly tied to his idea of a code of honor. When political ostracism from Davis was all that Alcorn received for his concession to secession, he developed a virulent hatred for Democrats as well as Jefferson Davis. Alcorn’s distaste for all things Democratic led him in later years to define secessionists as a group of fire-eaters, mainly Democrats, inciting the passions of ordinary southerners to work against their own interests, to secede due to inflated claims of danger to slavery and states’ rights. Being on the outside assisted Alcorn in the post-war when naïve northerners looked upon Alcorn’s lack of service in the Civil War as a sign of his lack of genuine complicity in secession. This in turn helped him rise to power in the post-war, when the political environment allowed former Whigs favorable conditions for a return to political involvement.

Unlike Davis and Lamar, both of whom left substantial written record, Alcorn was a bit harder to find in the historical record. Outside of four secondary sources—an unpublished
manuscript; a published introduction preceding a few transcribed letters between Alcorn and his wife; one published biography in 1966; and a master’s thesis on Alcorn’s senatorial career—Alcorn’s appearance in antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction works should be considered in terms of actual evidence as well as the lack thereof. The James Lusk Alcorn and Family papers collection at the Mississippi State Archives includes scrapbooks, journals, and letters, remains largely un-transcribed or unpublished. Probably the most interesting part of the collection are Alcorn’s surviving journals from the years 1865, 1869, 1878, 1880, 1882, and 1890. Alcorn’s surviving journals do not cover his times of public service and national strife, and one wonders if he or his family carefully selected what would remain for succeeding generations concerning his legacy. Journals that one might have hoped to find for this project, either in the late 1850s or 1866, were unavailable, if journals for those years ever existed.

L. Q. C. Lamar displays elements of both Alcorn and Davis in his thought processes concerning his own definitions of secession as well as the sheer effect that the signing of the secession convention had on a political career. Lamar’s definition of secession echoed that of his mentor, Jefferson Davis, until the ravages of the war and post-war caused him to reevaluate secession. Like Davis, Lamar saw secession initially as a last ditch effort, hoping that secession would at least bring about a conclusion to the sectional debates that had ravaged the country since the signing of the Constitution. Unlike Davis, who was forced into obscurity because of his inability to accept the defeat of secession, Lamar used his post-war reconfiguration of secession as a patriotic duty southerners were obligated to make upon the threat of their institutions and values. Lamar’s eulogy for Charles Sumner served as his ultimate redefinition of secession and the Civil War, setting in words the elements that would later be known as the lost cause.
Sources for Lamar are numerous, though one should proceed with caution. His son-in-law collected his correspondence and thoughts in a published book. Many scholars have utilized his words as primary material without caution. The physical letters and materials quoted within the book do not always have physical counterparts. Whether the original letters deteriorated over time, were not saved, or ever existed is unknown. When used, footnotes will allude to this situation to remind the reader that memories of secessionists as well as their ancestors were under contemporary assault and temptation to color the past so that history would be kind to them was an ever-present reality.

The organization of this dissertation aims to present a political, social, and cultural biography of Mississippi secessionists from roughly 1820-1890. Beginning with the social and cultural ties formed through their familial, educational, and agricultural circles, the dissertation’s early chapters try to describe the communities and circles of influence outside of the halls of politics in which the idea of secession and preservation of the institution of slavery found fertile ground. The first chapter focuses on the nineteenth-century American academy. A number of institutions and educators directly or indirectly influenced, educated, and mentored a generation of Mississippians who would decided that their fortunes and future lay outside the American nation. While specific influence or the impact of a particular instructor is difficult to prove, the presence of large number of young southern students at institutions of higher learning is difficult to ignore. Evidence suggests southern men who studied in the North were instructed in more than Greek, rhetoric, and calculus by their largely Federalist professors. Where better to learn the doctrine of minority action against majority tyranny than in the home region of the first Americans to openly discuss secession—New England. Southern students chafed at any threat to the institution of slavery, which encouraged nonconformity with their northern peers and forced
Southerners to make fast and lasting friendships with their fellow Southerners. After graduation, alumni of the same institutions would represent their sections and face off against each other in the hallowed halls of American government.

Building on the academic foundations of Mississippi and southern politicians, Chapter Two works to establish another important nexus of southern community: agricultural journals and commercial and southern conventions. Most secessionists were farmers and planters as well as slaveholders. Their beliefs and actions in regard to the institution of slavery were tied to their personal experiences, interests, and anxieties about their future as planters and the role of agriculture in their society and culture. The desire to cast secession as a foolhardy and lunatic endeavor often translates into a portrait of single-minded men who could not put together an intelligent argument. Doing so downplays the intricacies (however much we may disagree) of proslavery arguments as well as a rather progressive agricultural commercial empire envisioned by enlightened southern men. In this chapter, Mississippians lend their voices to the milieu dedicated to developing a more responsible and productive form of agriculture and the rise of southern and western commerce and industry after the Panic of 1837. Sectional politics drove more than a few of the men in these circles to translate their involvement in agricultural circles and dedication to a separate southern vision for the future of the nation into support for southern secession and a Confederate nation.

Chapter Three discusses how Mississippians came to understand the larger questions of the antebellum period and their gravitation toward the unlikely political decision of secession and its consequences. Chapter Four discusses the ways individuals arrived at their respective decisions to support secession and to encapsulate what ‘secession’ meant to individual Mississippians, including ideas concerning secession’s legality, necessity, or impossibility.
Members of the Mississippi Secession Convention as well as ordinary Mississippians appear as comparative points to more detailed portraits of Davis, Lamar, and Alcorn. The three men appear in this chapter in order of their importance or relative political power during the secession crisis—Davis as a ranking leader in the Democratic Party, Lamar as a Davis disciple aspiring to national stature, and Alcorn as a former Whig deciding between parties as a staunch pro-slavery Unionist and student of Calhoun. Of the three, only Davis and Lamar, through their Democratic connections, and then Lamar and Alcorn, through the secessionist convention, had contact during the secession crisis and the Civil War. As Democrats, Davis and Lamar rode out secession on the waves of political power, while Alcorn was forced into the background, regardless of his pro-slavery views and eventual support of secession.

While individual views of secession help us understand personal decisions to support secession, secession was not put to a popular vote in Mississippi. As such, only the Secession Convention delegates voted for secession, and their words and actions will be discussed in Chapter Four. The convention illustrates the somber discussion of secession and the roles of Mississippians in the process. While popular history often depicts secessionists as passionate or crazed fanatics, an analysis of the proceedings of Mississippi’s secession convention, combined with the chapter on individual views of secession, show how many Mississippians professed reverence for the United States, and experienced mental hardship throughout the ordeal. Davis, Lamar and Alcorn expressed reluctance to accept secession, but the mood of the South in general, and Mississippi specifically, convinced them it was the best course. Davis’s name appears in the proceedings, but he physically had yet to return home from Washington with the Mississippi delegation. Davis’s speech on the Senate floor concerning Mississippi’s secession played an important role in his own memory of the secession crisis—what it meant to him and
his defense of it—but Davis’s farewell address in the Senate and his reluctant but self-professed imperative return to Mississippi to protect its rights contributed to Davis’s self-styled definition of himself as a reluctant secessionist, despite his ties to advocates of secession and participation in meetings in congressional backrooms prior to the crisis. Lamar and Alcorn are self-professed reluctant secessionists because of their internal and external battles concerning their initial support of the action. Alcorn claimed he moved to secession out of honor, and Lamar chose secession with the hope for an end to all of the political and social strife that haunted the nation. The inclusion of members of secession on all points of the spectrum presents a much more nuanced and varied picture than that of a unanimous Mississippi vote to secede from the Union.

Chapter Five follows Mississippi’s secessionists in their quest to transmute their support of secession into physical military service or positions within the Confederate government. The chapter begins with the resignation and return home of Mississippi’s Congressional delegation and its entrance into wartime service. These prominent Mississippi secessionists, including Jacob Thompson, L. Q. C. Lamar, Albert Gallatin Brown, William Barksdale, Reuben Davis, John Jones McRae, Otho Roberts Singleton, and Jefferson Davis held important positions in the Confederate government, and as such, helped to define what secession meant for the larger Confederacy. Moving on from the more prominent portraits, what follows is a rough chronological portrait of the wartime experiences of many of the men from the Mississippi Secession Convention. While many prominent Mississippians came through the war relatively unscathed, others were not as fortunate. Some died on distant fields for the cause they helped ignite. Others resigned their posts and returned home, disgusted with the inability of Davis or the leaders of the Confederacy to fight a winning war or create a viable nation. Still other Mississippi secessionists remained at their posts to help mitigate the loss of life and chaos.
created by war. The chapter concludes with the wartime experience of James Lusk Alcorn, who struggled throughout the war because of his status as a Whig in a Democratic government. Unable to secure either a political appointment or a national military post, despite being elected to a post in the secession convention, Alcorn set to work enhancing his personal and economic well-being as a black market cotton smuggler. His Civil War experience was quite different from that of his fellow secessionists, but without his particular experience, his post-war career would have been impossible.

Chapters Six and Seven are at heart of this work’s thesis by focusing on the means by which secessionists played their antebellum political actions and wartime involvement into a postwar career as well as how the memory of their political experience shifted in their own time as well as that well into the twenty-first century. By following the post-war and Reconstruction careers of Davis, Alcorn, and Lamar and other Mississippi secessionists, it is clear that secession continued to have a formative role in many political careers, or the lack thereof, well beyond the actual moment of secession. Competing definitions of secession appeared before the end of the war in Union occupied areas in Mississippi, where men like Alcorn used commercial ties to curry favor with invading forces who would eventually occupy and control most of Mississippi. As the Reconstruction developed, northern and southern society demanded clearer and more precise definitions of secession as a means to ensure national or southern loyalty, especially from men deemed responsible for the Civil War and the South’s demise.

The post-war period is divided into two parts, roughly corresponding to very real breaks in the personal experiences and political careers of Mississippi secessionists, rather than following traditional historiographical breaks. Chapter Six focuses on 1865-1870, a period of hiatus for the Democratic Party and the white elite power structure in Mississippi. It begins with
an examination of the economic cost of war for Mississippians and begins to examine the post-war lives of secessionists through a series of portraits. In their retirement, bitterness, or period of waiting for the Federal government to lift their disabilities, secessionists attempted make sense of their vision for the South in light of defeat and in the midst of a period of loss, frustration, and anxious hope. While Jefferson Davis retired from public life and resolved to become the last Confederate standing, other secessionists chose more violent means by which to protest their defeat. The chapter’s ends with a focus on James Lusk Alcorn and a number of his secessionist peers, who attempted to rebuild the South and their political careers while casting their secessionist past and secession’s vision in a light better suited for post-war realities.

Beginning in 1872, Alcorn’s leadership as well as other men who were able to gain political power by working with the Republican Party, came under challenge. Chapter Seven follows the return of L. Q. C. Lamar and a number of other secessionists to Mississippi’s political life in 1872 and chronicles the means by which they engaged in the discussion of issues and concerns affecting the national discourse on the meaning of Civil War, Emancipation, and the future of the South. The return of so many Mississippi secessionists to the political sphere underlines how secession could still be a serious issue as late as 1872. Locally, secession served as a means to test loyalty to Mississippi and the South. Nationally, their support for secession no longer restricted men from reentering political service, but it continued to influence and haunt the men who had chosen its path. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to the strange, but instructive career of L. Q. C. Lamar, who was forced over the course of the rest of his life to revisit and live with the role he played in secession and the Civil War. Reconstruction offered him a second chance at a political career, and he sought, speech by speech, office by office, to convince his fellow Americans that his vision for the future of the South was different from that
proposed by secessionists and the South in 1860. It was not. Lamar paved the way for others who
shared his vision to regain control of local, state, and national offices throughout the state. The
ultimate goal of Lamar and his generation is fully realized at the Mississippi Constitutional
Convention of 1890. The chapter concludes with this particularly dark moment in American
history, when a body of one hundred thirty-four delegates, including six secessionists, met to
draw up a new constitution. The document placed new strictures on the freedoms guaranteed to
black Americans by the three amendments added to the Constitution during Reconstruction, and
it provided for the creation of racial segregation.

As a result of this inquiry, several issues become clear. Antebellum institutions and
organizations tied together southern political leaders, allowing them time, space, and opportunity
to take in a number of different ideas and consider a number of viable options. By 1860, a
coherent group of men came together in individual states and in national capacities to decide on
issues that had been part of the general regional and national discourse for generations. Second,
not all secessionists were political animals hell-bent on destruction of the Union. Davis, Alcorn,
and Lamar, as well as their peers in Mississippi and beyond, took very seriously their duty to
preserve the parts of their country that they felt needed protection from threat, whether that threat
was real or imagined, it appeared to loom quite menacingly in 1860. Third, secessionists were
true to their word, and they fought with their words, votes, and some with direct action. A fourth
point of consideration is that after the war, Confederates did not magically transform back into
loyal American citizens the day after Union victory. As Judge Lochrane, lamented, “it was
difficult for men to shake down their convictions like apples from a tree.”

61 Secession was indeed a physical act in 1860, and it also became a touchstone for politicians eager to continue

61 Carter, When the War Was Over, 275.
their careers during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The fifth point to be considered is that secession was in fact a collective memory, in that no two men really saw their participation or defense of the act, in at least three eras of their political careers, in the same way. The rush of events, in the form of Civil War and Reconstruction, forced men like Davis, Alcorn, and Lamar to continue to define secession for themselves, as well as to the southern people. Each man not only sought to find a definition that he could live with internally, but each definition also had to be supported and believed by the constituents he hoped to represent. In the end, the competition for secession’s definition ended in the public and political persona of L. Q. C. Lamar, a man who supported secession, fought for the Confederacy, and lived on to serve his Mississippi constituents and later the nation in some of the most prestigious positions in America’s political institutions. Lamar’s memory of secession played an intricate role, not only in how he saw himself, but how the South accepted his definition, and also how his memory of secession and Civil War, went on to attempt to define the conflict for the entire American nation.

There is much to be learned about the lasting memory and forgetfulness of the American nation regarding secession and its proponents. Fifty years ago, John F. Kennedy may have experienced quite a shock when his profile of the courage of L. Q. C. Lamar’s vision for the South in the postwar period awkwardly backfired. Kennedy came face to face with the hateful culture and laws that Lamar and his fellow secessionists fought so “courageously” to institute following Reconstruction. The town of Oxford, Mississippi, struggles with how to entice visitors to Lamar’s modest home, settling to interpret his life and career within the context of his times and to encourage the ideal of statesmanship. The resurgence of the movement known as the Tea Party and calls for states to nullify unpopular legislation and calls for secession in light of President Barack Obama’s reelection in our own time call up popular notions and imaginings of
states’ rights and secession, allowing one to question whether Faulkner did not have something right when he argued the past is not dead, it is not even past.
CHAPTER ONE:

THE THRILLING ASSOCIATIONS AND THE SACRED SYMPATHIES:
THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN MISSISSIPPI’S SECESSIONIST GENERATION

“Every inherited trait and predisposition, every tradition, every feature of his education—all of his instincts and all of his teaching—were distinctively and strongly Southern.”¹

“It is in the character of a teacher especially that he will be remembered as a benefactor of the country.”²

L. Q. C. Lamar remembered being surrounded by his father’s books. Boasting a large and varied library, Lamar’s father’s library in Milledgeville, Georgia, served as his first connection to books and learning. Lamar’s mother recommended many of his early books. The first book she gave him after children’s books was Benjamin Franklin’s biography, and her interest in poetry punctuates an otherwise familiar list of authors that followed, including Charles Rollin, Plutarch, Felicia Hemens, Edward Young, Lord Byron, John Marshall, John Locke, William Shakespeare and Joanna Baillie. His mother and father helped ignite a passion for learning in Lamar that would only continue as he pursued his education at Emory College and his later political career.³

Lamar was an ordinary student, showing special ability only in his talent as a speaker, and yet, his education—at Emory College, his mentors and classmates—were his lodestone.

³ Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 28.
Despite his lack of academic prowess, he maintained that, “No spot on earth has so helped to form and make me what I am as this town of Oxford [Georgia].” Oxford and Emory College contained for him the church where he “became impressed with the value and the peril of my soul.” In its buildings he became conscious of “power” and trained in the “arena of debate.” The college’s professors inspired him to stir men’s hearts and convince their reason. Lamar described a Dr. Means “who sat at the very fountain head of my mind, and with loving hand directed the channel into which it was required to flow,” and such was Means’s role in Lamar’s life, that he gave away Lamar’s bride, Virginia, at their wedding. Virginia’s father, Augustus B. Longstreet, then president of Emory, would become his great mentor. Classmate, Robert Goodloe Harper Jr., the son of Federalist Robert Goodloe Harper of Maryland, was bound to Lamar as “David was to Jonathan.” Two of Lamar’s brothers and a host of Emory students also took up arms during the Civil War in support of the South he had a hand in creating, a fact he noted in an 1870 Commencement speech.\(^4\) Returning to the school for the last time in 1890 before Emory’s Society of Alumni, Lamar stated:

> Such an occasion is to us the present moment of reunion, after years of separation, of the sons of our *alma mater*, within whose sheltering care we trained for the conflicts of life. The thrilling associations, the sacred sympathies which silently come to us at this moment, when we note with bated breath the mysterious movement of our inner life, are all the more vivid and intense because they cannot be embodied in speech. . . . The homage we pay to the great—the love and the cherishing of their memories as expressed in the rearing of stately monuments; in bestowing their names on our cities, our counties, and our children; in weaving their best thoughts into our daily discourse; the preservation from generation to generation of traditions and anecdotes concerning them. . . . is the result of a pure sentiment, high, heroic, in harmony with a constitution of mental and spiritual life ordained of Heaven. What says the great poet? Lives of great men all remind us. We can make our lives sublime.\(^5\)

\(^4\) Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 33-34. Lamar’s quotes in this section are taken from the same pages in an excerpt of a Commencement address given by Lamar at Emory College in July 1870.

\(^5\) Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 801. The pages refer to an Appendix containing the full and edited remarks of Lamar’s speech before the Society of the Alumni at Emory College, June 24, 1890.
Taking Lamar at his word, his education was less about the book learning he received, and more about the experiences he had and the relationships he built and maintained over the course of his life. Lamar continued to be an uncharacteristic scholar. In 1882, visitors to Lamar’s home were interested in Lamar’s lack of scholarly paraphernalia, the absence of a secluded study, ponderous bookcases, or an elaborate desk. Lamar worked where he happened to be in his last home, with rooms strewn with books, manuscripts, newspapers, and journals of every subject. Such was his passion for learning that the same visitors went to pains to assign blame for such materials littering an otherwise clean, sweet, and orderly home squarely on Lamar and not his model housekeeper of a wife.6

Years after Lamar’s death, while recalling Lamar’s early educational career his biographer and son-in-law Edward Mayes asserted, “Every inherited trait and predisposition, every tradition, every feature of his education—all of his instincts and all of his teaching—were distinctively Southern.” Mayes’ writings of Lamar betray a post-war desire to craft and pass on to future generations the purity of Lamar’s southern upbringing. Though Lamar himself did not travel much outside the South in his early life, those who educated him had strong ties to the North. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the best schools and universities were located in the Northeast. His own father and other mentors who shaped his academic and political endeavors overwhelmingly received their education at the knees of Yankees who could boast membership in Federalist, Whig, Puritan, and even Abolitionist circles.

What may be considered distinctively southern is the process by which southern men traveled north to receive an education, discarding what they believed to be radical, unfit, or

unnecessary but also seizing what was relevant to a southern context. Secession’s roots lie in the
North, first with the profoundly New England fomentation of the American colonists’ secession
from England and later the failed Federalist effort for New England to secede from the United
States during the war of 1812. Lamar and his generation received an education intrinsically
related to the state of national affairs, which reflected regional hopes and dreams for the future.
Their mentors attended largely northern schools, and their mentor’s professors attempted to
inculcate a Federalist view. Though Federalism was lost on most southern students, the later
belief in the right of secession by both southern Whigs and Democrats alike speaks to a selective
learning process. The retelling of Lamar’s education and early career in Mayes’ generation
reflects another series of regional hopes and dreams, subtly recast after the Civil War, without a
trace of northern educational origins. By creating an official memory of Lamar’s life, Mayes
participated in the construction of an image of the immediate past, which was in accord with the
current thoughts prominent in society.

Lamar’s past proved Mayes a liar. Mayes reported Lamar’s life accurately, but for the
purposes of the biography Lamar had to be southern despite the facts. While Mayes is
intrinsically wrong, we cannot throw away his biography wholesale as unusable. If nothing else,
this study aims to illustrate that often much of the past can only be retrieved when historians take
seriously and attempt to unpack, so to speak, the historical baggage of both the generation in
question as well as subsequent generation’s attempts to write history and thereby define their
past in the process of creating their own identity. Maurice Halbwachs’s study, On Collective
Memory, presents at once a perplexing and intriguing dilemma for historians interested in
capturing the past. He argues:

We can understand each memory as it occurs in individual thought only if we locate
within the thought of the corresponding group. We cannot properly understand their
relative strength and the ways in which they combine within individual thought unless we connect the individual to the various groups of which he is simultaneously a member. But individual memory is nevertheless a part or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over-to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu. One cannot in fact think about events of one’s past without discoursing on them. But to discourse upon something means to connect within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle. It means to perceive in what happens to us a particular application of facts concerning which social thought reminds us at every moment of the meaning and impact these facts have for it. In this way, the framework of collective memory confines and binds our intimate remembrances of each other. It is not necessary that the group is familiar with them. It suffices that we cannot consider them except from the outside—that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others—and that in order to retrieve these remembrances we must tread the same path that others would have followed had they been in our position.  

This lengthy passage speaks to the heart of the dilemma not only of Lamar’s education, but to that of his life, the lives of the secessionists within these pages, as well as the greater American nation in the Nineteenth Century and the historians who attempt to document a generation. Each generation has a vested interest in their past, as Halbwachs successfully argues, as a means to create their own identity, their generation’s purpose or goals, and direct their future. Scholars of nineteenth century political culture, including southerners and secessionists, must consider a myriad of memories and histories. The identities of intervening generations and their historians, including this author, must be considered individually and respective of each epoch’s creation of its own identity as well as wholly and respective of larger southern and American identity creation. Events of the Nineteenth Century forced Americans to reinvent themselves. Few should wonder that the men and women who endured greatly segmented their own lives and molded their identities to fit the changing nature of their world and society.

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While the Twenty-First century debate is whether it requires a village or a family to raise a child, one could not go far without either in the Nineteenth Century. In the North and the South, white, upper-class families interconnected and intermarried creating familial bonds of social, cultural, economic, and political interests. While we cannot know for sure the impact or influence of each connection, illuminating the interconnected relationships between specific individuals and connecting those individuals to groups of which they were members can be instructive. Fortunes and power depended on good connections throughout a lifetime. Educational and political institutions provided strong ideological foundations and powerful opportunities for southerners to learn, commiserate, debate, and network. Such ties were invaluable as these same upper class white men would marry into each other’s families, serve together in public positions, and provide future opportunities for their progeny.

These same strong familial bonds and relationships also served another important purpose, namely to stand in the place of parents in the event that one or both died before a child came of age. Losing a parent early in life was commonplace in early America. While the standard of living in Nineteenth Century America was much improved from that of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, death at an early age was not uncommon. The average life expectancy rate in 1860 was a little over forty-three years old; often it was less because of a sharp infant mortality rate. In fact, when James Buchanan left the presidency at the age of seventy in 1860, he had reached an age that barely 10% of the population attained.8 Given such odds, it is unsurprising that nineteenth century American social and cultural institutions and

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values provided solutions and adapted. Determined remaining parents or stepparents, interconnected families, mentors, and institutions stood in the gap for deceased parents. Such realities also created unique circumstance or opportunity. Dependent children were then often placed or driven into the arms of surrogates.

Surrogates often took the shape of individuals with familial ties, though more often than not, they also included teachers and mentors. Such individuals were often connected to educational institutions throughout the nation. Eric H. Walther, in his study *The Fire-Eaters*, alluded to the role of the academy in the lives of many prominent secessionists of the first secession crisis in 1850. Most pointedly, Walther began his study not with a politician, but a teacher. Nathaniel Beverley Tucker spent the majority of his career in the academy rather than the halls of Congress. His radical stances on national issues at a time when compromise was favored over sectional strife kept him from public office. Tucker saw his position as a law professor at the College of William and Mary as the perfect platform in which to impart his ideas to the world and create states-rights men. His writings, teaching, lectures, and personal correspondence exhibit nothing short of a one-man crusade to open minds and enlist them in his cause. Similarly, L. Q. C. Lamar’s mentor, Augustus Longstreet found in the educational realm a greater and more impressionable audience for his radical stances on sectional issues. The reach of Tucker and Longstreet and other educators like them may never be fully known, but testimony like that of Lamar of his experience at Emory College suggests educational institutions and teachers had a profound influence on the lives of southern men and in shaping their social and political values.

Mentors are often short-changed or undervalued in accounts of secessionists’ lives in favor of the more moving struggles of the orphaned or neglected secessionist and his subsequent
psychological battles, which played out with passion and sometimes violence in the political sphere in 1860. The psychological profiling of secessionists and their faulty, strained, or non-existent relationship with their parents, as well as doubts concerning secessionists’ own sanity or passionate temperament is a popular allusion made first by incredulous contemporaries and adopted by some historians without convincing evidence. Robert Barnwell Rhett, William Lowndes Yancey, Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, Louis T. Wigfall, James D. B. De Bow, Edmund Ruffin and Robert Toombs, among others, are historians’ usual suspects suffering from paternal issues or early-life struggles.\(^9\) Such psychological underpinnings help justify what seemed to

\(^9\) Robert Barnwell (Smith) Rhett spent a great deal of time with his uncle Robert Barnwell, having little in common with his father. William C. Davis’s portrait of Rhett is balanced, noting Rhett’s character described in passing by persons anxious to make secessionists madmen. Davis argues he did not accept his uncle’s Federalist leanings, but looked to him as a mentor. Davis credited Rhett’s anger to his arrogance and his passion and drive to his desire not to repeat his own father’s failings. See William C. Davis, \textit{Rhett: Turbulent Life and Times of a Fire-Eater} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 88, 106, 128, 303, and 333, and Rhett’s memoir edited by Davis, \textit{A Fire-eater Remembers: The Confederate Memoir of Robert Barnwell Rhett} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000). Eric H. Walther’s argument for William Lowndes Yancey’s passion and anger stemming from his turbulent relationship with his stepfather can be sustained by solid evidence. See Eric H. Walther, \textit{William Lowndes Yancey and the Coming of the Civil War} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Walther’s study \textit{The Fire-Eaters} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992) provides chapter-length biographies of prominent men of the secession movement both of the 1850 and 1860 movements, which he correctly asserts to be connected thanks to social and political ties. His assessment of Beverley Tucker influenced much of this chapter. Walther also included Louis T. Wigfall was an orphan by age thirteen and placed in the care of a guardian who provided for his education. See also Alvy L. King’s biography \textit{Louis T. Wigfall, Southern fire-eater} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970). James D. B. De Bow’s father died when he was young, leaving his mother with no money, forcing him to find his own way in the world. See Chapter Two of this study and Walther \textit{The Fire-Eaters}, 11, 161, 197. Edmund Ruffin’s father died when he was sixteen, leaving him in the care of a family friend Thomas Cocke who became a mentor and fellow agriculturalist. Cocke committed suicide in 1840, and the Encyclopedia Virginia states that Ruffin’s own suicide was somehow led by this event. See the Encyclopedia Virginia website, last accessed December 2012, http://blog.encyclopediavirginia.org/2011/03/25/this-day-captain-cocke-edition/. For Edmund Ruffin see Betty L. Mitchell, \textit{Edmund Ruffin, a biography} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), and Avery Craven \textit{Edmund Ruffin, southerner: a Study in Secession} (New York: D. Appleton, 1932). Less studied than his fellow secessionists, Robert Toombs of Alabama lost his
contemporaries as well as some historians an otherwise apparently inexplicable drive of particular men toward secession. While the psychological diagnoses of secessionists intrigues readers, without serious personal testimony or evidence, some claims are impossible to substantiate, and focuses on the wrong part of the story. Psychological studies regarding early childhood loss or masculinity studies of the hyper state of identity politics and culture cannot entirely explain how and why secessionists believed and acted as they did. The suggestion of psychological trauma in secessionists speaks more to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century obsessions with the inner workings of the mind and the effects of trauma on major historical figures. The nineteenth century’s lack of anti-psychotics and antidepressants aside, Freudian arguments take away secessionists’ free will and obscure personal responsibility and the influence of real and imagined communities in which secessionists participated, a dangerous omission.

Southern students, like their northern peers, were drawn to prestigious institutions of higher learning for the quality of education and their reputations for training generations of local, regional, and national leaders. The earliest American academic institutions of prominence were located well within the bounds of “civilization” along major lines of transportation and communication, which by nature did not include much of the South. None were overtly sectional. Their mission, faculty, and student body reflected an initial melding of regions and political beliefs. Not in the South, but in the North and the East were the minds of the earliest and some of the most influential southerners formed.

The southern educational experience in northern institutions created a challenge both for the students themselves as well as their faculty. Adopting unique styles of dress and asserting Democratic Party values allowed southern students to assert their distinctiveness. They also bonded over their protracted journeys to and from school, and came together in the homes of northern men with Democratic Party sympathies. Biographers of John C. Calhoun and accounts from Litchfield Law School noted southern students who dressed themselves in pink shirts, travelled together, and sought out peers or individuals who agreed with their values or politics. Northern and often Federalist professors expressed frustration when prize southern students refused to see reason on political issues, including tariff questions or slavery. Over the course of the nineteenth century, southerners became convinced of the need for southern institutions. A seemingly collective frustration regarding their college experience and the politically tumultuous Nineteenth Century, coupled with southern acceptance of education reform, increased westward settlement, or improved intrastate transportation and communication, inaugurated the creation of southern schools. Regional institutions served largely the state’s elite with few outside students, though men interested in professional fields of medicine and law continued to travel north for training.¹⁰

Antebellum Mississippi was part of the southeastern frontier. Despite being granted statehood in 1817, Mississippi’s first inhabitants were Native Americans and individuals from the earliest frontier outposts of Natchez. Everyone else could be correctly labeled an immigrant. This included many of Mississippi’s more prominent leaders including a number of Mississippi

secessionists. About half of the men who consisted of the Mississippi Secession Convention were born elsewhere in the country, part of the larger groups of Americans who migrated west or south to find their fortune. They were a highly mobile generation, largely thanks to their wealth, but also increased networks of transportation facilitated settlement in the western territories, which were in dire need of professional men. For example, Alexander Clayton was a native of Campbell County, Virginia, and attended Lynchburg College in Virginia. He moved to Tennessee to begin a law practice, but seemed to have just settled when President Andrew Jackson appointed him U.S. judge for the Arkansas territory from 1832-1834. Upon completion of his appointment, he moved back to Tennessee for a brief two years, before moving to Mississippi in 1837, where he remained until 1853, when he briefly moved to Havana, Cuba. He left Cuba for health reasons, returning to Tennessee and then again to Mississippi. Just before the Civil War, he travelled to Charleston and later Baltimore to be a part of the Democratic National Conventions. During the war, he travelled to Montgomery as a part of the Convention before seemingly settling in Mississippi until his death. Clayton, like so many members of his generation, moved frequently when opportunities to further their career presented themselves, and found great success in doing so.\textsuperscript{11}

Most Mississippians, and later immigrants to Mississippi, chose to travel back East to receive an education. Only three future Mississippi secessionists—William R. Barksdale, John A. Blair, and Samuel H. Terral—attended the state’s flagship university, established in 1848. The University of Mississippi imported their faculty from elsewhere in the country and until the Civil War its largely northern faculty worked to create an institution with course offerings and facilities that rivaled many Eastern schools. A number of future Mississippi secessionists settled

\textsuperscript{11} James D. Lynch, \textit{Bench and Bar of Mississippi} (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1881.), 500-507.
in the West and attended lesser-known regional schools, probably because of the cost of education, but also due to their closer proximity.\textsuperscript{12} Even after attending schools in the North or East, many graduates set their course for points west and south, realizing the dearth of experienced and educated men on the frontier and the opportunity to bypass a normally prolonged rise to social or political prominence.

While it is difficult to discern why southern men chose specific institutions for their academic studies, more than a few men were motivated by location or the requirements of the professions to which they aspired. While secessionists who became farmers and planters attended college, most of the men who did so chose careers in law or medicine. Wealth and social connections allowed some secessionists the privilege of attending the best American colleges, including Harvard, Princeton, the University of Virginia, and Yale.\textsuperscript{13} Many of the secessionists who immigrated to Mississippi attended schools and colleges in their native states before moving west or south, including Hampden-Sydney College, the University of Alabama, the University of Georgia, the University of Nashville, the University of North Carolina, South

\textsuperscript{12} Regional colleges as defined here are those that fall outside of the flagship state schools or established schools in the North and East. For example: James Lusk Alcorn and possibly Collin S. Tarpley attended Cumberland College (Mississippi or Tennessee), F.M. Aldridge attended Georgetown College (Kentucky), Albert G. Brown attended Mississippi College and Jefferson College, David Wiley Hurst attended Hanover College (Indiana) and Oakland College (Mississippi), Thomas A. Marshall attended Augusta College, and Arthur Exum Reynolds attended Clinton College (Tennessee). Hanover College in Indiana cost about a third of what a student would spend to go to Transylvania College, making it an economical option. Walter Wilson Jennings, \textit{Transylvania: Pioneer University of the West} (New York: Pageant, 1955), 165-166.

\textsuperscript{13} Charles Edward Hooker, the secession commissioner sent to South Carolina, attended Harvard University. Princeton graduates included William Joseph Eckford, Henry Thomas Ellett, and Jehu Amaziah Orr. Walker Brooke, Robert Watkins Flourney, Walter Leake Keirn, attended the University of Virginia. William Taylor Sullivan Barry attended Yale.
Men who wanted to become doctors faced additional schooling at medical schools, which were primarily located in the East. Among the Mississippi secessionists who were doctors, the University of Pennsylvania’s medical school or Jefferson Medical College, also located in Pennsylvania, were popular choices. Two of the earliest professional schools with dedicated law programs were Transylvania College and Litchfield Law School. While Mississippi secessionists’ ties to Litchfield were almost entirely secondary, through mentors or educators, at least three men—Jefferson Davis, Wiley Pope Hurst, and Thomas Dudley Isom—attended Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky.

Transylvania College (now University) originated during the Revolution, three years before England acknowledged the United States’ independence, as the school’s founders and supporters seized upon the need for professional men in the West. Its name, translated roughly into “across the woods,” speaks to its beginnings as the first college in the valley of the Ohio and an accurate description of its location in the wilds of the frontier. An initial land grant of roughly twenty thousand acres from the Virginia General Assembly in 1780 was later supplemented by a second grant to other early counties of Kentucky of six thousand acres of land to build structures

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14 Jeremiah Watkins Clapp attended Hampden-Sydney College in South Carolina. William Bruce Colbert attended the University of Alabama. University of Georgia graduates included George R. Clayton and William Littleton Harris. Fulton Anderson attended University of Nashville. Willis Monroe Lea and Jacob Thompson were University of North Carolina graduates. There were also a number of graduates from South Carolina College, including Thomas C. Bookter, James Ronald Chalmers, James T. Harrison, and Hugh Reid Miller. Washington College would become Washington and Lee College after the war, and Henry Stewart Foote attended.

15 Three Mississippi secessionists attended schools with ties to Transylvania. F. M. Aldridge attended Georgetown College in Kentucky, which Transylvania competed with for students and at one time, Transylvania sought to take over the school in an attempt to save the school from collapse. Georgetown was founded in 1829, the year Transylvania experienced catastrophic fire. James Shelton Davis and Marcus D. L. Stephens attended Louisville University’s medical college, which competed with Transylvania for medical students. Jennings, Transylvania, 247.
and begin the program.\textsuperscript{16} Thirteen and then later twenty-five men were appointed trustees and charged to erect buildings, employ teachers, fix salaries, and meet semiannually to conduct the business of the school.\textsuperscript{17} Much like America’s Founding Fathers, Transylvania’s trustees favored taverns for their meeting places, though the school’s location made transportation on poor roads through Native American territory treacherous. Six of the first thirteen trustees died performing labor for the school and conditions often prevented the Board from securing a quorum in the early years of the school’s organization.\textsuperscript{18} Poor transportation facilities and the long distances to traverse the region also affected incoming professionals, school faculty as well as students desirous of an education. The founders of the university believed the West’s distinctive institutions, laws, and diseases required a western academy. In addition, graduates of Transylvania might be free from the suspicions of federalism and habits of extravagance present in the East.\textsuperscript{19} The school’s motto, In That Light, We Pass on the Light, spoke of its ambitious plan to plant a seminary in every county in Kentucky, with Lexington being its central university.\textsuperscript{20} Called the Athens of the West, Lexington, founded in 1775, was more like a Rome as each road in the north-central part of the state met in Lexington to continue on into the Bluegrass. About one hundred houses, several good dry goods stores, and the territorial courts existed in Lexington at the time of the school’s founding.\textsuperscript{21} While the structures were primarily log in construction, the town prospered even as the school’s fortunes waxed and waned.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 7 and 30.
\item[19] Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 82.
\item[20] Peter and Peter, \textit{Transylvania University}, 3-4.
\item[22] Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 11.
\end{footnotes}
Travelers noted Lexingtonians’ taste for sciences and fine arts, table manners, and their sartorial preferences set them apart from the less cultured inhabitants of the Kentucky and western interior.\textsuperscript{23}

The actual institution began in 1789 as a primary school with children as young as eight years of age. A nineteenth-century history of the school explains discipline problems, salary disputes, disparate views on the future of the school, lack of centralized management, denominational antagonisms, low endowment, insufficient legislative funding, and lack of public support doomed the school from ever realizing its lofty goal. While the school’s trustees and supporters appreciated the need for Transylvania in the west, payment of its first teachers in cash and produce signaled only the beginnings of the school’s tortured relationship with its faculty and presidents. Restructuring of the faculty and the dismissal of presidents as various religious factions and groups rose or fell in popularity hindered the school’s path to success.\textsuperscript{24}

Bright moments occurred in the school’s history prior to its demise just before the Civil War. From its beginnings it included medical, law, divinity, and arts and science schools, though its medical school was arguably its most successful, boasting the largest numbers of students over the life of the institution as well as its investment in libraries, labs, specimens and models to put it on the level of the likes of the University of Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{25} While the law school dissolved on at least three occasions, it and the medical school saved the school’s reputation in troubled financial times.\textsuperscript{26} George Nicholas’s chair of law and politics at Transylvania was the first of its kind in the country, and at one point, the law school boasted three faculty members,

\textsuperscript{23} Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 82.
\textsuperscript{24} Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 3-4, 21, 24, 26, 68, 72 and 284
\textsuperscript{25} Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 102-103, 108 and 114,
\textsuperscript{26} The law school disbanded in 1807, 1821-1823, and 1826 before flourishing in the 1840s and declining with the Panic of 1857, see notes on the role of the law and medical school saving the school’s reputation, Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 122, 167-168, 239, and 256.
more than any other law school in the country.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, in the law department in particular, the school’s law faculty as well as sponsors and board members drew heavily from William and Mary College, particularly students of George Wythe.\textsuperscript{28}

Responsible for many of the successes of Transylvania was a man who served at the school’s helm during its self-proclaimed “golden era” from 1818-1827. Born in Salisbury, Litchfield County, Connecticut, Horace Holley was twice a student at Yale. Drawn to Yale’s President, Timothy Dwight, Holley studied religion and graduated with high honors in 1799. He briefly studied law before he returned to earn his divinity degree under Dwight. It is important to note Holley’s early attraction to Dwight’s religious doctrines in his first tenure at Yale, and one can witness the effects of Dwight’s dedication to education and the academy in Holley’s own relationships with his students and dedication to Transylvania. While Holley began his career as a pastor of a Congregational church in Connecticut, he became increasingly liberal until he converted to Unitarianism in 1809 and relocated to pastor a Unitarian Church in Boston. An exceptional orator, devotee of the Federalist Party with a pastoral career on the rise, Holley was both an unorthodox but obvious choice to lead an academic institution with long-standing affiliation with the Presbyterian Church and a constant penchant for reorganization.

Initially elected in 1815, accounts vary whether Holley rejected the school’s offer or the board of trustees blocked his election in 1817. Public opinion in Kentucky overwhelmingly called for a liberal president of national attention, as expressed by House Speaker Joseph C.

\textsuperscript{27} Jennings, Transylvania, 112 and 223.
\textsuperscript{28} Wythe was a lawyer, public official, judge, and educator who taught at William and Mary from 1779-1790. Wythe’s powerful role in the development of American legal education was felt for generations. When his judicial career forced him to resign from formal education at William and Mary, he continued to privately educate students in Richmond. As a result, Wythe was the legal mentor of a number of men of the Early Republic, including Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, John Marshall, John Breckinridge, and Henry Clay.
Breckinridge who argued Holley’s creed was of no interest to the trustees. Certainly Holley’s Unitarian beliefs were problematic for the board’s members, who hailed from four of the largest religious traditions: Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopali ans. When the board made another offer, Holley visited Transylvania. Impressed by the city, perhaps after visiting the school and a tour from Henry Clay, Holley accepted and became president on December 19, 1818.\(^{29}\)

Horace Holley’s presidency transformed Transylvania. Prior to his arrival the school graduated a mere twenty-two men annually, which increased to 558 during his presidency. The school grew from a one-year college to a four-year institution between 1818-1827, and its curriculum compared to that of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. While hardly a national school in the early 1820s, the school’s demographic profile began to include students outside the reach of schools on the coast especially from the western and southwestern frontiers, including Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, and Arkansas. While the law school went under in 1821, it rebounded by 1823. With the establishment of George Nicholas, a George Wyeth student from William and Mary College, as the first chair of law and politics, the department boasted notable law faculty over the course of its history, including James Brown, another Wyeth student, as well as Henry Clay (1805-1807), John Monroe, John Pope, and Joseph Breckinridge (1816-1820). In 1823, William T. Barry, Jesse Bledsoe and Horace Holley guided the law department through the period of its greatest achievement.

As the law school stabilized, the medical school continued to be Transylvania’s main draw as Holley encouraged a reorganization of the medical school faculty and facilities to place it on par with that of eastern schools. The funding for much of the improvements in the faculty, facilities, and curriculum came in the form of increased support from the Kentucky Legislature, which gave the University substantial sums of money toward new buildings and books for the law, medical, and academic libraries.\textsuperscript{30}

While Holley’s presidency is a bright moment and certainly one of the longest in the antebellum institution’s history, his liberalism in politics ultimately condemned him to the fate of so many promising academic leaders and faculty before him. Charges of irreligion and unorthodoxy haunted him; however such charges stemmed from Presbyterian administrators and trustees who had lost control of the school. His detractors argued Holley’s religious views caused him to mock Christianity. They questioned his discipline and accused him of financial mismanagement. In their eyes, the school had not done enough for the poor and too much for the rich. Some even argued that Holley’s presidency was nothing more than a ploy to curry favor in New England for Henry Clay’s presidency. Holley’s supporters pointed to his successes in lifting the school from a grammar school to a university, the rising student diversity, and the need for financial investment in the school to accomplish such improvements. Students defended Holley’s desire for discipline, his vision to create a moral and virtuous environment, which encouraged freedom of opinion. Standing firm in his resolve to see the school flourish, Holley planned to teach the 1827-1828 school term and then resign; however, he perished from yellow fever in the Gulf of Mexico the summer before the term began. Though plagued from its inception, Holley’s

\textsuperscript{30} Jennings, \textit{Transylvania}, 102-105, 108-109, 112-115 and 120.
presidency showed the type of institution Transylvania could be with a little help from the legislature and in spite of denominational feuding among the public and board.  

Another bright moment in Transylvania College’s history was the quiet and ongoing support and influence of Transylvania alum and board member, Henry Clay. Clay was another student of George Wythe. Clay, an assistant in Virginia’s High Court of Chancery, first came to Wythe’s attention because of his exquisite penmanship, rumored to be the way Thomas Jefferson, too, came under Wythe’s tutelage. Clay spent four years in Wythe’s office, making up for his own backwoods deficiencies in education and pedigree. To finish his apprenticeship, Wythe sent Clay to Robert Brooke, Virginia’s attorney general. In less than a year, Clay stood before a panel of judges in the Virginia Court of Appeals who found him competent to practice law. Yet rather than begin what might have been a promising and distinguished career in Virginia, Clay packed up his belongings and set his sights on his family’s newly adopted home state of Kentucky.

Clay settled in Lexington and would call no other place home his entire life. He built a home, Ashland, and bought extensive amounts of land with the intent for it to serve as a refuge from Washington, D. C. His marriage to Lucretia Hart, one of his mentor’s daughters, produced a family that eventually boasted ten children. Early on in his Lexington tenure, he sought out other transplanted Virginians and former Wythe students as mentors and friends, including George Nicolas, James Brown, John Breckinridge, and his father-in-law, Thomas Hart. In addition to their local practices, these men dedicated their earnings and efforts to turning Lexington into a sort of “Athens of the West.” First through the creation of a lending library and then through a venture to turn Transylvania Seminary into one of the first prominent universities

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31 Jennings, Transylvania, 137-138, 144, and 150.
32 Heidler and Heidler, Henry Clay, 19.
west of the Appalachian Mountains, this small group of men was largely responsible for the growth and success of Transylvania University. Clay became tied to the University through his status as the school’s attorney and later through an appointment to its faculty as a law professor in 1805. Though Clay would only hold the post until 1807, his involvement continued. As the country made preparations for the War of 1812, Clay took time to meet with Benjamin Latrobe on plans for new buildings for Transylvania. He also served as a member of the board of trustees during the 1830s and as a mentor for Transylvania graduates. School histories suggest his death was a tragic loss to the school as he was had been one of the school’s biggest champions both in terms of his influence as well as his own personal and financial support for the school.

While Clay’s passing did not hasten Transylvania’s closure, Transylvania’s time in the nineteenth century was short. Despite its troubled and at times hobbled existence, its greatest achievements can be summed up in its notable alumni, including David Rice Atchison, Stephen F. Austin, James G. Birney, John C. Breckinridge, Alexander Campbell, Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jefferson Davis, Albert Sidney Johnston, Samuel Freeman Miller, and James Speed.

Jefferson Davis in particular flourished at Transylvania. Born in Kentucky in 1808, Jefferson Davis and his family moved first to Louisiana and then to Mississippi when he was just seven years old. Of the reverse migration, Davis’s record is silent, but he arrived at the University in 1823 to join the sophomore class. The Transylvania Davis knew had just begun to reap the benefits of Holley’s presidency, and Davis had nothing but fondness for his professors. He made particular friends with David Rice Atchison (future senator from Missouri), who would later reappear in Davis’s time in the Senate and would be Davis’s source of information regarding events in Kansas during its statehood crisis; George W. Jones of Indiana (future senator from Iowa), whom Davis reconnected with first at a chance meeting at Fort Crawford
and again in Congress in 1837 as a delegate from the Wisconsin territory. Jones had ties to Senator William Allen of Ohio, Lewis Linn of Missouri and John J. Crittenden of Kentucky. Jones remained a devoted friend throughout Davis’s life, even in defeat. He also made friends with Albert Sydney Johnson, a man who he would meet again at West Point and the Civil War.33

In 1824, Davis learned of his father’s death, and not long after Davis’s brother Joseph, anxious for his brother’s future and of the opinion his brother could do better for an education than Transylvania, secured an appointment for his brother at West Point from John C. Calhoun. He admitted openly that he did not relish leaving Transylvania and Lexington, which had become a home away from home for one of the school’s most intelligent and well-loved students. Despite his appointment and the start of his military career, Davis felt the pull of his alma mater. On a journey home from leave in 1828, Davis stopped off in Lexington. The effect of West Point on Davis compared to his experience at Transylvania is described by Davis biographer William J. Cooper with an anecdote. If Davis had returned directly to Mississippi from Transylvania, “I might have made a tolerable respectable citizen,” but West Point “made me a different creature from which nature had designed me to be.” The curriculum at West Point contrasted sharply with that of Transylvania’s courses, and his peers were not like-minded academics. He struggled in an environment that required him to use his poorly maintained mathematical ability and paired him with people who had no love for learning.34

Two fellow Mississippi secessionists also attended Transylvania, though not at the same time as Jefferson Davis. Thomas Dudley Isom, one of the first settlers of Oxford, Mississippi, was a native of Tennessee, born in Maury County in 1816. He received his early education from Professor Samuel P. Black a prominent Tennessee educator who taught, among other schools, at

34 Cooper, *Jefferson Davis*, 41 and 47.
Pebble Hill Academy in Rutherford County. Upon receiving this education, Isom was sent to Mississippi in 1835 by a company with goods to trade with Native Americans, settling his store on the present site of Oxford. Isom was the first white settler and merchant in the place, remaining there until whites removed Native Americans from the area. His foray into the frontier seems to have renewed his desire for education, specifically a medical career. He travelled eastward in pursuit of this journey, attending increasingly prestigious institutions. From Mississippi, he travelled first to Tennessee to study medicine under Dr. John S. Spindle. From Tennessee, Isom moved to Kentucky to take a course of lectures at Transylvania University before travelling east to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to attend the Jefferson Medical College from 1838-1839. When he returned to Oxford, Mississippi, to practice, he was one of the state’s most distinguished practitioners.\(^{35}\) In addition to Isom, Wiley Pope Harris attended Transylvania at the height of its legal program in the 1840s, when George Robertson, Thomas A. Marshall, and Aaron K. Woolley reigned. No other American law school in 1840 had three legal professors, and Harvard alone would boast three professors only by 1850.\(^{36}\) Harris was a native Mississippian who lost his father at the age three. His uncle, Wiley P. Harris, adopted him and his brother sent him to study at the University of Virginia. From there he moved to Kentucky to

\(^{35}\) Goodspeed Brothers, *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, embracing an authentic and comprehensive account of the chief events in the history of the state and a record of the lives of many of the most worthy and illustrious families and individuals.* (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1891.), Volume 1, 1006.

\(^{36}\) Jennings, *Transylvania 223.* Robertson was Chief Justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court from 1829-1834, ending his tenure to return to his law practice and to teach at Transylvania. Thomas A. Marshall was a graduate of Yale whose political and judicial career bookended his tenure as an educator at Transylvania. Marshall was the only member of Transylvania’s law department who was not a Democrat, identifying himself as Anti-Jacksonian and later Republican, possibly the result of his time at Yale. He went on to become Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals in Kentucky and was a member of Kentucky’s and the United States House of Representatives. See Marshall’s biography last accessed December 2012: http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000161
specifically study at Transylvania under Robertson, Marshall, and Woolley.\footnote{Dunbar Rowland, ed. \textit{Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions and Persons}. 3 volumes (Atlanta: S. A. Brant 1907), Volume 1, 841.} Under the direction of Judge Buckner Harris, another uncle, he would return to Mississippi to become a distinguished lawyer, jurist, and politician.

Transylvania College’s location and reputation made the school a viable option for many southerners, though a school much further to the north drew southerners to its hall of learning and significantly influenced legal minds of the secessionist generation. Litchfield Law School is an intriguing institution of the early national period, and its power to draw southerners so far from home is worth discussion. Prior to the American Revolution, men who desired to take up the study of law had two options: a five-year apprenticeship with a lawyer who had studied in the Inns of Court in London or a prolonged trip and three-year course of personal study at the Inns of Court in London. The selectivity of both options limited the number of men in the field and served as a means to control the type of man who could enter the profession. While apprenticeship served as the primary means for men to enter the profession, it is important to note that southern colonies sent their young men overseas to the Inns in larger numbers than those of the northern colonies.\footnote{According to Daniel J. Boorstin’s \textit{The Americans: The Colonial Experience} (New York: Random House, Allied, 1958) of the approximately 236 Americans attended the Inns of Court before 1815, over half were admitted to the English bar between 1750-1775: of the total figure, one third came from South Carolina, nearly one quarter from Virginia, and more from Maryland than Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts. McKenna, \textit{Tapping Reeve and The Litchfield Law School}, 9.}

Their institutional ties to mother country created quite a vacuum of able and practicing attorneys in the South upon the cessation of the Revolution, as loyalists were disbarred and many fled to England.

The ideological foundations and institutions created in the fledgling nation after the war all but destroyed the possibility of an institution that catered to a specific class, like the Inns of
Court, from developing in America.\textsuperscript{39} As a result, the apprenticeship system served as the means by which a young man entered the profession. Through the performance of clerical duties, aspiring lawyers would gain access to law books and guidance from a seasoned practicing attorney. Through copying and exposure to the forms and formulas of law, young men would become lawyers through rote and repetition.\textsuperscript{40} The process and time involved in educating lawyers as well as America’s continued westward expansion left the fledgling nation with a great need for legal services. Early American aspiring lawyers did not specialize in one type of law, as provincial lawyers were required for a variety of services. Legal educators provided their students with a broad and comprehensive knowledge of common law, civil law, natural law, and admiralty law to fulfill the duties of a counselor, lawyer, attorney, solicitor, and scrivener. The quality of one’s education depended on the time given by one’s chosen mentor and one’s proximity to the necessary texts. An established lawyer could have upwards of five to ten students studying in his office and earn as much as $500 to $1000 per pupil during their three to five year apprenticeship.\textsuperscript{41} The common complaint of contemporary law students was a lack of a comprehensive system of study within the apprenticeship to enable them to perform all that was required of them. Little structure or practical knowledge existed, and sometimes students were required to move around within their five years to attain the knowledge necessary to gain acceptance to the bar. The bar examination consisted of a panel of judges in open court, often by this point more of an attempt to examine a candidate’s character rather than the knowledge so painstakingly acquired. The desire for practical knowledge and lack of a comprehensive system

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\textsuperscript{40} Heidler and Heidler, \textit{Henry Clay}, 23.
\textsuperscript{41} McKenna, \textit{Tapping Reeve and The Litchfield Law School}, 10 and 12.
\end{flushleft}
of education within the apprenticeship system pushed lawyers to act on behalf of future lawyers.\textsuperscript{42}

The Litchfield Law School was established for lawyers by lawyers and was a natural outgrowth of the traditional apprenticeship system of reading law in a lawyer’s law office. Its purpose, location, and method were tied to its creator, Tapping Reeve, and the unique circumstances of his life. Reeve was called to tutor a young Aaron Burr, who along with his sister, were grandchildren of Jonathan Edwards’s daughter Esther and recently orphaned. Over the course of his stay in their uncle’s home, Reeve fell in love with Aaron’s sister, Sally Burr, much to the disapproval of her family. After a difficult and hard-fought courtship, Reeve won over Sally’s family and the two married and settled in Litchfield, Connecticut in 1773.

Litchfield should not have held an aspiring lawyer in an emerging new republic anxious to aspire to the highest positions or courts in the state; however, Tapping Reeve remained there his entire career. Cynics would be quick to dismiss the role of love in the story, but if it were not for Reeve’s devotion to his ailing wife, his hard-fought battle with her family for her hand in marriage, and his willingness to forgo his own ambition for his responsibilities to his family, Litchfield Law School probably would not have existed. As it was, Reeve remained in Litchfield to stay with his wife, and while forgoing opportunities to rise in his field, found the means to prosperity through expediency not planning.

Like other established lawyers of the period, Reeve took on students to read law under his supervision. Unsurprisingly, his first student was none other than Sally’s brother and his former pupil, Aaron Burr from 1774-1784. The moment Reeve’s law office became a formal school is murky as events and reputation allowed an organic process. Reeve gave set lectures to organized

\textsuperscript{42} McKenna, \textit{Tapping Reeve and The Litchfield Law School}, 16.
classes as early as 1782. His first apprentices were instructed in a downstairs parlor until Reeve moved his students and law library to a separate building in 1784 to prevent his wife from being disturbed. His reputation grew not so much from his own law practice but the success of the men who studied under his tutelage. In 1798, Reeve brought in James Gould to assist him in the school’s teaching responsibilities, which continued to enhance the reputation of the school.

The seat of the county and superior courts, Litchfield’s location offered a young and upcoming lawyer a considerable amount of potential business. In addition to the courts located there, the town was situated along key transportation and communication routes, a coaching station, where the roads from New York City, Albany, Boston, Hartford, and New Haven converged. During the Revolution, the town was an important supply depot for food, clothing, and munitions for the Continental Army. After the war, Litchfield became a thriving manufacturing town, boasting forges, mills, factories, and tanneries as well as Connecticut’s fourth highest population. Despite Litchfield’s remote location in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains, the town’s location along these provincial and later early national transportation routes allowed Reeve’s students access to the school from most points in the fledgling nation, including Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Louisiana, and Florida. A young John C. Calhoun used what Litchfield historian Marian C. McKenna described as a “well-travelled” coastal route to journey from South Carolina to Connecticut. The route ran all the way from Savannah to New York, where it joined the old Boston Post Road. One of America’s earliest highways, one could travel twenty to thirty miles a day if the road was good. Either a six-week

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44 McKenna, *Tapping Reeve and The Litchfield Law School*, 42 and 67. Early American roads were more like wagon trails, consisting of largely dirt or logs. Early roads required constant maintenance, repairing the effects of heavy coach or wagon usage combined with conditions
journey on horseback or coach on a well-travelled road or a trip by the sea were preferred by southerners rather than attempt travel from the southern gulf seaboard through the wilderness of Indian territory.

In addition to its accessibility, no school in the nation could rival the type of education and environment offered at Litchfield. A legal education in early America was hard to come by, spotty, and left to the whim of the lawyer to whom students either were lucky or unfortunate to study under. Reeve’s and Gould’s system of lectures—one and a half hours daily over the course of one to two years for a price of $100 the first year and $60 the second year—bridged the gap in the old apprenticeship system and the future law schools affiliated with colleges. Students received instruction on mainly private not public law, and Reeve’s focus on the principles of law and their practical application allowed the school to attract a large number of students from all over the nation. In addition, Reeve and Gould’s personal law books served as the school’s law library, perhaps one of the best libraries assembled at the time. Access to books was one of the more essential elements of a legal education, and since most legal texts, including Blackstone, originated in England or were published there, legal texts were prohibitively expensive for students and established lawyers alike. Moot courts and oral exams trained students to speak publically and debate points of law.

One did not earn a degree at Litchfield, but almost everything a Litchfield student accomplished during his tenure would be required of him in his profession. About the only physical reminder of student’s time at Litchfield are their personal handwritten notebooks, which brought about by weather, including rain and snow. A good road was often a dry one as much as it was well maintained. Impassible roads delayed and often stopped travel, creating layovers in cities for long stretches so that snow could melt and mud could dry. Armies often camped for winter and spring months in the Civil War because existing roads or the lack of them made travel impossible.

45 McKenna, *Tapping Reeve and The Litchfield Law School*, 111.
served them throughout their careers, often carefully bound in leather preserved by their descendants to this day.\textsuperscript{46} The experience of Litchfield was something no other institution in America could offer until much later in the Nineteenth Century, and the proof of its success lies in its alumni. In its existence from 1784-1833, Litchfield Law School educated a little more than one thousand students from almost every state in the Union. While many hailed from the Northeast, the historical catalog shows the remarkable migration of Litchfield students into the frontier to become some of the first lawyers and lawmakers in states as far from Connecticut as California, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Mississippi. A few daring men also travelled beyond the United States, to the Bahamas, Sandwich Islands, West Indies, South America, England, France, and the Yucatan.

Of Litchfield’s alumni, two became vice presidents of the United States, three became justices of the United States Supreme Court, twelve Cabinet appointments were given to six students, twenty-eight became United States senators, and 101 men became members of the House of Representatives. On the state level, Litchfield counted fourteen governors, ten lieutenant governors, sixteen chief justices, and thirty-four state Supreme Court associate justices among its alumni. Litchfield graduates also went on to help found or teach at law schools established in the nineteenth century, including the illustrious Horace Mann, Uriah Tracy, and Seth Perkins Staples. The sons and grandsons of Jonathan Edwards, Rufus King, Cotton Mather, and General Edmund Kirby-Smith attended Litchfield. Other notable alumni included famed artist George Caitlin, James Buchanan’s brother William, Sidney Edward Morse, Samuel

\textsuperscript{46} McKenna, \textit{Tapping Reeve and The Litchfield Law School} 84.
Morse’s brother and inventor of the method to print maps in color, Augustus Schell, Boss Tweed’s successor at Tammany Hall, and Eli Whitney’s nephew, Eli Whitney Blake.\textsuperscript{47}

In addition to these impressive numbers, it is also important to note that while many Litchfield students had been born and educated in the North, the changing nature of American society, population growth following the Revolution, and westward expansion necessitated that many of Litchfield’s graduates harkened to the call to go west as young men to the promise of greater futures. While many graduates remained in New England to join their peers as scions of the northern aristocracy, just as many Litchfield graduates relocated to locations as distant from Litchfield as the Ohio Valley and even as far away as California, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Wisconsin.

Litchfield’s southern graduates are of particular importance. Roughly thirty percent of Litchfield graduates, hailed from the South.\textsuperscript{48} As many as 206 southerners and a rogue student from Bermuda attended Litchfield. Of that number 164 men came from states that later seceded. By this point, Litchfield’s unique and successful model and prime location make a clear case for the desirability of a school dedicated to legal education. In particular, the native southern population of Litchfield hailed primarily from Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. A decent number of students attended from Delaware, Kentucky, and Maryland. Very few students attended Litchfield from Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and Washington, D. C., and none Florida and Texas.\textsuperscript{49} Representation from various states can best be


\textsuperscript{48} Custer, “The Litchfield Law School,” 183.

\textsuperscript{49} These findings were based on the data published for individual students’ information listed in Fisher, \textit{Litchfield Law School 1774-1833}. As with most alumni publications, most of the information was voluntarily submitted by graduates. Further searches on individual students beyond Fisher’s work may reveal students from unrepresented areas.
explained by existing transportation routes. Transylvania College pulled strongly from the areas Litchfield could not, particularly Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Louisiana and Texas. The presence of students from these areas speaks to the need for legal professionals in the territories and the Union’s newest members. Encumbered by the lack of transportation as well as the threat of Native American attacks, Litchfield’s southern contingent hailed primarily from the old colonial South, whereas regional schools like Transylvania College and later University of Mississippi and others catered to the new Southwest.

Beyond their regional heritage, these southern men who travelled great distances for their education reflect a unique trend. Litchfield was a post-graduate institution, meaning students were required to get their undergraduate degrees elsewhere before attending. The numbers represented here are inexact because the Litchfield student catalogue printed only what the students reported and not all students listed their A.B. degree and institution. Despite inexact numbers, trends develop within this small cadre of students. While a number of schools are represented, roughly 8-10 consistently appear, including Hampden-Sydney College (1), Harvard University (5), Princeton College (22), South Carolina College (16), Transylvania College (5), the University of Georgia (14), the College of William and Mary (4), and Yale College (24).\textsuperscript{50} Within these subsets, it is interesting to note that students from the same state who attended the same undergraduate institution often appeared at Litchfield around the same time period, suggesting southern students banded together on northern campuses possibly for both moral support and ease of travel but also quite possibly creating and reinforcing social and cultural connections.

\textsuperscript{50} Fisher, \textit{Litchfield Law School 1774-1833}. Though they appear in different ratios, each of these colleges except William and Mary were represented in the Mississippi Secession Convention. The numbers in parentheses denote the number of students from each respective institution.
What is less clear is why southern men would willingly place themselves within an environment so potentially hostile to their own society and political beliefs. Reeve’s desire to keep the coursework focused away from political topics seems to have helped the school pull students from the South, including a fair number of Democrat-leaning students and families. Certainly there is evidence of a very lively nineteenth century heritage of honor and violence at Litchfield, particularly among students from South Carolina. More than a few students were either involved in or killed in duels, and a number of students and alumni committed suicide.\(^5\)

The most dangerous aspect of study at Litchfield may not have been the ideas to which its students were exposed. One alumnus of the school was a member of the Hartford Convention of 1821, Roger Minott Sherman. Sherman played an active role in the calling of the Convention and authored the Report to the Connecticut Legislature. Though only Sherman is identified as a Hartford secessionist, the school’s overwhelming Federalist-leaning faculty and student body credibly suggest a category of men who believed secession to be a viable action on behalf of a beleaguered and suffering region. That southern alumni would later be linked first to Nullification in 1832 and then to Secession between 1850-1865 suggests that their exposure to such ideas and teaching in their youth and early careers was significant. John Rutherford was a member of the Southern Convention of 1850. Litchfield alumni who later supported secession in 1860 included Eugenius Aristides Nisbet (Nesbitt) of Georgia, a member of the convention and drafter of the state’s Ordinance of Secession; Washington Poe, also from Georgia, joined him as a delegate to the Georgia Secession Convention; and Fleming Bowyer Miller of Virginia was a member of Virginia’s Secession Convention of 1861. John H. Howard and Augustus Romaldus

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\(^5\) The school’s first student, Aaron Burr, killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, and a number of students fought at school. Georgian William Clay Cumming dueled George McDuffie of SC in Washington, D. C. South Carolinians seemed to be more violent than their peers. Edward Peter Simons was killed in a duel in 1815. Henry George Nixon was killed in an 1829 duel.
Wright of Georgia, and Thaddeus Goode Holt of Virginia joined the Confederate Army. William H. MacFarland was a member of the Provisional Congress of the Confederacy, and Wright would also serve in the Confederate Congress.\(^{52}\)

Institutions alone cannot bear responsibility for the influential ideas and experiences southern men had in their formative years. While southern men often developed identities or political opinions in opposition to their Federalist peers and professors, their mentors’ influence was not always negative. Individual men, however, often teachers, bear personal responsibility for their roles in the education of secessionists. Educational pedigrees from particular institutions often hide the personal relationships between students and their mentors, stretching on for generations. Moses Waddel and Augustus Longstreet, mentioned here in order of influence, are two such individuals. The two men were connected in that they were mentor and protégé, and their influence among southern men of the period alone would make a great topic of further study. The idea of secession and its original proponents were not southern, but northern. The educational networks of the Nineteenth Century created networks of influence, but also helped spread political ideas. Secession’s chain of influence begins further north and east than Mississippi, even than South Carolina. The chain of influence is convoluted, but begins in New England with the Federalists who opposed the War of 1812. The same Federalists suffered the death of their party without themselves dying. The Federalist influence in northern schools may not have been popular among Democratic-leaning southern students, but the idea of secession as a means for minority groups to achieve recognition and force a majority power to pay attention to its demands, seems to have gained their interest. The role of education in the promulgation of

\(^{52}\) Fisher, *Litchfield Law School 1774-1833*, 65, 81, 85, 90, 98, 106, 112 and 140. At least two men worked for peace, Benjamin Chew Howard, a Maryland alumnus, was a member of the 1861 Peace Conference, and later, secessionist turned peacemaker, Augustus Romaldus Wright was a delegate to negotiate peace in 1864. Fisher, *Litchfield Law School*, 65 and 140.
the idea of secession speaks to the growth of the nation, the history of higher education in the Nineteenth Century, as well as the impact of ideas over time.

On May 19, 1849, John C. Calhoun wrote a letter to William B. Sprague of Albany, New York, who had requested from Calhoun a summary of the character of the late Reverend Dr. Moses Waddel.53 Not many historians recognize Waddel as an important Nineteenth Century figure, and Waddel’s humble career as a minister and a teacher would be easy to overlook except that Waddel’s students were great men. From humble beginnings preparing young men for college in his famed log cabin schools and later Willington Academy, he later guided the careers of young men as president of the University of Georgia. Few educators could boast such successful students. He educated two vice presidents, three Secretaries of State, three Secretaries of War, one assistant Secretary of War, one United States Attorney General, Ministers of France, Spain and Russia, one United States Supreme Court Justice, eleven governors, seven United States Senators, thirty-two Members of Congress, twenty-two judges, eight college presidents, seventeenth newspaper editors or authors, five members of the Confederate Congress, two Bishops, three Brigadier Generals, and one authentic Christian martyr.54

Described by Calhoun as a man of good character, punctual and faithful in his duties, sociable, amiable, but not without a mixture of firmness and sternness. Waddel was also a pious, zealous, and well-versed minister who was understood more for his plain, simple, and earnest

54 This list of impressive students is often not accompanied by names in sources. James Lewis MacLeod, The Great Doctor Waddel ~pronounced Waddle~: A Study of Moses Waddel 1770-1840 As Teacher and Puritan (Southern Historical Press, 1985) includes the names of ninety Waddell students. While the political men are better known, the martyr sticks out in the list and is a misnomer. Thomas Fielding Scott (1807-1867) was an Anglican bishop and the first missionary bishop of the Oregon and Washington Territory. His hardships earned him the title of martyr in the minds of Waddel’s biographers, he died in 1867 in New York City from fever.
style of preaching. As a teacher he was most distinguished, Calhoun argued. The father of classical education in the upper country of South Carolina and Georgia, Waddel excited emulation in his students, and Calhoun argued Waddel’s students’ successes was the best evidence of his excellence as a teacher.\(^{55}\)

Moses Waddel was born in 1770 and attended Hampden-Sidney College, whose president at the time Waddel attended was Samuel Stanhope Smith. A member of the Presbyterian Church, Waddel’s first and primary calling was as a Presbyterian minister. Ordained in 1794, he turned to education as a means of guiding his flocks, beginning schools throughout Georgia and South Carolina. Initially, he prepared students for college, and alumni of his log cabin schoolhouses, included John C. Calhoun, William H. Crawford, George McDuffie, Hugh S. Legare, James L. Pettigru, Pickens Butler, Noble, William Izard Bull, Dawson, Walker, Howell Cobb, Augustus B. Longstreet, and George Rockingham Gilmer.\(^{56}\)

The University of Georgia invited Waddel to become its President, where he guided young minds from 1818-1829. Most histories of Waddel’s life credit him with a period of great growth physically and academically on the campus of the University of Georgia. Waddel’s belief in the call of the church to be involved in education created an environment in Georgia fertile enough to see the establishment of Mercer, Oglethorpe and Emory Colleges. Waddel’s own son John N. Waddel would be educated at Georgia and eventually wound up at the University of Mississippi during the tenure of Augustus B. Longstreet, serving from 1847-1865 as a member of the faculty or as a trustee. Reverend Shaler G. Hillyer noted in a remembrance of Waddel, “he


gave an impulse to the cause of education in South Carolina and Georgia which scarcely any man at that time could have done. . . not only our own state, but Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas, felt the influence for many years after that master spirit presided over the University of Georgia.”

Hillyer’s choice of the word “master” is appropriate. Buried at the end of his touching and passionate biography is a small paragraph noting Waddel was a slaveholder. His son briefly touched on the fact that his servants worked his farm, carefully adding how Waddel himself rarely purchased a slave except to purchase his slave’s husbands or wives for “humanity’s sake.” Waddel did provide the slave children under his care with religious instruction, and as with many post-Civil War comments about slavery and slaveholders, Waddel’s son assures the reader no cruel treatment occurred, rather the reverse, his neighbors complained his humane treatment was ruining “all the negroes” in the area.

Calhoun’s letter to William B. Sprague also included another list of distinguished students of Waddell, including Augustus B. Longstreet. It is from Waddel to Longstreet that one can then link up to Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, himself the son, nephew, and student of Litchfield Law School and a Waddel alumni and eventually himself a teacher who would in turn influence many more young minds. While any of the many secessionists mentioned above might prove instructive, the early life and education of L. Q. C. Lamar illustrates the myriad of individuals and connections intersecting over the course of multiple generations to create a very unique individual who lived in and played an ever-important role in extraordinary times. Though complex and deep, the connections and relationships evidenced point to real and imagined communities of southerners tied by more than just their sectional and political opinions. The

beginnings of L. Q. C. Lamar can be interpreted as one man’s career focal point or another’s final legacy. Lamar’s familial connections tied him to Litchfield, through his father to Tapping Reeve and the Federalism of New England. His educational connections tied him to Longstreet, who was tied to Waddel and John C. Calhoun. Jefferson Davis mentored Lamar, passing on advice and possibly experience gleaned from his days at Transylvania College, under the influence of Henry Clay, or from his deep personal relationship with Franklin Pierce. His friendships and relationships with other Mississippians connected him to even larger circles of influence. Lamar himself was conscious of the many connections, as he was able to use them to his personal and professional advantage, until he too had stood where others had before him.

Before there was a L. Q. C. Lamar, there was his father, Judge Lucius Q. C. Lamar. A rising star in the Georgia political scene, Lamar committed suicide in 1834, leaving Sarah Lamar alone to raise her children to be successful intellectuals. Contemporaries understood Lamar’s mother’s desire to supplement his book learning with agricultural work and instruction on plantation life, which completed a man’s education. The family moved to Covington, Georgia, in 1835, and Sarah Lamar’s children were enrolled at the newly established Methodist Manual Labor School. In addition to regular studies, students were required three hours of manual labor a day, making it a finishing school for the sons of elite white men who would one day join the planter ranks. While Lamar did not enjoy the work, he later argued it strengthened his delicate system and trained he and his brothers, as well as many of Georgia’s most distinguished men, in the workings of a farm.59

The Methodists who started Lamar’s labor school founded Emory College. Surrounded by large plantations in Oxford, Georgia, Sarah Lamar again relocated her family so that Lamar

could attend. She built a house and took in college boarders to help with her expenses. In the meantime, Lamar studied with the fourth class to graduate from Emory College and excelled in classics and debate, but neglected mathematics. It was in the fall of 1841 that Lamar was pulled into the irrevocable orbit of the Reverend Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Emory’s president.\(^{60}\)

A lawyer, author, clergyman, and educator, Longstreet’s influence in Lamar’s life would be far-reaching. Born in Augusta, Georgia, in 1790, he was educated in southern secondary schools, including a preparatory school in South Carolina where he boarded in the home of John C. Calhoun’s brother, William. The Calhouns were personal friends of Longstreet’s parents, and John C. Calhoun was probably the mentor to Longstreet that Longstreet was to Lamar. Calhoun, like Lamar, lost his parents at an early age and relied on family connections to get his education and rise in his career. Longstreet’s stay in Calhoun’s home deeply influenced Longstreet so much that Longstreet went north to continue his education at his mentor’s alma maters, Yale University and Litchfield Law School.\(^{61}\)

Longstreet returned to Georgia to pursue a legal career and was admitted to the Georgia bar in 1815. After a career as a private practitioner, Longstreet served in the Georgia Legislature in 1821. In 1822, Longstreet became a judge of the superior court and served in that capacity


until 1827, when he retired from public office, resumed his private law practice, began writing, and found religion.\footnote{The Georgia Humanities Council and The University of Georgia’s The New Georgia Encyclopedia biography website has the best information regarding Longstreet’s political and literary career, last accessed February 2013, http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1235. Sources seem to credit Longstreet’s retirement to different causes. The Litchfield Historical Society, The Ledger, (http://www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/ledger), suggests his retirement occurred after the deaths of several of his children. Other biographers associate the retirement to a desire to write.}

Thirty-seven years of age seems like early retirement especially upon gaining such high offices in the state so quickly. Such a departure seems odd, but his reappearance in 1834 coincided with the Nullification crisis, which seemed to push Longstreet back into the public arena. Unlike many southern men of the same period, Longstreet chose a more academic means by which spread his influence and defend the southern way of life and state’s rights positions. Much like Beverley Tucker’s reasoning in staying in education rather than politics, he desired to be heard by larger audiences and educate future generations.

Longstreet took up his pen. In 1834, he launched the \textit{Augusta State Rights Sentinel}, which provided him a soapbox from which to support nullification until 1836. In 1838, the \textit{Sentinel} merged with the \textit{Chronicle}. His writings also appeared in New York’s \textit{The Methodist Quarterly}; Richmond, Virginia’s \textit{The Southern Literary Messenger}; Augusta, Georgia’s \textit{The Southern Field and Fireside}; \textit{The Magnolia}, and \textit{The Orion}. Around the same period, a series of sketches entitled \textit{Georgia Scenes} appeared anonymously in the \textit{Southern Recorder} in Midgeville, Georgia. Popular with contemporaries and judged by twenty-first century literary critics as early manifestations of local-color writing and frontier humor, Longstreet owned up to the writings in 1840. Such writings betrayed his as well as other southerners’ attempts to romanticize and
glorify the slavery and plantation society, which increasingly came under attack from abolitionists of the period.\textsuperscript{63}

Concomitant with his literary turn, Longstreet utilized the pulpit as another means to reaching the larger public regarding his positions. Scholars note his religious fervor increased upon his retirement from public life, and like many of his southern peers anxious to join religious denominations friendly to slavery and southern life, he not only turned to Methodism, but also became a preacher in 1838. In the 1840s, Longstreet weighed in heavily within Methodist church controversies over the compatibility of slavery and Christianity. Such divisions in the 1840s resulted in the splitting of most American religious denominations over the issue of slavery almost twenty years before the nation itself was rent in two.

Clearly, Longstreet’s interest in southern politics had not waned. He shifted the methods in which he chose to advocate for his section’s causes, and it is perhaps his service to the academy, which proved to have the most lasting influence upon future generations of southern men. In the later part of the 1830’s, Longstreet began a fruitful career as a college president. He served in that capacity at Emory College from 1839-1849, after which he spent a year at Centenary College in Louisiana before going to the University of Mississippi from 1850-1856. Between his tenure at the University of Mississippi and that of his final position at South Carolina College from 1857-1860/61, Longstreet turned his attention to his plantation, to which he returned at the start of the Civil War. An ardent advocate of slavery and state’s rights, which inevitably included the doctrines of nullification and secession, Longstreet’s writing echoed the states’ rights and white supremacy positions of longtime friend and mentor John C. Calhoun and

other known state’s rights’ pro-southern politicians and leaders. His access to the minds of impressionable young southern men, including Lamar as well as his nephew, future Confederate General James Longstreet, as well as his leadership at flagship universities in the Deep South speaks to the tenor and tone of the education provided by and for the white patrician classes in the South. Longstreet did not believe that secession would lead to war, but should a war happen, that the South would be victorious. L. Q. C. Lamar not only met up with Longstreet at the beginning of his ascent in the southern academy, but also became intimately tied to his family upon marrying Longstreet’s daughter Virginia in 1847.  

Longstreet was arguably the most influential force shaping the young Lamar’s social, political, and cultural beliefs, but Lamar was not at a loss for influential male role models. Upon graduation from Emory and his marriage to Virginia Longstreet, Lamar temporarily moved out of Longstreet’s orbit into that of family. He began studying law under his uncle Absalom H. Chappell in Macon, Georgia in 1847 and gained admittance to the Georgia. His first practices were in Covington and Macon, Georgia, close to family. In Milledgeville, Georgia, Lamar joined relatives at the 1847 and 1849 Democratic conventions in discussing perceived northern attacks on slavery. To prepare for the conventions, he studied the Congressional Globe, supplied by none other than Congressman Howell Cobb, a relative by marriage, wealthy planter, as well as future Secretary of Treasury under President James Buchanan, Governor of Georgia, and Confederate General.

Lamar never made his love for his home state of Georgia a secret; however, Lamar’s personal desire to remain there was not as strong as his obligations to fulfill duty, an impulse.

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which plagued him his entire career. Evidence of the stronger influence of A.B. Longstreet in Lamar’s life occurred when Longstreet assumed the presidency of the fledgling University of Mississippi in 1849. Not only did Longstreet ask Lamar to join the faculty and move to the southwestern frontier, but also he asked Lamar to teach his worst subject, mathematics.65

The move to Mississippi to teach also providentially brought him into the forefront of Mississippi politics as the state joined in the crisis experienced by rest of the nation over the Compromise of 1850. Lamar’s kinsman by marriage, Howell Cobb, helped pass the compromise, which bolstered the fugitive slave act and admitted California as a free state. Lamar sided with his father-in-law and supported the cause for secession. Lamar not only attended states’ rights meetings, but he spoke publically against California joining the Union as a free state. Despite the compromise’s passing, the debate raging in the state in 1851 stemmed from Mississippi Senator Henry S. Foote’s vote for the compromise, which violated the instructions he was given by the Mississippi legislature. In 1851, Lamar stood in for a sick Jefferson Davis at the last minute with a debate on Oxford's square with Foote. Foote at the time was also leader of Mississippi’s Union Party and a veteran of political battles. He and unionists throughout the South managed to maintain the Union in the face of heavy opposition and threat of secession.66

From 1852-1855, L. Q. C. Lamar made one more effort to establish himself in the legal and political community of his home state of Georgia. He returned to the state in 1852 to join his dear friend Robert G. Harper from Emory College in practicing law in Covington. He believed it would not be hard to garner a seat in Congress from the district and maintained his patriotism and ambition lay in Georgia. True to his word, he landed a seat in the Georgia Legislature in

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65 Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 33 and 46
66 Lamar’s relationship with Howell Cobb is alluded to in Mayes, *L. Q. C. Lamar*, 70, and in a number of Lamar’s biographies.
1853 after besting his opponent during the campaign in quoting the Constitution from memory. Interestingly, while Lamar was trying to establish his political position and follow his ambition, his inability to properly maintain and employ fifteen slaves plagued him. In 1854, Lamar returned to Oxford with his labor force and turned them over to his father-in-law in hopes of earning some profit by their labor on the family plantation. Upon returning to Georgia, Lamar’s practice with his friend faltered when the friend became seriously ill. Moving the practice from Covington to Macon proved no better, and after an unsuccessful campaign for Congress in 1855, Lamar returned to Mississippi to try his hand at a planter’s life on 1100 acres along the Tallahatchie River, twelve miles north of Oxford.

Aptly named “Solitude,” the plantation consisted of significant acreage acquired to allow Lamar to grow cotton and corn, raise hogs, and build a four-room house with separate office, slave cabins, and an icehouse. While no one could argue such a life equated to the extravagances of the planter aristocracies of Natchez and the Delta, it allowed Lamar to gain the planter ranks and become one of Lafayette County’s leading citizens. “Solitude” gave Lamar the opportunity to study law and politics and plot his entrance into Mississippi and national political circles. His return to Oxford brought him back into the circle of his father-in-law, as well as Mississippi’s elite leading men, including Oxford’s own Jacob Thompson.

Jacob Thompson served as Lamar’s mentor to the political scene of Mississippi and facilitated his local and state career. A transplant to Mississippi from North Carolina, Thompson utilized the frontier state to catapult himself into national politics. As a member of one of the first families to settle in Oxford, Thompson married into one of the wealthiest planter families and

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68 Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 60-61. Lamar met Thompson on his arrival in Oxford, Mississippi in 1850-1851, but it was his return to Oxford in 1855 that brought him back into Thompson’s sphere of influence.
became a large landowner as a result. Another outspoken proslavery state’s rights advocate, Thompson mentored and supported Lamar’s ambition to join the national political fray of the late 1850s. Thanks to Thompson’s influence and connections, Lamar was nominated to Congress in 1857 in the same year James Buchanan appointed Thompson as Secretary of Interior.

Thompson’s influence in Lamar’s nomination is well documented, while evidence of their relationship in Oxford as well as Washington is shadowy. Little of Thompson’s correspondence before or during the war exists, thanks in part to his house being burned by Union forces in 1864. As with many forthright secessionists, ambassadors from southern secession conventions, and Confederate politicians, Thompson’s correspondence is beyond rare. It is possible to trace his movements and actions in part and at times entirely through the correspondence and official reports and memos of others, including that of Lamar. Lamar’s relationship with Thompson was vital to gaining the trust of the constituents of Mississippi’s First District, who he served beginning in 1857, and Lamar claimed him as a life-long friend. On the occasion of Thompson’s death, Lamar wrote to Thompson’s niece in sympathy, reflecting on Thompson’s role in his life:

> He was one of the few men whose presence in this world invested my own life with much of its own interest. I first met him in 1849. I was then a youth only twenty-four years of age, while he was near the zenith of his high honors and impatient aspirations. . . . [Thompson] openly exerted in my behalf. . . . From that time to the day of his death our friendship, personal and political has been unbroken.69

In addition to Thompson, another well placed mentor and associate of Lamar was Jefferson Davis. Lamar stood in for Davis in 1850 during the debate with Foote. The relationship is not a straightforward one. Though Davis was the senior senator from Mississippi, his politics were much more moderate than that of Thompson and Longstreet as well as many of his fellow

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House colleagues. Lamar importantly stood in for Jefferson Davis at the Democratic National Convention in Charleston, presenting Davis’s moderate views while Davis remained in Washington. That Lamar walked out of the convention with Yancey and fifty other southern delegates rather than back Stephen Douglas speaks to his degree of involvement and leanings. Certainly many Democrats sympathized with Yancey, but the split in the Party April 1860 guaranteed Democrats would lose in November.

The small town of Holly Springs in Marshall County possibly brought together the most secessionists in a single place than possibly any other town in Mississippi. Holly Springs was the county seat, and its location along the Mississippi Central Railway made it an important business center for local plantations and professionals, including doctors and lawyers. The Chalmers family serves as another example of the means by which young men were educated and gained their profession. In 1861, a recent transplant to Holly Springs, Mississippi from Virginia, James Ronald Chalmers, was just thirty years old. He was the son of prominent Virginia lawyer Joseph W. Chalmers, who immigrated to Mississippi to set up a practice in Holly Springs. James travelled back east to attend school at South Carolina College and then returned home to Mississippi. According the 1860 Federal Census, he was a prosperous lawyer and district attorney with $12,200 in real estate and $10,000 in personal estate, including ownership of forty-three slaves. His cousin, David Chalmers Glenn, did not have the same advantages. Seven years older than James, David Chalmers Glenn arrived in Joseph W. Chalmers’s household upon the death of his parents when he was just an infant. Rather than attending school, Joseph Chalmers served as his mentor and his uncle’s law office was his school. Despite the difference in their
education, David Chalmers Glenn was admitted to the Mississippi bar and practice in Holly Springs alongside his cousin and uncle.70

Holly Springs did not lack for lawyers, or even doctors. Samuel Benton, Jeremiah Watkins Clapp, Orlando Davis, Harvey Washington Walter, and Daniel B. Wright were drawn there to further their careers. William Monroe Lea, a North Carolina native, settled in Holly Springs after his educational tenures at the University of North Carolina and medical school in Pennsylvania. In 1861, he entered his twenty-fourth year of medical practice in the town. Each of these men, in addition to Chalmers and Glenn, would probably have passed each other on the street, argued politics, offered counsel on difficult cases, and maybe even intermarried or attended the same social functions. In February 1861, each would be elected to Mississippi’s Secession Convention as delegates from Harrison, Marshall, or Tippah Counties.71

The Mississippi Secession Convention that convened in 1861 consisted of men tied together through a generation’s worth of mentorships and friendships, which convinced them that secession from the Union might be the means by which the South could preserve the institution of slavery and continue to prosper. Walker Brooke may have studied under State’s Rights champion Beverley Tucker. Charles de la Boulay Fontaine, a great-grandson of Patrick Henry, had read law with Jacob Thompson. William Littleton Harris attended the University of Georgia, possibly when Waddel presided at its helm, and practiced law in Washington, Wilkes

70 For Chalmers and Glenn, see Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, Volume 1, 535-536 and 800, as well as Lynch, Bench and Bar, 307-308. For James Ronald Chalmers census information: James R. Chalmers; p. 129, line 16, Free Inhabitants in the County of De Soto, Post Office Hernando, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860 (National Archives Microfilm Publication, Roll 653_581); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. 71 For Benton, Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, Volume 1, 380. Davis was also president of the Bank of Holly Springs. For Orlando Davis, see Rowland, Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions and Persons, Volume 1, 206. For Walter, see Lynch, Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 488. For Lea, see Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, 1105.
County, among the likes of Augustus B. Longstreet, Joseph H. Lumpkin, Garnett Andrews, William Dawson, Robert Toombs, and Alexander Stephens. Amidst this group were Union men as well as secession’s most virulent leaders, and ultimately Harris chose secession. He was chosen by the convention to be Mississippi’s secession commissioner to Georgia, and he would argue passionately for secession stating, “Mississippi is firmly convinced that there is but one alternative.”

The educational and professional ties brought together at Mississippi secession convention were not distinctively southern, but the fruits of their relationships would be. Their teachers would be the benefactors of the American nation, but in 1861, they would also be the benefactors that helped shape the Confederacy. The depth or extent of the relationships and inspiration behind secession will remain unknown to us. Certainly one could venture that Lamar and other men of his generation sharpened their values and ideas upon contact with the nation’s and the South’s brightest and most influential figures. Their educational and professional careers coincided with a political culture and environment racked with cancerous division and physical violence. The secessionist generation witnessed and participated in the national government’s implosion first-hand while cultivating friendships, alliances, and knowledge that served them throughout their careers. Their lives, as great men in the South, would inspire and teach future generations to understand that their lives, too, could be sublime.

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72 For Brooke, see Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, Volume 1, 435. For Fontaine, see Ibid., 746. Harris can be found in Lynch, Bench and Bar, 342 and 349.
CHAPTER TWO:

THAT BRIGHT AND GLORIOUS DESTINY:

SOUTHERN VISIONS OF AMERICA’S FUTURE

Revolution requires vision. A better world must first be imagined before it can be brought into being. Antebellum Americans North and South envisioned futures in which the West would be key to a booming economy and a more perfect union. The timeline and means by which such a vision could be carried out differed, but the goals were not wholly divergent. The entire country endeavored to change with the times, to discover, invest in, develop, diversify, and cultivate existing resources as well as newer forms of industry, labor, and transportation. Continued territorial expansion throughout the century drew the interest of Americans North and South toward the development and future of the West. Many Americans believed the West was vital to the progress and success of their own interests, region, and nation. At the dawn of the mid-nineteenth century, the South’s visions diverged from that of the North, and the region entertained plans which would place its inhabitants not only on a vastly different path from that of the North, but one which removed them entirely from the Union.

Secessionists could not have successfully seceded from the Union without a vision of future self-sufficiency, specifically economic independence from the North and greater regional
ties and direct trade with the rest of the world. Convincing others that such a move was logical and timely would prove to be less difficult than crafting a nation of many “souths” into one “South.” The colonial “old” South consisted of states like Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Their economic relationships with the North were forged in the colonial era, which included contests over slavery, tariffs, and territory. The “new” South included states formed as part of the country’s increased prosperity and westward expansion, including Kentucky, Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Most of these states were still very new and showed great economic promise. Their futures in some way were dependent on social and economic connection to the native “old” South. Mississippi identified with South Carolina and Georgia because most pioneers to the state emigrated from those states, embraced slavery, and shared the same sources of economic stability and growth.

The South did not experience a transformative “market revolution” much less a transportation or communication revolution during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Slavery prevented large-scale internal improvements and the development of factories and wage labor systems. While the South did not or could not embrace improvements, the region did not lack for visionaries and leaders desirous to educate their region as to the benefits of such efforts. Changing on their own terms was preferable to those dictated by northern interests, but the Panic of 1837 forced the issue through economic realities. While the North embraced the market despite of the financial crisis of 1837, the South decided to take a more nuanced stance: to be in the market, not of the market. Changes embraced in the period mainly furthered agricultural and commercial interests without sacrificing a slave labor system or emphasis on larger cash crops. Plantations became more self-sufficient in their ability to raise crops for market and subsistence,
and planters tried to be more conscious of how their use of land and choice of crops affected soil quality. The region also embraced communication and transportation technologies, which aided in the sale and transfer of crops.

The importance of agriculture to the antebellum United States economy cannot be overstated. Despite steady progress in the development of manufactures in the North during the nineteenth century, agriculture remained the primary means by which Americans attained wealth and subsistence. The preface to “Agriculture of the United States in 1860,” compiled from the original returns of the Eighth Census, stated:

The importance of agriculture as a recourse for wealth, and as supplying the means of subsistence to all classes of community, is so well understood, and its relation to manufactures, so many of the products whereof it consumes, and which it supplies with so many of its most important elements, is so generally appreciated, as to render superfluous any argument to prove its value. It is an interest which, better than any other, may be expected to flourish as manufactures and the arts prosper, and it is of more importance to those interested in its advancement to understand its progress from time to time than to secure any special legislative acts with the view to stimulate its productions. Agriculture will prosper in proportion to the progress of the population, and its employment in other productive pursuits.¹

Agriculture was not imperiled or becoming obsolete, but flourishing. Agriculture was essential to the health of the nation’s economy, but it also played a role in shaping the identity and culture of the American people. As the American population grew, so too did manufactures, arts, and agriculture progress. The pursuit of agriculture was “honorable, remunerative, attractive and popular, a certain home market; and wherever such exists there prevails a better system of culture, a more refined population, higher energy, a better morality, and in all things a happier condition both for the permanent welfare of the people and for the good of the state.”²

² Kennedy, Agriculture of the United States in 1860, iii-iv.
In 1860-1861, the primacy of agriculture and the South’s commitment to preserve slavery were intricately tied together in the language of the southern secession ordinances. Mississippians identified the institution of slavery as the “greatest material interest” of the world upon declaring their separation from the United States. Only secession in 1861 could prevent Mississippians from facing ruin at the hands of northern abolition and Black Republicans. Slave labor cultivated cotton: “the product, which constitutes by far the largest and most important portions of commerce of the earth.” Mississippians claimed cotton as one of the “necessities of the world,” and if slavery were imperiled, commerce and civilization would be in jeopardy. ³ The Federal government had given “indubitable evidence of its design to ruin our agriculture, to prostrate our industrial pursuits and to destroy our social system,” Mississippians argued. Secession was the means to secure the identity of southern whites and their place at the top of the social order, and it ensured a specific end: continued economic growth and prosperity. They dared to envision an alternative future for a self-sufficient South outside the American nation, inside a southern confederacy and connected to a larger world economy.

The illusion that Mississippians and the South could be self-sufficient was born in the wake of a national financial panic in 1837. Believing dependency on the market made a region vulnerable to ruin, the South turned to agricultural periodicals and organizations to communicate the dangers. As apolitical outgrowths of post-1837 economic realities and concerns, agricultural journals and commercial conventions eschewed politics and encouraged self-sufficiency. While cash crops would continue to be a part of the economy, forums encouraged farmers and planters

³ A Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union, Journal of Mississippi Secession Convention, 1861. Reproduced in Commemoration of the Centennial of the Civil War by the Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States (Jackson, Mississippi: The Commission on the War Between the States, 1962), 3.
to cultivate foodstuffs, raise cattle, and local production of cloth and other items imported or bought from northern markets. Articles, letters, and conversations centered around better treatment of and efficient use of slave labor as well as a thoughtful consideration of and careful investment in communication, manufacturing, and transportation technologies. Imposing political neutrality encouraged lively conversation about agriculture in the context of changing ideas and technologies. No idea was deemed too outrageous, provided that the result advanced the cause of self-sufficiency in the market, furthered agricultural knowledge and practices, and left slavery intact. By nature such discussions interested men invested in the Southern economy, including men of means and, occasionally, political influence. The resulting print conversations and extra-political meetings constituted evidence of the creation and maintenance of imagined communities of men beyond formative familial and educational relationships and apart from traditional political ties. As the American political environment deteriorated in 1850s, the communities’ congenial economic visions and experiments gave way to a more troubled secondary purpose. Perceived threats to Southern economic prosperity turned friendly meetings into partisan regional mouthpieces. As members of the community became convinced that the crisis threatened slavery and thereby their economic vision, their vision for the future of the South changed. Community members transformed their hopes of a self-sufficient South within the American nation into an independent Southern nation.

The purpose of this chapter is first to explain the conditions in 1837 and the 1840s, which marshaled the efforts of southerners on behalf of their section’s economic stability. The chapter focuses on the means by which Mississippi weathered economic crisis and recovery. Second, the chapter will specifically examine how agricultural journals, specifically *De Bow’s Review*, and the Southern Commercial Conventions used their print and public forums to
communicate important new ideas and technologies and provide a politically neutral place southerners to discuss and contribute to the larger discourse of self-sufficiency and later secession and independence. Key to this section is the portrait of the community created by the efforts of visionaries and progressive-minded intellectuals. The Review and Southern Commercial Conventions attracted cultured and educated men who recognized the value of agriculture and commerce as well as the revolutionary opportunities present in the era. They valued experimentation and encouraged a spirit of entrepreneurialism initially for the good of the South within the larger American economy, but increasingly to illustrate the possibility of economic independence from America.

Agricultural communities of visionaries serve as an important link to the thrust behind secession and independence. Without understanding the level of economic recovery and vitality evident from 1837-1860, southerners would not have dared to imagine the South stood a chance on its own in the world. Shared experiences of common agricultural pursuits helped establish levels of trust and respect beyond traditional familial or political relationships. The majority of Mississippi secessionists identified themselves first as planters and farmers then politicians and leaders. Because they earned most of their income from cotton planting and heavy investment in land and slaves, the decision to secede was well-considered. In voting to secede from the Union, secessionists severed economic ties with the American nation and fully committed to a vision, which was predicated on the continued protection and preservation of slavery.

To begin the story of the Panic of 1837 and Mississippi’s history in relation to it, we must recognize that Mississippitians were still in the process of striving in the wilderness to improve

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4 Based on the 1860 United States Census as well as the survey of secession convention delegates, secessionists identified themselves first by their primary means of wealth. Very few men who held political office identified themselves by their titles. Those who did were usually members of the judiciary.
Mississippian's lot in the world and achieve economic success. Mississippian's sided with the Confederacy to protect their interests and investments and follow a vision tied to their agricultural and economic pursuits. To find economic success required the creation of communities of Mississippi planters and leaders, dissemination of agricultural methods and systems, pervasive trends and ideas, and group action in the face of troubled times.

During Mississippi’s territorial phase, pioneers struggled to find a crop that would flourish. They focused settlement in the areas closest to water sources. Much of the state’s interior contained pockets of Native American settlements, which necessitated piecemeal settlement and prevented concentrated white populations for the first part of the nineteenth century. As Native Americans ceded land to the Federal government, the state attracted more white settlers and eventually gained statehood in 1817. The collapse of the tobacco market in the late eighteenth century, devastating plagues of insects, and the invention of cotton gin forced Mississippi pioneers to switch to long-staple black seed cotton as early as 1795. Mississippi saw the first cotton gin constructed in 1795, which filled a need for a crop increasing in popularity. Even though gins could be found on most plantations, they could not keep up with demand. Cotton was so valuable it served as legal tender in the Mississippi territory.\(^5\)

Cotton ruled in two eras: 1800-1837 and 1850-1860. The later boom period was a result of the changes instituted after the Panic of 1837, increased reliance on slave labor, and the forces and demands of the market. Cotton’s first reign was the result of market demands. Mississippi pioneers worried more about production to meet demand, rather than concern themselves with

\(^5\) While John Hebron Moore’s work agrees with Dunning School presuppositions no longer recognized in the Twenty-First Century, including racist and prejudicial treatment of African Americans, his research on Mississippi agriculture in the antebellum period is one of two books that exist on the topic. His research is vital to this chapter, but is also included with sincere understanding of its faults as well as its contributions. John Hebron Moore, Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), 18-19 and 23-25.
the quality of their product or how their practices damaged the soil. Much like the tobacco ventures of the colonial South, the high price of cotton allowed Mississippi pioneers the luxury of crop failure, experimentation, and “cheap” labor. While colonial generations learned to plant, cultivate, and harvest crops from their African slaves or Native American neighbors, Mississippian resorted to trial and error.\(^6\) Their correspondence and articles in agricultural journals document a community of men newly engaged in cultivating a crop with little direction. Planters supervised the work of their slaves, who toiled year round to correct planters mistakes and indulge planter attempts to innovate and cultivate.\(^7\) Little attention was given to the production of grains or foodstuffs that could be more cheaply imported from the North, and few Mississippian cared to raise livestock, which failed to thrive in the climate. Material needs were imported from northern and European markets. Any interest in new machines or tools were limited to those which furthered cotton production. Gins and presses were developed to fit the needs and demands of their work, and planters utilized first water and then rail transport when available to get their goods to New Orleans before it went on to European markets.

“The rot,” a bacterial disease in cotton seeds found its way to the Mississippi Valley after 1811, and the resulting crop failures forced planters to turn to varieties that were harder to gather and gin, requiring planters to explore new methods and tools.\(^8\) Despite innovation, Mississippian experienced the repercussions of their extensive and exploitative agricultural

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\(^7\) Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi*, 42-43.

\(^8\) Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi*, 30-31. Mississippian adopted cotton seeds from Mexico, which were easy to pick and process. Mississippi horticulturalists then crossed Mexican cotton with Georgia Green and Creole Black varieties to develop a breed which grew well in Mississippi’s clay and black loam and became the standard and parent of American cotton by 1830. By 1833, Mississippian further improved the variety by 1833, calling their variety Petit Gulf, which proved to be immune to rot and a produced a high quality cotton for market.
practices. Gullies, ravines, and depleted soil led many early Mississippians to uproot from their settlements only after 10-20 years of land use. Prior to the depression in the 1830s, planters anticipated such outcomes. Utilizing profits from their ventures, they bought additional land and more enslaved men and women to clear it between growing seasons so that a planting season would not be wasted with a move to new locations. So strong was the focus on profit that few planters took the time to build substantial estates and homes knowing physical moves were in their futures and choosing instead to maintain homes in populated urban areas like Natchez or Port Gibson. Innovation and reform were too costly, and planters argued that ignorant slaves could not be trusted to work land efficiently, learn new techniques, or utilize expensive machines or tools.

From 1835-1837, Mississippians experienced flush times. The removal of Choctaw and Chickasaw people from their native lands opened the state’s interior. Immigrants from the eastern part of the United States flocked to the Mississippi frontier in a rush akin to that of the discovery of gold later in the century in the west. Cotton’s high market price and uninterrupted prosperity allowed Mississippians to buy large tracts of land at speculators’ inflated rates. Planters thought little about the expense and labor required to clear and cultivate new acreage, which their inefficient agricultural methods demanded.

Boom turned to bust as Jackson’s war with the Second Bank of the United States ended in 1837 with economic depression. Requiring customers to pay banks in gold or silver resulted in a number of land forfeitures to the government. Land speculation ended, beginning an era where people could buy land more cheaply from the government if they had the resources. Wealth declined as the price of cotton fell from twenty-one cents a pound in 1837 to a low of five cents a pound by 1845. Cotton prices stabilized at just above ten cents a pound, but would not recover
and surpass pre-1837 heights until after 1850. For planters who made their fortunes from a single cash crop, the prolonged depression taught them the virtues of a diversified economy and agricultural system. While some planters probably avoided financial ruin by picking up and moving west, those who remained were forced to radically change their agricultural methods, reduce their dependency on imported and manufactured goods from the North and West, become self-sufficient in their production of necessary foodstuffs and material goods, and learn or encourage new economic ideas and conservation.\(^9\)

Participation in the market, rather than dependency on the market would ensure recovery. Mississippians were not defeated or broken by the economic panics of 1837, rather planters organized agricultural societies, increased the number of cotton bales produced each year, modernized their methods of agriculture, and invested in the tools, technology and industry suited to their needs. Jefferson’s suggestion of farmers raising what was needed and a little more became the model. While only the largest plantations fully realized this ideal, planters and farmers alike grew more cotton, limited production costs, grew their own foodstuffs, and increased labor productivity.\(^10\) The post-1837 economy in Mississippi brought more cotton into the market, which further depressed its price, but cotton became less of a king and more of a constitutional monarch.\(^11\) Planters and farmers used cotton for their principal form of income, but other crops formed larger shares of their overall agricultural plan. Livestock and cattle raising increased in this period, which brought more variety to the diets of white as well as black Mississippians. Fertilizers, crop rotation, and plows were implemented to restore nutrients needed to bring forth healthy crops and save slave labor for other work. Planters dabbled in

\(^{10}\) Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi*, 163.
\(^{11}\) Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi*, 93.
horticultural experiments, pushing boundaries of what was thought possible in the various soil climates in the state. The ultimate goal was to see themselves released from the bondage of manufacturing and grain growing states, becoming more self-sufficient, economic, and knowledgeable in their agricultural practice.

The production of foodstuffs became a priority. Corn and cotton seasons coincided so that two crops of each could be grown without taking away labor or resources from either crop.\textsuperscript{12} Field rotation kept the soil from exhaustion, and Mississippian planted an underappreciated amount of cow peas, the “clover of the South” between rows of cotton to add nitrogen to the soil, which were not harvested. Cowpeas served as a valuable source of food for livestock in the absence of spring and summer grasses and were plowed into the soil when fields were prepared. Together with cotton and corn, cowpeas formed the third part of the Mississippi’s agricultural triumvirate.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to cultivating foodstuffs, Mississippian experimented with the boundaries of known agricultural practice. Believed to be unsuitable to Mississippi’s soil, grains and grasses were avoided prior to 1837. Whether based on a lack of evidence or at the encouragement of agricultural enthusiasts writing in the era’s agricultural journals, planters and farmers experimented with a newfound vigor. Wheat, oats, rye as well as grasses were pioneered, though most were initially grown to supplement cattle forage crops rather than for foodstuffs. Planters and farmers willing to risk the temperamental and fungus prone crops were rewarded, and the

\textsuperscript{12} Moore, \textit{Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi}, 56.
\textsuperscript{13} Moore, \textit{Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi}, 56-58, 112 and 124. Planted at a rate of one bushel of cowpeas to an acre and planted on as much land and in the same field as cotton, cowpeas were a hidden yet important element to Mississippi farming culture because the United States Census did not consider cowpeas worthy of mention as an important crop. While the 1830s saw farmers planting one acre of corn for every two acres of cotton, Mississippian grew three acres of corn and six acres of cotton for each farm worker available.
1840s saw the erection of mills for the first time. Additionally, planters experimented with sugar cane and sorghum, and they planted orchards and vineyards, settling on Mississippi-friendly peach, pear and plum trees. Post-depression Mississippians focused on refining methods of planting, plowing, cultivation, fertilization, and processing crops, and they also participated in seed breeding to create better quality crops resistant to disease and easy to harvest.

Such efforts were the extent of nineteenth century modernization in Mississippi. Few changes were made to farming implements beyond changing the metals constituting a hoe or a plow to make them more durable. They refused to replace manual slave labor with mules or horses. In the minds of planters, as well as Dunning era historians, modernized agricultural methods would have been wasted on ignorant slave labor who used work slowdowns and tool breakage to foil planters’ desire to implement labor-saving and more economic means of production. But changes in slavery historiography illustrate how Dunning era historians parroted planter assertions that were grounded less in slaves’ knowledge and skill than in planters’ desires to maintain white superiority over their labor-force, no matter how short-sighted and backwards their methods looked to rapidly developing nineteenth-century agricultural advancement and knowledge. Over the course of the 1840s and 1850s, southern agriculturalists learned methods for planting that their northern and western counterparts had pioneered long before them, but they only adopted those that did not challenge or curtail slave labor. Sectional disputes over slavery created enough distrust of northern and western sections that agricultural methods discussed at

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length in northern print forums, to which southerners subscribed and read, met with unwarranted distrust.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the distrust and penchant for conservative change, southerners should be viewed as pioneers and venture capitalists interested in perfecting the art of cultivation. Though motivated first by immense profit and fear of financial ruin, Mississippi planters and farmers were an educated class of men who used their interests in horticulture to great result. Cotton cultivators before the depression, like Walter Burling of Natchez and William Dunbar, turned into cotton breeders who experimented with cotton varieties which resulted in easier to separate seeds, better quality cotton, higher yields, resistance to rot, and grew well in the red clay and black soils. Moving from Green Seed Georgia Upland Cotton to French Sea Isle West Indies Cotton to Black Seed Creole Cotton to Mexican Cotton was a concerted effort on the parts of Mississippians to find the right breed of cotton, even if it meant a lot of trial and error. Such effort was harder to accomplish after the depression, but more than a few planters engaged in continuous efforts to find valuable strains that would increase yield and improve the cotton crop, including Richard Abbey and Henry Vick. Vick in particular was known for his Hundred Seed Cotton developed between 1844-1845, which focused less on seed appearance but on superior plants. The reward for these individuals’ efforts rarely resulted in much monetary gain, similar to that experienced by Eli Whitney and others who worked to perfect the cotton gin. Such innovations and developments allowed little more than name recognition as the nature of the invention and its widespread acceptance and continued tinkering and development.\textsuperscript{17}

Single efforts by educated men turned into local community groups, where farmers and planters could share their work among peers. An evolving movement which began in the late

\textsuperscript{16} Moore, \textit{Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi}, 77-79 and 167-169.
\textsuperscript{17} Moore, \textit{Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi}, 145 and 153.
1830s, the Mississippi agricultural societies worked on local and state levels to impart wisdom to the collective agricultural community at their height between 1837-1845. Newspapers, periodicals, and agricultural societies were the hallmarks of the movement and critical to its success, creating forums for discussion as well as opportunities to educate wider numbers of farmers and planters. Reform was the primary focus of agricultural societies, and their members and contributors were Mississippians interested in improving agricultural methods and practice within their own counties and throughout the state.

While De Bow’s Review is the most well-known and more vocal periodical to come out of this era on the national level, Mississippians read, contributed, and participated in their own agricultural literary renaissance. While northern publications were known in the South, many southern planters and farmers saw northern methods as inapplicable to southern crops and soils. Despite this, agricultural societies of the period increasingly showed interest in northern publications as a result of the depression, illustrated in their subscription to northern papers or printing articles of interest in their publications. Readership and subscriptions in the Nineteenth Century are difficult to measure. Whether read in the private library of a distinguished planter, physically placed in a larger reading room where individuals could browse at their leisure, or quoted or reprinted in other agricultural or political newspapers, any singular publication could have as many readers as equal to the number of subscriptions or thousands more. Reprints of regional articles or letters in far-flung areas also help illustrate the diversity of interest in published material relating to agriculture. Though short lived and primarily regional publications, the Mississippi Farmer, the Southwestern Farmer, the Planter, and the Southern Planter called Mississippians to agricultural improvement over the course of the 1840s.

18 Moore, Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi, 77.
Modeled on the *Albany Cultivator* from New York, the *Southwestern Farmer’s* editors Nathaniel Greene North, John C. Jenkins, and Martin W. Phillips based their publication in Raymond, Mississippi.\(^{19}\) Each man was active in creating local and statewide agricultural societies. They were also well connected within the state’s agricultural communities. Leading planters, farmers, mechanics, and horticulturalists contributed regularly to the publication, making it one of the more complete publications in terms of its reach throughout the state. In addition, the publication’s central location and its mission to provide information and facilitate communication between farmers and planters from all over the state ensured its support and popularity. Of the many publications of the period, Mississippians would have been exposed to its articles and methods of agriculture more than any other publication. A nonpolitical paper by design, the *Southwestern Farmer* actively helped to create agricultural societies and related details of society meetings. Among the many ideas advocated in its pages, a Mississippi farmer or planter would have been exposed to material regarding the diversification of crops, raising livestock, planting fruits and grasses, the benefits of natural fertilizers, improved farm tools and machines, selective breeding practices for corn and cotton, and horizontal plowing and ditch creation to control erosion.\(^{20}\)

Though published in Augusta, Georgia, the *Southern Cultivator* was probably the most influential agricultural paper in Mississippi from 1843-1860. Edited by Jethro W. Jones, James Camak, and Daniel Lee, the pages of the *Southern Cultivator* urged self-sufficiency. While one can debate whether southerners could ever be entirely self-sufficient as a region, certainly the focus was on individual planters, who could aspire to if not realize such a lofty goal. As defined by the *Southern Cultivator*, self-sufficiency included producing one’s own foodstuffs and raising

\(^{19}\) *Moore, Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi*, 75.
\(^{20}\) *Moore, Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi*, 75-77.
livestock to reduce spending. Other popular topics included soil conservation, crop rotations, and natural fertilizers. One of the reasons for its long-lived publication was its ability to avoid articles and discussions focused on politics and slavery that ruined other southern agricultural periodicals.21

In addition to independently published papers, Mississippians in agricultural societies strove to support publications, though even the most dedicated agriculturalists could not always keep papers in print. An example of such an effort is the Southern Planter, which lasted only a year despite being sponsored by one of the state’s two most popular movements. The Southern Planter was sponsored by the Natchez agricultural movement, which was directly tied into Jefferson College at Washington, the intellectual center of the old Natchez district.22 While Moore suggests that the society’s paper failed to live up to the standard of the Southwestern Farmer, the connection to a college suggests an internal effort to tie educational institutions to the larger reform effort. The Natchez movement consisted largely of the Raymond, Clinton, Canton region as well as Hinds and Madison Counties. Beyond attempting publication of a journal, the society held general public meetings with lectures, fairs and exhibitions with a particular focus on livestock.

Within the same area, the Raymond agricultural movement had more of a longer lasting impression and success with its efforts. While the Natchez organization was more theoretical in its discussions, Raymond’s movement aimed for a practical revolution of Mississippi agriculture by building a statewide organization of local agricultural societies. Individuals did most of the hard work, like Martin W. Philips of the Southwestern Farmer. In addition to the paper he edited,

21 Moore, Agriculture in Ante-bellum Mississippi, 77-80.
Philips authored articles in the *Raymond Times* under the nom de plume of “Pro Bono Publico,” including an article regarding creating a statewide organization as early as 1839 to promote cooperation among farmers and planters in Mississippi and encouraging self-sufficiency. The Raymond group counted as successes a livestock show in 1841, state and county fairs between 1842-1844, adding entertainment to fair schedules to bring out more attendees, as well as displays and sales of farm implements at sponsored fairs.

While both movements lost steam after 1845 as cotton began to recover, one cannot ignore the interest and efforts of individuals to change the mindset of farmers and planters once devoted to cash crop agriculture. Whether the agricultural movement’s “reading lists,” including the writings and theories of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Edmund Ruffin, did as much as the articles and letters of Mississippi farmers in state agricultural publications to change the agricultural theories and practices of Mississippians will remain unknown. Certainly, the creation of agricultural societies and publications regionally and nationally evidence a well-read, informed, and open-minded southern agricultural community. Mississippians proved by their actions that they could adjusting their methods to prevailing conditions, persevere, and even triumph over depression.

Cotton prices began to recover, ushering in a decade of economic boom that ended with the American Civil War. Cotton reigned again, but Mississippians never forgot the lessons learned and the ability of the community and economy to recover and again prosper. While the Mississippi agricultural reform efforts became normal practice and the momentum of social events slowed, a number of men believed there was still much work to do. As personal fortunes improved, energy and community effort necessary for continued momentum reached a plateau;

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however, on the national level, increased westward expansion created the need for a more concerted regional movement among men interested in agriculture to develop a plan for how the territories would interact with and participate in the larger American economy. Such a project required an architect with enough vision to understand the complexity of the situation and help articulate and provide a forum for the competing ideas of how such a project would be realized.

One southern visionary stands above all others in his attempts to bring together east and west through a journal devoted to trade, commerce, and manufacturing: James B. D. De Bow. A nationalist, De Bow used his journal to ignite southern and western passion to become involved in and even dominate the American economy. The dialogue he promoted and the political environment in which he lived and participated transformed him. When he started the review, he struggled to make ends meet, but by 1860, he joined the ranks of the slaveholding class. His nationalism wavered during the political crisis of the 1850s, which pushed he and his readers to increasingly more radical conclusions and positions. As early as 1857, De Bow and his Review nurtured the seeds of discontent and supported disunion and later war. De Bow’s transformed self is the reason why history is not kind to his memory. His support of a losing effort, scientific racism, expansion of slavery to the territories, and other political and social positions popular among southern nationalists cancelled out and dulls his earlier facilitation of a vision of Southern agricultural development and self-sufficiency.²⁴ De Bow’s sponsors, contributors, and readers believed in and aspired to the vision he set forth for the South and the West in the larger nation. One cannot open the pages of the Review and miss De Bow’s obvious passion for his subjects. Each article or editorial aside invites readers to take the time to read views they may not share to understand the national conversation on a topic as a whole. Each issue contained repeated

entreaties to individuals to contribute articles and letters as a means to enlighten and educate the community De Bow believed he was creating, connecting, and nurturing. So important is this journal, as sectional politics, economics, and cultural pressure increased over the course of the 1850s, De Bow and his followers imagined not only themselves as an community, but a nation.

J. D. B. De Bow was born in troubled times. In early March 1820, the question of the extension of the institution of slavery into the Missouri territory was decided by a close vote, and while the battle over the tariff was a few years away, De Bow’s entrance into the world in Charleston, South Carolina on July 10, 1820, gave the South an advocate who knew only a United States struggling with its identity in relation to the institution of slavery and the meaning of nation and union. Orphaned in 1836, young De Bow struggled to educate himself using what little family resources left to him. Beginning first at Cokesbury, a labor school supported by the Methodist Conference of South Carolina, De Bow matriculated at the College of Charleston in 1840 and graduated in 1843. He was active in many organizations and noted primarily for his reading and “scribbling.” Many of the articles later published in the De Bow’s Review were from this period, dusted off from some ancient chest and revised and updated to fit the events of the day.25

De Bow struggled to find a niche in Charleston. In January 1844, he decided to become a lawyer and passed the South Carolina bar in May of the same year. Despite the ease to which he achieved his goal, beginning a legal career and starting his own practice proved to be disappointing. He began to submit his writing and found great success in supplying articles for the struggling Southern Quarterly Review of Charleston, which gave him gainful employment until mid-1845. In that same year, he was selected as a delegate to the 1845 Southern

25 Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 1, 2, 9-11, and 13.
Commercial Convention in Memphis, Tennessee. The event changed his fortune and guided him toward the role in which he would find great success, influence, gratification, and perhaps affection and antebellum fame.26

De Bow wrote a series of articles in support of the Memphis convention from his perspective as a delegate, which appeared in the Charleston Mercury from October 9-18, 1845. The commercial convention movement signaled a desire on the part of influential men of the South and West to address, discuss, and find solutions to the controversies stemming from long-lasting divisions between regions relating to the tariff, westward expansion, and slavery, but also the rise of cotton interests, the decline of the soil and productivity of the colonial South, the North’s increasing prosperity thanks to industrialization, mechanization, and transportation.27 De Bow’s enthusiasm for the conference and his desire for involvement won him a role as one of seven secretaries for the convention. His experience convinced him that a gap existed in the intellectual community of the nation as a whole, particularly between the West and South.

De Bow envisioned a monthly publication devoted to trade, commerce, manufactures, and agriculture was needed to serve the “emporium of boundless wealth which flows from the Mississippi Valley.”28 Naturally this burgeoning empire would require a shift in the traditional seat of influence from the “old” to the “new” South. De Bow’s unnatural step of making New Orleans, not Charleston, the locus of influence was a bold and forward-thinking move. The reasoning behind such a decision lay in his idea that the Crescent City located on the Mississippi River would become a vibrant commercial hub as the South and West developed. In addition, as a native Charlestonean and South Carolinian, De Bow had witnessed journals rise and fall, and he

26 Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 13.
27 Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 15.
28 Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 17.
believed such a journal would have a better chance at survival and influence closer to the nexus of southern and western trade.

De Bow fought to keep the Review in print. Location proved to be the least of De Bow’s worries at the onset. Charles Gayarre described the dire situation of the Review’s beginnings in his eulogy for De Bow, who died in 1867; “So limited at first was the patronage granted to this useful work, that Mr. De Bow very soon sunk his small means, and its publication was suspended. He was so completely broken that he found himself hardly with one dollar in his pocket.” Gayarre correctly credited the financial support of Maunsel White, a rich merchant and sugar planter, as the financial savior of the Review. In addition to White’s patronage, subscription agents scoured the Louisiana countryside for new readers, including plantations on rivers and bayous and in the most remote parts of the country through swamps, morasses, and interminable piney woods. White’s generosity coupled with the devotion of early agents and what Gayarre described as De Bow’s “energy that no obstacle could daunt, and no fatigue overcome,” De Bow and an assistant toiled until dawn, slept in a bare room above a bookstore furnished with a modest mattress, lived on bread alone with a little butter and limited their daily outlays to twenty cents a day in order to achieve success.29

The Review’s tentative beginnings soon blossomed into modestly successful publishing enterprise.30 The Review appeared on a monthly basis from 1846 to 1862, and once the war was over, resumed publication from 1866-1869. Early issues contained articles by De Bow or local writers. Sectional tensions drew and called for the submissions and articles from the South’s

29 Charles Gayarre, “James Dunwoody Brownson De Bow,” De Bow’s Review 3, No. 6 (June 1867): 497-506 and Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 500-501. Maunsel White’s Tabasco pepper sauce and 1812 Wine Sauce appeared in 1864, four years before that of TABASCO pepper sauce. That a fire-eater has his name on a hot pepper sauce is probably not intentional, but the author finds it humorous.
30 Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 501.
social and political leaders. By 1848, De Bow boasted Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, John Quincy Adams, and others among the Review's supporters, and the publication had a “larger circulation than any other southern work, and the strongest influence. Initially printed in New Orleans, De Bow eventually required the services of presses outside the South. By 1847, the Review was “stereotyped” in New York, and by 1858, published in New Orleans and Washington, D.C., with agent offices in New Orleans, New York, Charleston, Mobile, Boston, St. Louis, and London.31

Arguably as the Review became more successful, De Bow attempted to appeal to a broader audience, but he refrained from an overt literary turn. His publication rose above literature’s “higher walks of fancy” and avoided the “statelier tread of philosophy,” which he believed had had their days in the sun.32 Observing what became an increasingly shrill concern in the South, De Bow challenged southerners and westerners to find solutions on how to break the northern industrial monopoly. In his mind, turning to manufacturing and investing in agricultural and cultural improvement and reform was a much more active and honorable alternative than submission without a fight.33 De Bow knew that the capital and interests of southern planters were intimately tied to slavery, but his journal encouraged southerners to see how transportation and communication improvements could be used to further their way of life without disrupting its labor system. Southern planters and farmers could learn much of practical value from agricultural scholars and men willing to experiment and invest in new agricultural and industrial methods, means, and products. De Bow’s Review contained ideas and experiments nothing short

31 Edward Reinhold Rogers, Four Southern Magazines, Ph.D. diss., (University of Virginia, 1902), 26 and 28.
33 Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 32.
of revolutionary, considering pre-1837 depression agricultural practices and the South’s dearth of
industrial, mechanical, and internal improvements. De Bow and other writers encouraged
protective tariffs, agricultural schools, crop rotation, fertilization, drainage, fencing, procuring
new farm implements, experiments in new crops and cultivation methods, horticulture,
viticulture, manufacture, transportation, public schools, libraries, and overall intellectual
betterment. De Bow liked to consult experts and visionaries whose ideas and projects helped his
readers to see practical examples of how they could contribute to the growth and vitality of the
region and the overall nation.

De Bow also marshaled statistics to serve his cause. As one of the respected statisticians
of his era thanks to his role in the 1850 Federal Census, De Bow’s work chair of the Bureau of
Statistics in 1848 gave him access to valuable information. He believed his statistical work and
data would help southerners, as well as other Americans, understand and develop raw and
manufactured products, invest in internal improvements, understand the value of commodities,
labor, and transportation costs as well as comprehend the changing nature of native-born and
foreign-born populations within the country, while possibly attracting more settlers to the South
and West. Especially between 1853-1856, issues of the Review utilized these statistical
resources.34

Two projects in particular highlight De Bow’s creativity in attempting to inspire his
readers as well as future contributors and visionaries to aspire toward improvement. The first
was an ongoing project publishing multiple-issue series of articles providing informative
histories of specific states and cites, which included information on industry, commerce,
manufacture, and agricultural figures and details. Much of this work was done both to encourage

34 Skipper, J. D. B. De Bow, 70, 73, and 82-84.
and showcase current projects, but no doubt a secondary aim was to attract potential future investors or migrants to each state.

In a similar vein, De Bow’s second project was another ongoing series entitled the Gallery of Industry and Enterprise. From 1851-1853, De Bow created a regional snapshot of praiseworthy southern and western men. In introducing the second member of the Gallery in February 1851, De Bow laid out what one might consider the qualifications of members:

One who devotes his personal influence and pecuniary resources to the promotion of the temporal interests of his fellow men, by the establishment of charitable institutions for the support of the poor and unfortunate, by rearing of colleges for the education of youths in the paths of virtue and religion, by cultivating the soil and enlarging the means of honest industry, and advancing the cause of civilization and refinement—then we do not hesitate to pronounce such a character an ornament to human nature, and worthy to be held up as an example for the respect and admiration of mankind.35

De Bow lauded candidates’ political knowledge or “personal heroism in contributing to their country’s glory earned accolades,” specifically for leading public improvements, including manufactures, commerce, agriculture, and railroads in the South and West.36 Certainly the list of men from the Gallery is almost foreign to even those familiar with the men of the times. Beyond giving their name and town of residence, De Bow drew attention to each man for his willingness to venture beyond ordinary agricultural interests and adopt new technologies or industries. Beginning with Stephen Girard of Alabama, the members of the Gallery included each state which would eventually secede from the Union in 1860 as well as two northern agricultural states including, in order of appearance: Daniel Pratt of Alabama, William Gregg of South Carolina, Henry Workman Conner of South Carolina, John G. Winter of Georgia, Charles

36 The term heroism is one used by De Bow when acknowledging men who placed innovation before profit, investing much of their fortunes in technologies, processes, or discoveries that would benefit Southern participation in the rapidly changing economy of the nineteenth century.

The lone Mississippian of the Gallery, Collin S. Tarpley, was an odd but interesting choice for De Bow’s Gallery. His portrait appeared in the March 1852 issue of De Bow’s Review, which also offered articles relating to the Cotton Planters’ Convention and the Southern and Western Rail-Road Convention. Born in Virginia in 1802, Tarpley emigrated first to Tennessee with his parents and attended school at Cumberland College and Harpeth Academy before giving up full-time schooling to help his parents in the fields. De Bow probably believed Tarpley to be a kindred spirit as both had worked hard and endured harsh conditions early in their lives to succeed. Tarpley walked five miles in winter, when he could attend school, carrying blankets and provisions for the week, studying by the “blaze of faggots, in utter loneliness, and sleeping upon

37 While the actual article for the first member Stephen Girard is in question, the remaining issues contain the portraits of the Gallery of Industry and Enterprise: De Bow’s Review Issue 10, Nos. 2-6 (February-June 1851); Issue 11, Nos. 1-6 (July-December 1851); Issue 12, Nos. 1-3 (January-March 1852), 5-6 (May-June 1852); Issue 13, No. 1-5 (July-November 1852); and Issue 14, Nos. 1-2 and 4 (January-February and April 1853).

38 De Bow’s Review 12, No. 3 (March 1852).
the hard floor!” He worked on his family’s farm and supported his sisters and brothers well into his adult life. Studying law in the law office of James K. Polk and Governor A. V. Brown, Tarpley’s gratitude to those who gave him opportunity gained him respect, allowing him to become associated and later partner with the Honorable John McKinley, future United States Supreme Court Justice. Upon moving to Mississippi, he entered into one of the southwest’s largest law practices and amassed a “great fortune.” He partnered with Judge Taylor and built a reputation for successful suits before the Federal and State Supreme and Chancery Courts.

Tarpley was one of De Bow’s model citizens because of he was so well-rounded in all the categories De Bow and his readers prized. Tarpley’s legal practice created the capital, which allowed Tarpley entrance into the world of accomplished industrialists and enterprising citizens. Despite becoming a lawyer, he continued in farming pursuits and became an accomplished cattleman. At the 1842 Mississippi State Agricultural Society Fair, Tarpley took prizes for his stock. His efforts extended to philanthropy, serving on the commission to build a state asylum in 1848. A Democrat and southern rights supporter, Tarpley was a friend of Jefferson Davis and active in the Southern Commercial Convention movement of the 1850s. Letters to him from Henry S. Foote and George Calhoun counseled protection of southern rights through a

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41 Janis Quinn, Promises Kept: The University of Mississippi Medical Center (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005): 3.
42 Jefferson Davis to Collin S. Tarpley, 19 December 1855, Washington, D. C. Tarpley seems to be Davis’s eyes and ears both to the public opinion because of his recent canvass of the state in the nomination for Governor as well as in the legislature, where he hopes Tarpley will assure those who desire to nominate him for the Senate that the nomination would be greeted with enthusiasm and accepted.
redress of grievances over submission or dissolution. He succeeded Judge Sharkey on the Mississippi Supreme Court Bench in 1851, and in 1855 he lost the Democratic nomination at the State convention to John J. McRae.

De Bow’s praise for Tarpley fell outside of politics, from which he distanced himself and the Review by stating,

> With the political opinions and views of Col. Tarpley we have nothing to do in our Journal, selecting, as we do, our subjects from both sides indiscriminately. In this arena of politics we doubt not that he has made his enemies—quite as many, perhaps as other men. With them we leave him to fight out his battles, and without doubt he will find foemen ready armed and worthy of his steel.

De Bow’s praise came on the heels of the criticism Tarpley received for his idea of a railroad from Jackson to New Orleans. De Bow’s inclusion of Tarpley in the Gallery is connected to a meeting De Bow and Tarpley had in 1850 with James Bribble to discuss the idea of a railroad from southwest Mississippi to Jackson. While the first meeting ended in failure, the second meeting in 1851 met with success and convinced James Robb, a wealthy banker from New Orleans, to begin working to establish a company. As De Bow relates in Tarpley’s profile, the initial project was enlarged to run from New Orleans through the State of Mississippi and terminating in Nashville. Tarpley was ridiculed and abused, called a dreamer and interested landholder. De Bow himself was used to such labels and accusations for his own part in the scheme and beyond. Touting the rail line as New Orleans’ “salvation,” De Bow described

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44 J. D. B. De Bow, “Gallery of Industry and Enterprise: C. S. Tarpley of Mississippi,” 334. It is difficult to tell whether De Bow is trying not to become embroiled in secessionist controversy and backlash from 1850 or whether Tarpley’s connection to moderates in the period were the issue.
Tarpley as a Christ-like figure, as the “stone which the builders rejected has come to be the head of the corner.”  

Beyond De Bow’s own editorial contributions is the substance of the Review itself. With only a three-year break from 1862-1865, De Bow’s Review saw the world through a southern lens, projecting its editor’s vision of how antebellum life should be experienced, what one should think or believe, and improvements needing to be made to the social order, structure, economy, or government. James D. B. De Bow set forth in 1846 to publish a journal that would command the approval and support of every citizen wishing well to his country.” He did not say southerner, westerner, or northerner, and he desired the enterprise to spur the South and West to help benefit the whole nation. De Bow envisioned his journal would instruct and enlighten individuals on practical and important matters of moral and physical advance in the field of Commerce. Commerce with a capital “C” included subjects a “starved devotee to literature and science” would find informative rather than sheer entertainment in flights of fancy. 

Believing Commerce to be caught up with and inescapably tied to agriculture, arts, professions, fortifications, defenses, transporations, and legislation, De Bow believed by targeting individuals in the newest and most busily growing and expanding portions of the country, a greater good was possible. He argued:

If we take the South, from the Old Dominion as it stretches itself to the gulf, there is a population scattered and difficult to be reached by the influences of letters. If we take the West sweeping away through the valley of the Mississippi, there are States forming and developing, there are men struggling with the wilderness, subduing soil into cultivation, opening trade and creating for its avenues. The first efforts of these men have their aim and end in physical good.”

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De Bow’s service and commitment to these “underrepresented peoples,” suggests he understood how his journal might help men on the frontier as they developed and executed their ventures. Inhabiting the newest parts of the nation, such men were impressionable, open to vision and planning, which would make them and their region successful. With his audience literally on the frontier, they were hard to reach. The Review’s initial installments suffered from a lack of subscriptions, ceasing publication for a short time before scraping together funding until he found surer financing and his agents located new subscribers.

In time, the people De Bow tried to represent went on to serve the Review and the South. The Review changed its content and appealed to the southern community as events transformed a community formed with motto of “Ploughshares come before philosophy,” to a community ready to beat ploughshares into swords and pruning hooks into spears. The pages were home first to planters, farmers, and industrialists interested in exchanging information and methods. Approaching the eve of Civil War, greater distress at the discordant futures envisioned by each North and South drew philosophers and politicians to the Review.

De Bow’s Review became an organ of an imagined nineteenth century community, one anxious to put forth new enterprises, face hazards, test theories, and finally, to envision a better society outside the Union. De Bow urged his readers to “fall in the with spirit of the age and the country” and to “seize upon the practical field of labor.”\textsuperscript{48} A lesser visionary than De Bow could not imagine a wider sphere of influence. What is interesting is how little this imagined

community, brought together through contribution, readership as well as subsequent trial and error experimentation, conversation, and organization, is contemplated.49

A list of contributors to De Bow’s Review reads as a “Who’s Who” of nineteenth century pioneers in agriculture, industry, and invention. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of contributors wanted to advance of commerce, particularly agriculture, in the most recently settled areas of the American frontier, which at the time De Bow premiered his journal, still included much of the Northwest, South, and West. De Bow published contributions from all parts of the country, including a number of foreign contributors who commented on annexation and westward expansion. In addition to hailing from all parts of the world, contributors can also be placed into standard category of rich, educated, white men. An ability to write and a way with words might catch the readers’ attention, but one needed the time to read as well as to write. Mississippian Samuel Cartwright wrote with such passion that rarely a year went by without an article or letter written by his hand. Though Cartwright’s fame beyond the nineteenth century is that of a racist physician, his articles concerning scientific racism fell short of offering political or social implications of his theories. For others, like Mississippian Miles Hill McGehee, who contributed on two occasions to De Bow’s Review, political careers interrupted an otherwise engaged level of readership and contribution. Wealth allowed men the leisure and the resources necessary to invest in ventures outside the realm of traditional plantations, as for men like Mississippian James D. Noyes, a vintner who promoted viticulture. Writers were transformed by the ebb and flow of national events. Mississippians like George Frederick Holmes, W. S. Grayson, and Percy Roberts appear nowhere in the Review prior to 1855, but their contributions after that date are both plentiful and passionate. Before he gained fame for his fiery secessionist spirit, Edmund

Ruffin was a darling of the agricultural movements of the 1850s, known for his exhaustive soil studies and experiments to find ways to return nitrogen to soil depleted from centuries of tobacco farming in Virginia. He began his tenure in the pages of the *Review* with a 1853 article entitled, “Southern Agricultural Exhaustion and Its Remedy.” He reappeared in 1857 writing a two-part series, “Agricultural Features of Virginia and North Carolina.”⁵⁰ National politics transformed Ruffin’s contributions to the review from genuine research in the field of agriculture to stormy articles, including topics on abolitionist agitation, race, Liberia and colonization, and rising slave prices.⁵¹

Ruffin and other famous southern agitator contributors make *De Bow’s Review* an intriguing, and at times, sinister publication. Many men who would one day lead the charge for secession contributed, some regularly, to the *Review*. At least twenty secession delegates from seven states contributed to *De Bow’s Review*. Of these twenty, some are easily recognizable and others quite unknown. Unsurprisingly, South Carolinians lead the list with nine contributors, including William Gregg, Thomas M. Hanckel, Lawrence M. Keitt, General G. Marigault, C. G. Memminger, William Middleton, James L. Orr (brother of Mississippian J. A. Orr, a Mississippi

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It is tempting to assume from the presence of such names that De Bow published extremist views; however, such an assessment would be false, given that many of the same men were accomplished agriculturists, planters, physicians, or from other professions, who used the pages of De Bow’s to report their findings or to engage in a larger conversation about the future of their respective fields of inquiry. Most were leaders in their local communities but not beyond, though such men were active or followed the actions of planter, commercial or other conventions dedicated to the preservation of their rights and ways of life. Later, beyond their role in secession conventions, many of the same men fought for the Confederacy. A few found their way into mid-level appointments in the Confederacy or even the Union, which had promoted causes near and dear to their heart—agriculture, industry, or economics. Those who participated or supported secession did so out of belief that secession from the United States and the creation of a Confederate nation was the best hope to continue their vision of a more perfect union. Few envisioned a war, though it seems as events transpired that many were motivated to fight to protect their interests. After the war, they returned home to their plantations. Few lost any land, though most lost thousands in personal property in the form of their slaves. Many continued much as they did prior to the war, as evidenced by the letters to De Bow’s after the war, attempting the same crops in the same land with a new labor system. Some continued to write
contributions, responding to and offering suggestions regarding life in the South after the war or on subjects altogether unrelated and nonpolitical.

Mississippians’ contributions to *De Bow’s Review* offer a unique insight into the causes and passions held by men who were first and foremost planters interested in their own fortunes who later either supported secession as delegates to the Secession Convention or through active participation in the war or government service. Whether because of De Bow’s editorial control or genuine abundance of united thought regarding the subject, Mississippians do not evidence a desire for disunion from their first articles, though they advocated openly for their rights, evidenced a belief in the positive merits of concerted organized efforts to work collectively with other planters, and defended slavery as necessary to the success of their efforts and the order of mankind. Their backgrounds were varied, though many hailed from the Natchez region, possibly in connection with other agricultural organizations there, but also because it is the nexus of power, market, and social forces in the region.

Of the three Mississippians who contributed to the *Review* and went on to become members of Mississippi’s secession convention, all three men wrote between 1847-1851 and were not serial contributors. Their writings suggest how and why they found their future selves in the Mississippi secession convention. Each man was an earnest intellectual, passionate in his writings. They responded to De Bow’s editorial questions and published strongly opinionated position papers in the hopes of engaging other planters. From their writings, they enjoyed reading the opinions and ideas of their fellow planters. To a man, each engaged their readers to consider and discuss difficult questions of cultivation or how to deal with pests, to share their experiences of failure or success in hopes that others might learn from the collective discourse.
None of the three future Mississippi secession convention delegates would be considered famous, even by Mississippi standards, though Clayton was a prominent judge.

In July 1849, thirty-six-year-old Miles H. McGehee of Panola County, Mississippi, wrote to De Bow. A native of Georgia who moved to Mississippi some time prior to the 1850 census, McGehee was a planter in his prime. From an impressive twenty-five-thousand dollar venture with about eighty-four slaves in 1850, his real estate worth grew to two hundred thousand dollars by 1860 with a self-reported value of personal estate of two hundred fifty thousand dollars, which included the value of one hundred and eighty enslaved persons and any personal effects. To say McGehee had a stake in cotton planting would be an understatement. His election to the secession convention cemented his position as one of the wealthiest men of his county and the convention as a whole. His motivation in writing to De Bow, “the great advocate of our rights” was to respond to a call of a plan to save planters from ruin in a market of unstable cotton prices. McGehee, a self-proclaimed “constant reader and admirer” of De Bow’s Review, found “insight into the plan that I propose for the protection of cotton planters” in the journal. In fighting to maintain or grow his wealth, he wrote his letter advocating for collective action. His plan for the creation of a “planters’ chamber of commerce” that would connect and allow communication between cotton planters scattered “over too large an extent of territory” using the fastest and

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newest technology available to the Nineteenth Century: the telegraph. Unlike the mails or expresses, communication via telegraph ensured that every hour men, “our representatives, elected by our patronage,” could act in concert to ensure their interests and fix cotton prices in a manner favorable to those who elected them. McGehee believed manufacturers worked against planters and such actions were necessary to “give the cotton planter a fair remuneration for his labor.” He hoped De Bow’s “high position” and willingness to publish McGee’s views would “relieve those whose interest you so ably advocate from ruin.” McGehee signed his letter by adding that he had “a sincere desire for your success in aiding the planting and great commercial interest of the south” and considered himself De Bow’s “obedient servant.” 53

McGehee’s letter is more than a reflection of the age’s sentiment albeit with a fair amount of exaggeration of the plight of the planter in 1849. His desire to contribute to De Bow’s Review reflects a belief in the Review as something more than light reading of the educated elite. McGehee believed his reading of the Review enlightened his opinions and could tie him to a broader group of peers. He lodged his argument with manufacturers against Americans in the North as well as Britains in Liverpool and Manchester, which shows an understanding that only planters would look out for the interests of planters. That such technology existed to do so in a manner to keep almost constant contact with men of their own interest seems to be a given. In addition, his trust that De Bow’s Review had reached himself and thereby others like him, is also telling. Why else would he go to such lengths to write a letter if he did not feel as if it would be positively received, discussed, and accepted.

Miles McGehee wrote again to the review in 1851. His article, “Cotton – Diseases of the Plant and their Remedies,” reflected a more personal investigation, and he asked for responses

from other planters. His enemy changed, but his call to rid the world of cut-worms, cotton-louses, cotton blights, boll-worms, and caterpillars or cheneilles went out again to what he perceived was a larger and interested audience. McGehee called upon De Bow and his Review to publish his treatise on pests to “give my planting friends my observations, hoping to obtain from them (through your Review) their views in regard to the same matters, of so much interest to us all, and also to attract the attention of entomologists.” He was disingenuous about who did the actual work on his lands, declaring “I plant,” “I cultivate,” and “I sow” when his labor force numbered to more than one hundred men and women. McGehee none-the-less illustrates for readers and historians a planter turned gardener scientist. He alludes to an experimental garden of an acre in size in addition to his fields, which he uses to indulge his whims of new cotton varieties and attempts to stem insect invasions and solve cotton devastation. Based on the nature of his observations, McGehee was serious about his war on the insect kingdom and wished to enlist planters from as far afield as South Carolina and Georgia or even the “flat-woods” as their “is some similarity between those lands and some parts of the Valley of the Mississippi.”

McGehee’s fellow contributors and future secession convention delegates, Col. Harvey W. Walter and Alexander M. Clayton, both hailed from Marshall County, Mississippi. Their articles appeared in De Bow’s Review in 1850 and 1851 respectively, and both men wrote articles discussing the slave laws of southern states and showed interest in the era’s Southern Commercial Convention movement. That Clayton and Walter would go on to represent their county as members of a five-man delegation to the secession convention speaks to the existence of a community with diverse interests and vision. Neither man was a stereotypical planter or slaveholder. Both men were prominent in their community and state as legal minds. Their

interest in competing political parties, Clayton was a Democrat and Walter was a Whig, revealed different visions for themselves and future generations while supporting and explaining the laws relating to slavery within their Mississippi and beyond. The two seemed to have a mutual respect for each other even in opposition, as Clayton speaking of Walter, who he clearly marked as a formidable and stubborn opponent, once wrote:

He possessed an eminent degree [of] the two most requisite characteristics of a lawyer—patience and perseverance. He saw his end clearly, and never grew tired in pursuing it. He never saw but one side of a case, and that was his own. He overlooked all obstacles that stood in his way, and drove on to his conclusions regardless of their presence, and if not always successful, he always presented the strongest and most favorable view of his case.  

While only their names appear along with their place of origin appeared in *De Bow’s Review*, the stories of the two Mississippians suggest subtle differences in their shared communities of Marshall County and the readership of *De Bow’s Review*.

Alexander M. Clayton was born in Virginia in 1801 and educated in Virginia. Like many men of his generation, his career opportunities brought him to the West. He moved to Clarksdale, Tennessee and made a name for himself as one of the area’s most distinguished lawyers. His subsequent partnership with Judge Turley placed him inside one of the leading law firms of Tennessee and earned him the notice of President Andrew Jackson, who appointed him to a judiciary position in the territory of Arkansas. His tenure there ended shortly after it had begun when he contracted a particularly virulent form of cholera, which ended his ability to perform his duties and precipitated his move to Mississippi in 1837.

He settled in Lamar, Mississippi, establishing a plantation on lands recently vacated by the Chickasaw and Choctaw. Unlike some of his peers who were either lawyers or farmers,

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Clayton found success in both realms. From the 1850 to 1860 Federal Censuses, Clayton’s personal property increased from twenty-eight thousand dollars to one hundred fifty thousand dollars.\(^5^7\) In addition, by 1860 Clayton’s real estate value exceeded one hundred thousand, and he owned at least one hundred and forty slaves.

Losing none of his energy in his agricultural pursuits, Clayton’s sizable labor force allowed him to pursue a lucrative and growing legal practice. In 1842, he was elected to the High Court of Errors and Appeals and was reelected to a full term in 1844.\(^5^8\) His term on the court expired in 1851, and as such, he had to run for reelection. His strong positions for States Rights before the Nashville Convention and in the Mississippi Compromise Convention soiled his chances for election, and he returned to private practice in a partnership with the Honorable J. W. C. Watson of Holly Springs.\(^5^9\)

The election of Franklin Pierce to the Presidency of the United States relieved Clayton from his early withdrawal to private practice. Pierce tendered Clayton the position of Counsel to Havana, which he accepted. He arrived to investigate allegations that France, England, and Spain were working to “Africanize” Cuba, which was nineteenth century language for putting forth a


\(^{58}\) Lynch, the Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 504.

\(^{59}\) Clayton supported the United States Supreme Court decision in Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857). Believing the North to be in violation of the Constitution, Clayton saw secession as the only remedy for the south. Lynch 507. John William Clark Watson would later serve as a State Senator in the Second Confederate Congress, 1-11 May 1864-March 1865. Lynch, 505.
plan for the emancipation of Cuban slaves. Satisfied that such efforts were only rumor, Clayton’s health dictated a return home to Mississippi. Upon recovery he removed to Memphis to pursue a profitable position in the firm of Judge Archibald Wright and D. M. Currin.  

Sectional crisis recalled him to politics. Once again he left his position at the Memphis firm and began the first of several important tenures in national and southern political conventions. A member of the Charleston Convention, the Baltimore Convention, and the Mississippi Secession Convention, Clayton was at the center of the political storms of 1860-1861. He was a member of the Committee of Fifteen, which drew up the secession ordinance for Mississippi, and he was also chosen as a delegate to the Montgomery Convention and to a seat in the Provisional Confederate Congress. His stay in the Confederate legislative branch was short, as he was subsequently appointed to the Confederate District Court for Mississippi, holding that position until the end of the war. After the war, he served as a circuit court judge until Governor Ames removed him from his duties for obvious failure to take the “iron clad oath.” He continued service to the state as a member of the board of trustees of the University of Mississippi and as a promoter and director of the Mississippi Central Railroad.

Clayton’s retirement to quiet seclusion amid the wreck and ruin of his country did not prevent him from seeing the ashes of the “smoldering” ruin cleared away and the country putting on the “robes of new prosperity.” Clayton’s life—a “checkered vista of fourscore years” — allowed him to see the rise of a nation as well as its destruction. Remaining were those “eternal

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60 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 505-506.
61 Lynch, Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 506. The ironclad oath referred to the oath created and used during Reconstruction beginning in 1862, which required an individual to declare that he had taken up arms against the United States, given no aid, encouragement or counsel to persons in rebellion, or held office or served in the Confederacy. It was also called the “Damnesty Oath” by former Confederates as it practically ensured their inability to ever serve again in public life.
principles which reside only in the mind of integrity and the heart of the patriot,” which his fellow citizens not only esteemed but honored.62

Harvey W. Walter was born in Fairfield County, Ohio in 1819, though his parents were Virginians and later moved him even further west to Kalamazoo, Michigan.63 He moved to Mississippi in 1838 for reasons one biographer romantically related, “impelled by those warm and generous feelings which sought the accord and mutuality always vouchsafed by that people with whom his lot was destined to be cast.” The less romantic reason was that a number of people moved to the region once the land was cleared of Native Americans. To pay for his law schooling, he taught a school for two years in Tippah County, and once he received his license to practice, he moved to Holly Springs in Marshall County to live and work in what would be a popular locus for his generation’s preeminent Mississippi statesmen. According to a biography of the “Bench and Bar of Mississippi,” his legal learning, powers of analysis, reasoning, speaking, and mesmeric influence over juries were legendary. His “neighborly influence” was such that he was recognizable at “every public assembly,” “the centre of the social circle,” and “the welcomed and honored guest of every private entertainment.” There he not only contributed to the legal community, but he worked tirelessly to promote the Mississippi Central Railroad and served on the board of trustees to the University of Mississippi. Between his work as a lawyer and chief of the railroad, Walter built a substantial estate from his earnings.64

Both Mississippians wrote to De Bow’s Review to discuss the slave laws of Mississippi between 1850 and 1851. Clayton’s article in De Bow’s Review appeared at a critical time in his

62 Lynch, Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 507.
63 Lynch, Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 487.
64 Lynch, Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 487-488 and 490. The Walter Place, as it was known then and today, includes two cottages, twelve bedrooms and baths, a botanical garden, on roughly fifteen acres. General Grant deemed the home suitable for his family headquarters while he was based in Holly Springs in 1862.
career, just before the canvass in 1850 and his later removal to Cuba. One might argue that Clayton’s article’s short length on the subject of southern slave laws was more a product of his busy schedule rather than limited knowledge or interest. Appearing in the January 1850, Clayton’s article, “Southern Slave Laws,” is more outline than substance. Clayton believed the Mississippi legislature had no right to prevent emigrants from bringing slaves within the state, “so long as slavery continues to be tolerated,” unlike Walter who believed the state had more than enough to meet its immediate needs. Both he and Walter were mindful that slaves with “criminal pasts” found their way into the state, and as a result, speak in harsh tones as to the dangerous nature of current law allowing for such criminal slaves to be allowed in the state versus a public opinion with a mind to prohibit the practice. Both mention the prohibitions of masters emancipating slaves and the rights (or lack thereof) of freed slaves within Mississippi borders. Clayton seems to hint at the idea that good behavior could win a black man or woman a place in Mississippi, as long as they were not a public charge and lived within restrictions, including no right to franchise. While Clayton’s article is very direct and short, Walter seems to take up the mantle, delivering a somewhat different though more drawn out reflection of the slave laws of Mississippi.65

From his home in 1851, Walter penned his single article, “Slave Laws of the Southern States: Mississippi,” for publication in *De Bow’s Review*.66 Walter’s article addressed legislation relating to enslaved persons, which betrayed his Whig politics. He became a slaveholder sometime after 1850 as his personal estate value grew from five thousand dollars to one hundred

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fifty thousand dollars between the 1850 and 1860 Federal Censuses.\textsuperscript{67} According to the later, Walter owned eight slaves, and based on the ages of those listed in the census, possibly a family as five of the eight are all less than eighteen years of age.\textsuperscript{68} Nevertheless, Walter wrote a straightforward explanation of how slavery worked and defended existing laws, pointing out the more humanitarian measures as well as abuses. Walter began by explaining the organic means by which legislation relating to slaves came about, “no fixed rule of public policy; constant change seems to have been the only end at which we aimed.” He further explained that the people of Mississippi desired a change regarding the policy of bringing additional slaves into the state. Preempting \textit{Dred Scott v. Sandford} by six years, Walter then wrote something rather unusual for a southern slaveholder of his generation living in a state admitted to the Union just thirty-four years prior, “Our “wild land” is now nearly cleared, and our slave force is fully adequate to its culture.” In other words, Walter advocated for no further introduction of slaves, and he provided a number of reasons. In a practical sense, he believed the land needed to maintain its strength, and keeping the labor force in check allowed for farmers and planters to rest land and maintain soil viability. Speaking as a true Whig, he advocated investing surplus capital in commerce and manufacturing. Believing southerners were “blind to these advantages,” including railroad and steamboat technologies, Walter argued neglecting manufactures and growing grain and foodstuff

\textsuperscript{67} Harvey W. Walter; p. 275B, line 11, Schedule 1, Free Inhabitants of Northern Division of the County of Marshall, State of Mississippi; 1850 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, Roll 377) Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29.

created a unnecessary dependency on “our more sagacious sister states.” His final reason for advocating a cessation in slave importation related to the places from which such laborers were brought, namely the North. Preventing an adequate “home” for freed slaves would strengthen bonds between southern states by compelling them to keep their slave property so that they would share a common interest.” Provisions and precedent for states to make such prohibitions of slave importation existed in the Mississippi constitution as well as in those of other states’. Walter’s conversation regarding the cessation of slave importation probably put some slave owners on edge, as the Compromise of 1850 was not universally appreciated or supported. While his reasons for prohibiting the introduction of slavery had little to do with abolition, bringing the existence of laws to the public’s attention which might be used with a different motive to prevent the movement of personal property or to limit the number of slaves available sounds socially suicidal.

Walter was no friend of the enslaved population. His motives to end importation of slave labor in his state coincided with his unspoken agreement with Mississippi legislation regarding emancipation and free blacks. Only meritorious service performed for the benefit of the owner or the state and approved by the legislature could free a black man or woman in Mississippi, and Walter argued such an instance had not occurred. In addition, blacks freed could not remain in the state, although the legislature determined that slaveowners could not transport their slaves beyond the state’s borders to free them, there remained the option of Liberia. By his language summing up these laws, Walter assents, “We are thus freed from the curse of having free blacks in our midst; and as a vast majority of our citizens very properly regard slavery as a boon to the African.” Such statements as well as his final paragraphs relating to the humanity of Mississippi

laws, allude to Watson’s personal belief in the beneficiary nature of the institution and the laws which allowed slaves many freedoms, including protection from cruelty and unusual punishment, keeping pets, planting garden patches, the existence of places of public worship and ministers, no work on the Sabbath, and oral Bible instruction. Freed blacks’ freedom was respected and upheld in Mississippi courts, and only the interference of abolitionists prevented slaves from learning how to read and write.\(^{71}\)

Walter’s article is thus a true southern Whig’s view of the institution of slavery as well as a snapshot of how he might have sided on issues of national importance in the coming years. True to form, Walter would later oppose secession until “he considered that measure an inexorable alternative to the dishonor and political degradation of his people.” Once on board, he not only voted for secession, but served as a lieutenant of a company of men who responded for the first call for troops in 1861. His army days were limited, though, as his legal gifts could not be appreciated on the field of battle, and he was transferred to the staff of General Braxton Bragg as Judge Advocate, where he remained for the rest of the war.\(^{72}\)

Upon the war’s close, Walter returned to his practice in Holly Springs, and in 1878, when yellow fever descended on the town, earned his place in the heart of his people. He opened his home and used his resources to give aid and comfort to refugees from neighboring Grenada. Upon the disease’s appearance in Holly Springs, he famously urged others to flee, including his whole family excepting his sons who stayed behind with him, stating, “As for me and my sons, we cannot go; we must fight this foe; we must succor, our people and administer to the sick, the dying, and the dead.”\(^{73}\) Such actions could only result in eventual death, and so it was


\(^{72}\) Lynch, *Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 489 and 491.

\(^{73}\) Lynch, *Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 491.
remembered by Frederic Speed, “In the stillness of the preceding night a few sparks of electricity flushed over the wires, and all the civilized world read in the morning of the 20th of September. . . . ‘Colonel Walter is amongst the dead of the past twenty-four hours.’” His sons followed their father to their graves within the same week.  

Despite the merits of their political careers and even Walter’s dramatic death, he and Clayton lived relatively normal lives as lawyers and politicians who owned slaves. They certainly represent some of the less strident common contributors of slavery-related articles to *De Bow’s Review*. The *Review* possessed a strong pro-slavery bent, reinforced and shored up by religion, philosophy, and science. De Bow did not set forth to create a proslavery publication dedicated to discussion of only slavery. The earliest articles dedicated to the institution of slavery, its workings, preservation, endangerment, or general arguments regarding racial superiority appear infrequently. There is a significant turn in the tone and content of articles in the *Review*. The first article devoted entirely to “The Negro,” appeared in May 1847. Many of the earliest contributions lacked a defensive tone or argument, often considering the subject of slavery as one might a discussion on the best means to grow cotton in a specific climate. By 1855, the number of articles with a designated title or subject matter related to slavery rose to more than ten articles per year. Most articles concerning slavery underlined the racial inferiority of black men and women. Biblical passages identified the existence of slavery since the dawn of creation—often supporting a theory of multiple creations—as well as the religious legal constructs of slavery in Israelite and later Roman societies. Tied to biblical arguments were scientific racism claims that each race were physically and intellectually distinct, having no

74 Frederic Speed, “Harvey Washington Walter.” *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Mississippi, Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons from its organization,* (Clarion Steam Printing Establishment, Jackson, Mississippi, 1882), XVII.
claim to power or freedom in society based on their darker skin and God-ordained role. The tirades regarding racial inferiority as well as religious and scientific defenses of the institution of slavery for the institution of slavery appear in the later 1850s as events and politics increased southern fears. J. D. B. De Bow himself became a slaveholder in 1860, and his actions may have been a response to being converted by his own journal to aspire to the greatest heights of southern civilization and to become a proper southern gentleman or leader. 75

A number of Mississippians contributed to the dialogue of slavery and racial superiority in the pages of De Bow’s Review. No man argued for or supported the institution utilizing the same argument or rationale. Some approached the topic from a scientific background, utilizing religion to shore up their more outrageous claims. Others tried a more philosophical approach, attempting to cast doubt or affirm readers’ interpretation of the social and moral implications of the “natural rights” vested in nation’s own Declaration of Independence. Still other men utilized the current push westward to illustrate the benefits of the institution and its role in the definition and assertion of popular will and rights. Such contributions from a single state in the nation illustrate the diversity of popular beliefs about the role of the institution in society. Mississippians’ willingness to stand up for or explain their perceived rights points to future disagreements on how such rights would be defended over the course of the 1850s. Their articles change over time, from logical and rational arguments to outright fear-mongering. By 1860, the

75 By a Citizen of Mississippi, “The Negro.” De Bow’s Review Volume 3, Issue 5, May 1847, was the first article specifically devoted to the topic of enslaved men and women. Articles pertaining specifically to slavery or race appeared in De Bow’s Review: November 1847, July 1849, September-December 1849, January-April, July-September, November-December 1850; January, June-July, October-December 1851; February and May 1852; March, June-September, and November 1853; January, July, and October 1854; January-December 1855; January-December 1856; January and March-December 1857; January and March-December 1858; January-February, April-June and August-December 1859; January-December 1860; April 1861; and January-April 1862.
sole Mississippi article was so inflammatory the author deemed it safer to sign it “A Mississippian” rather than his name. Or did such views written by someone from outside Mississippi, say South Carolina, believe the article would achieve more credibility among readers if it did not come from the state everyone assumed would lead the secessionist charge?

Among the Mississippi writers is Samuel A. Cartwright. A man reviled more in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries for his tireless efforts to unite science, religion, and proslavery to argue for the racial, social, cultural, mental, and otherwise superiority of whites over blacks, Cartwright deserves explanation, but not quarter. An obvious racist to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, he was much respected and admired in the nineteenth century by men who agreed with his opinions, and he had a pedigree to back up his ideas. An apprentice to Benjamin Rush, he was a native Virginian who claimed Natchez, Mississippi as his home for some years in the antebellum period before settling finally in New Orleans. He famously described two diseases found only in American slaves, “drapetomania” and “dysaethesia aethiopica.” The result of a mad desire for freedom and a lack of work ethic, Cartwright’s made-up diseases were discredited, eventually, though not before he used them in his proslavery war against northern abolitionist fanaticism. Cartwright’s particular appeal allowed him access to publish frequently in De Bow’s Review from 1851-1855 and 1861-1862. His language is some of the most quoted when historians require a reference from De Bow’s.

The science of medicine could save the Union now and forever, if it were brought to light. So believed and wrote Samuel A. Cartwright in his first and often quoted article in De Bow’s Review, “How to Save the Republic, and the Position of the South in the Union.” The reception of advancements and theories in the fields of anatomy, physiology and phenomena

76 S. A. Cartwright, M.D., “How to Save the Republic, and the Position of the South in the Union,” De Bow’s Review 11, Number 2 (August 1851) 184-197.
drawn from observation would go a long way toward solving the political problems that plagued his age.⁷⁷ Men of science who have not had the opportunity to diffuse it held the knowledge of the differences between white and black. He believed such knowledge required refinement and purification so that the masses could understand, a job for only a man of superior intellect.⁷⁸ According to Cartwright, all history disproved the idea that “the negro is a white man only painted black,” as color was not only confined to the exterior skin, but pervaded “every membrane and muscle, tinging all the humors, and even the brain itself, with a shade of darkness.”⁷⁹ Not leaving science alone to make his arguments, Cartwright used the Bible to back up his statements with God’s law handed to Moses for the Jews, believing the history of Ethiopia and the Canaanites would allow North and South to see the Truth.⁸⁰ He doubted northern devotion to equality over the demands of the “higher law of God,” especially when they would eventually find that support of their principles would kill their trade and manufacturing, deprive them of wealth, and lead to war. He mocked their Puritan background, called out their fanaticism, and decried them as bullies.⁸¹ Time would tell the North that the blot of slavery was really a necessary part of the entire structure of the Union, and such was one of the few coherent moments of Cartwright’s article, so firm and true he believed his argument on behalf of the South and slavery. Understanding the role of the institution in the development of the nation, Cartwright set about destroying the argument for free labor. So many people only ended up in northern prisons, penitentiaries, and alms-houses that they would be better off as slaves and not a

⁷⁷ Cartwright, “How to Save the Republic,” 185.
⁷⁸ Cartwright, “How to Save the Republic,” 192.
⁷⁹ Cartwright, “How to Save the Republic,” 186.
⁸⁰ Cartwright, “How to Save the Republic,” 186.
⁸¹ Cartwright, “How to Save the Republic,” 188.
burden to the state. A deliberate and proper explanation of the case he described would bring about a quieter nation, easing the collective conscience and agitation. Continued examination of the slavery question would just keep the specter of secession and disunion alive and well. He explained:

The public sentiment so predominant at the North, that the negro can be *washed white* by personal freedom, political and social equality, and that it is a sin and a shame to Christianity, republicanism, and humanity to let him remain so long unwashed has led to a system of fanatical aggression at the North, which South Carolina believes will bring swift and sure destruction upon her, if she remains in the Union, and hence she is preparing to leap, as from a ship on fire, into the gulf of secessionism. She is deaf to the recital of the dangers she may encounter out of the Union, believing that sure destruction awaits her in it. But if public sentiment North could be directed, by the force of some strong and commanding intellect, into another channel of thought, calculated to lead to the truth she would have hope—hope would make her pause, as she only leaves the Union because she sees no hope of safety in it.

Such a plan seems to have continued unabated by Cartwright and others throughout the 1850s. While Cartwright desired a search for truth, he envisioned a truth favorable not only to the South, but the white men.

George Frederick Holmes rooted his own arguments in support of slavery in ancient history, rather than the science and religion favored by Cartwright. An educator by profession, Holmes began his career as a professor of ancient languages at Richmond College in 1845. He took a position as a professor of history and political economy at the College of William and Mary in 1847 until appointed the first chancellor of the University of Mississippi in 1848. Prior to a return to academia in 1857 to teach at the University of Virginia, Holmes became a prolific writer and contributed to a number of publications, including *De Bow’s Review*. Holmes wrote two large articles in 1855 detailing slavery as institution that had been in the world since the

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82 Cartwright, “How to Save the Republic,” 189.
84 Cartwright, “How to Save the Republic,” 193.
world began and was “one of the principal and most enduring arrangements of humanity.”\textsuperscript{85} Believing modern science could not revive or recall lost arts, Holmes noted that his generation was ignorant of how “the immense blocks employed in the construction of the Pyramids were quarried and lifted into place.”\textsuperscript{86} An obvious proponent of slavery, Holmes used history, literature, and the Bible to root his arguments in the age-old idea that slavery was an illustration of a noble truth that men created to satisfy the requirements of developing societies and nations. It had always existed; it would always exist.\textsuperscript{87} Slavery was impossible to eradicate, could never be extinguished by legislation, and only dependent colonies of revolutionary governments had successfully abolished, and having done so, only replaced it with a harsher reality and slavery, much worse than existed in the American South.\textsuperscript{88} Like Cartwright, Holmes argued slavery was religiously acceptable, natural, and universal. After the war, it is interesting to note that Holmes is one of a handful of men who reached back to Milton to discuss the end of the civil war and the loss of a particular vision.\textsuperscript{89}

W.S. Grayson of Mississippi contributed a more philosophical approach to his statesmen’s ideas regarding slavery, and his reasoning often incurred editorial comments from De Bow. What separated Grayson from his Mississippi peers was his writing style. His contributions illustrate a mind constantly working through the rational arguments for and against slavery, and his fellow southerners often took issue with his logic, evidenced by impassioned letter and responses to his articles. Grayson argued for slavery utilizing a combination of law and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[86]{G. F. Holmes, “Ancient Slavery,” (November 1855), 564.}
\footnotetext[87]{G. F. Holmes, “Ancient Slavery,” (November 1855), 564}
\footnotetext[88]{G. F. Holmes, “Ancient Slavery,” (November 1855), 565.}
\end{footnotes}
political philosophy, contributing complex article to De Bow’s Review from 1857 to 1861. Grayson’s first article, “The Constitution of Man and Slavery,” served as an inquiry into the natural constitution of man in connection with domestic slavery in an attempt to show relation between nature and law, and the origin and authority of the law. Believing as many men of the age that society had the right to promote its own interest and advantage, Grayson argued, “slavery is nothing more than a rule of society—nothing more than a civil rule restraining the natural liberties of slaves ‘so far,’ in the words of Blackstone, ‘as is necessary and expedient for the general advantage.” Going further he argued that he did not view slavery as a blessing, as he would not want to see white men reduced to it, and as a blessing, white men might aspire to it, which he remarked, none did. When calling slavery an evil, De Bow himself intervened with an asterisk, arguing:

We disagree entirely with the writer. Slavery is intrinsically a blessing to the African, because it is the only condition in which his moral and physical nature can be developed, as all experience has shown. It therefore does not touch the question to speak of enslaving “white citizens of the United States” or of “desiring slavery for all good men, ourselves and our children, & c., included,” and the writer changes the issue when he does.90

One might go so far as to argue De Bow does not quite understand Grayson’s mode of argument, as he takes issue or tries to clarify what often needed no commentary in other articles contributed by Grayson. Grayson himself predicted misapprehension of his meaning, despite providing illustrations for his arguments.

Often Grayson went out on ideological limbs to illustrate his opinions, muddying rather than clarifying his points. For instance, an article entitled, “The Right of Governmental Toleration,” utilized the history of Catholicism v. Protestantism to show how Protestantism and

Slavery were both choices of evil, born out of the relative imperfections of the human character. Further, he argued:

Slavery is not intrinsically right, it is only right circumstantially—right under a set state of circumstances. The right to rule is freedom, but slavery is an exception to that rule; and if right, right as all exceptions are, according to the circumstances which surround it. And so of Protestantism.

Little wonder that De Bow again inserted himself with an asterisk with the comment, “Against which argument the editor, as before, protests.”

Grayson was not a strawman for De Bow. Grayson’s two-part article on the “Natural Equality of Men Treated as a Question of Philosophy,” appeared in the Review in 1858 and 1859 and earned no commentary from De Bow. He argued how the declaration of American independence—and thereby all of American society—confounded natural rights with principles of social and moral philosophy. While much of the two articles is an exercise in confusing or upsetting the definitions of the words “natural” and “rights,” Grayson’s intent is clear. While arguing “the laws or rules that govern or regulate them [social ethics, right and wrong rules of social intercourse], should not be called natural laws or rules,” he admits such codes have a place in society and restrict the natural liberties of mankind for the purpose of protecting its people. Such rules were neither uniform or consistent, allowing for his point that there “is a clear, broad, and momentous distinction between natural philosophy and the rules or principles of conduct that should permanently govern men in the social relations of life, whether civil or religious. His conclusion did not affirm the rights of slaveholders to withhold or limit the personal freedom or liberty of their slaves, believing the rights of man are the result of a system

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91 W. S. Grayson, “The Right of Governmental Toleration,” De Bow’s Review 23, Number 3 (September 1857): 262-266. Quotation from 266. De Bow’s usage of the word “before” refers not to an early protestation in this article, but that of Grayson’s previous article.
of morals designed to regulate the social state. Such principles could be obeyed or violated without obeying or violating any law of “nature.”

Why De Bow published Grayson’s writing in a period when proslavery writers submitted strong arguments in support of slavery and the treatment of slaves is perplexing. De Bow seemed to consider him a friend and appreciated his perspective. His presence in the Review speaks to the lack of uniformity to proslavery arguments as well as the lengths philosophical writers went to reason their way through twisted logic, arriving at a point forceful than those of scientific racism or religion.

Percy Roberts wrote practical articles, which made him the most dangerous of all the proslavery Mississippians in De Bow’s Review. He did not need science, religion, or philosophy to support slavery. He rooted his plain-spoken arguments in personal observations and current events affecting southerners and westerners. His three contributions to De Bow’s Review were practical, timely, and effective. So much so, De Bow published two separate articles debating Stephen Douglas’s proposal of and essay on popular sovereignty within the same year.

Beginning with his first contribution in October 1858, Roberts sets himself apart from his peers’ support of slavery by producing an argument based on lived experience. Closer to the form of earlier Mississippi writers to De Bow’s Review, like McGehee, Roberts literally writes from his “Mississippi bottom.” Writing on African slavery in the South and the West, he chose

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not to explain why slavery was unsuccessful or unnecessary in the North and the Midwest. His tone was neither angry nor mocking. In comparing the amount of labor and money required to plant ground in the West versus the South, Roberts argued that the sum of money required per acre in the South was enough to “achieve a moderate fortune in the champagne country of the West.” The work was hard, and the argument that southern lands could produce uniform capacities of cotton discredited. While southerners of the 1840s and early 1850s cried for southern self-sufficiency, Roberts argued such economy was nonexistent, stating, “not more than one out of twenty planters makes these necessaries at home; they allege that it is cheaper to purchase these things, than to set apart the land and force essential to their production.” The drive to produce more to buy more was alive and well, as prices for slaves were commiserate with a desperate need for labor. As most of the labor was spoken for and most of the West and South continued to be settled and grow, Roberts argued for a reopening of the African slave trade to avoid unfair competition for labor and to keep the prices for slaves within moderate standards. He was hopeful that the labor required to settle and work western land would create a class of western planters with an eye toward the preservation of slavery for an overall increased prosperity of the South and the western states and territories.96

The Union’s fate rested on Americans’ understanding of the role of cotton. Lives, political peace, and commercial success depended on cotton’s successful culture. Roberts believed the rhetoric of the time. King Cotton could not be suppressed lest England herself might fall. Perpetuating Union depended on no less than giving the institution perpetuity within the nation through reopening the slave trade and allowing the institution’s introduction into the

West. This bond of sympathy, tendered by an unmentioned North in his article, would reestablish goodwill. Without it, the Constitution was a “rope of sand,” and the Union a “shallow mockery.”

Robert’s appeal to the Constitution is evident in all of his articles, but none more so than his pieces discussing Stephen A. Douglas’s popular sovereignty. Acknowledging the South’s divided opinion of the Douglas, Roberts admitted Douglas vindicated the institution on moral grounds and advocated it as necessary for the southern system of agriculture. Yet, Douglas’s stances on slavery seemed hollow to Roberts, a bid for the next Presidency rather than a Senatorial seat. Robert’s issue with Douglas is the doctrine of popular sovereignty. Meant to solve the nation’s territorial squabbles, popular sovereignty was to Roberts “a political fly” in Douglas’s “cup of sound doctrine.” \(^98\) “Men, as a general rule, read as they run,” Roberts argued and “it is believed that the article of Mr. Douglas, thus read, is adapted to engender very disastrous conclusions.” Slaves were like all other property and could claim no privileged distinctions, even in the territories. As the territories were the property of all the states, citizens enjoyed the right to enjoy his property. Under the principles of *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, Roberts argued, his doctrine cannot for a moment hold. \(^99\) The power to protect property guaranteed in the Constitution did not, in Roberts’s view, include the right to destroy property. While Congress’s control of the territories was clearly laid out in the Constitution, wherever a citizen went in the United States, the exercise of his rights were unchanged. \(^100\) A territory that could not offer such protections would not really be a territory available to that citizen. Equating slaves to farm

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\(^97\) Percy Roberts, “African Slavery Adapted to the North and North-West,” 392 and 395.
\(^99\) Percy Roberts, “Popular Sovereignty,” *De Bow’s Review* 27, Number 6 (December 1859); 625-647. Quotations from 625 and 642.
imple-ments, Roberts argued that a man’s protection in the use of such tools is a “fundamental condition in the contract he makes with the United States government, when one purchased a tract of territorial property.” The government, in essence, would be bound to protect and intervene on behalf of slavery in the territories, not watch it cast into oblivion by popular vote.

Contributors who defended slavery called more often for northern cooperation with the institution without launching into defensive arguments that called for disunion. Historians’ uses of the Review’s more racist or disunionist contributors have given the journal a false reputation. De Bow’s Review was not full of sectional discord, calls for disunion, and love of war. The first sectional article addressing a “north” and a “south” appeared in 1849 as a result of sectional tension due to the events leading to the compromise of 1850. Articles on the role of the South and the future of the Union flared from 1855-1857, dying down until events in 1859 prompted the first article with the word “disunion” in the title. From 1860-1861, articles focused on the right of secession, rebellion, and the rise of the southern nation. Southerners who wrote for the journal suggested a weakening before a final break with polite boundaries traditionally observed in sectional disputes. Two Mississippians stand out in their articles which bookend a tumultuous decade: Samuel R. Walker and an anonymous writer, “A Mississippian.” The two articles illustrate the continuity of southern ideas of their rights and institutions as well as marked departures in language and thought.

Samuel R. Walker was one of the first Mississippi writers after McGehee to call De Bow’s Review readers to action in response to real or perceived threats to southern lifeways. A Mississippi native who later moved to Louisiana and Arkansas to pursue his legal career, Walker was a poet turned politician. Pieces titled “Caution to Youth,” “The Devil’s Ride,” “On Seeing a

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Child at Play,” and “To Byron” written during his youth at Oakland College between 1835-1840 capture an innocence and use of language not entirely lost by 1854. Beginning his contribution to De Bow’s Review with a call to arms to southerners anxious to avoid a war, Walker pleaded with readers:

Believing from my heart that the question of Cuban independence is one of the momentous import to the people of this Union—the most important in the result of the world—and the South, a question freighted with the issue of life and death and willing to contribute in directing to this subject to the attention of gentleman of our own State, and of those sister States linked to us by a common destiny, you will, I am sure, pardon me that I have chosen this mode of communication.102

His apology is for the method of his plea, which compared to other articles of the same period is inflammatory and frightening. Walker desired Cuba as another slave state on the side of the South, as many southerners did. The fear was that Cuba would be “Africanized” before the United States acquired the nation, which would then become “another San Domingo.” The Union would endure only as long as it was in the interest of both sections, with the ability and protection of the right of the South to extend slavery in the balance. Declaring the issue to be “the greatest question of the age,” Walter urged southerners to meet the challenge “boldly” as “Americans.” As it stood, “the seeds of liberty must be sown in blood,” and he left readers with a final, ominous thought: “It is one thing to keep your faith; and it is another thing for a man or nation to wreak a wrong on humanity by stepping beyond what is pledged to or required of it.”103

Ten years later, ‘A Mississippian’ argued, “a crisis impends the North.” The time had come for the South to start imagining the end of the republic’s career. Unlike other writers before him, he boldly questioned readers why topics like revolution, the establishment of a southern confederacy, and an independent southern government should not be seriously considered. A

102 S. R. Walker, “Cuba and the South,” De Bow’s Review 17, Number 5 (November 1854), 519-520.
103 Walker, “Cuba and the South,” 523-525.
pure religion and a perfect labor system ensured no nation could match its circumstances and advantages. Assuaging fears of war causing ruin, the author assured his audience that their work force would trudge on in war or peace in their “respective vocations” to fulfill the wants of man and governmental needs. In war, freemen would fight and slaves would till the fields to feed and clothe the army, and pay for the nation’s armies. An interesting point in his argument was his acknowledgement of how fighting for the institution of slavery seemed to be useless and madness. He believed proclaiming one’s rights and endless proofs for the rightness of the existence of the institution had been fruitless, only on the battlefield could one find justice.\textsuperscript{104}

The situation was not bleak by July 1860. Lincoln was still months away from election, and “A Mississippian” believed hope still lay in Calhoun’s idea of dual presidencies for each respective region or two separate Senates, arguing that the later would not fundamentally change the current system. Above all he argued:

\begin{quote}
Self-preservation is the first law of nature. We have the right to protect ourselves; we should demand the power. If the poor boon of justice is denied us, the craven only is content with less, and the South is thus to be vanquished; Southern chivalry is a vagary of the wildest romance; Southern manhood a dream; and the truth and justice of our cause will be our damning shame.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

Whether the writer lived to know the real shame of subsequent defeat is unknown as is the knowledge that he was a Mississippian at all. Certainly his anonymity gave him courage to take some of the strongest positions in the \textit{Review} to date by any Mississippian, but his ideas and words fit in well with his contemporaries writing from other states. Generally, De Bow assigned authors’ names to their pieces, believing the individual writers should receive credit for their

\textsuperscript{104} A Mississippian, “Our Country—Its Hopes and Fears,” \textit{De Bow’s Review} 29, Number 1 (July 1860): 83-86. Quotations from pages 84 and 85. A Mississippian is careful to note that a separate southern nation would allow them to “leave behind “Mormonism, freelowism, and higherlawism with their teaching so sensual in morals and so dangerous in politics.”

\textsuperscript{105} A Mississippian, “Our Country—Its Hopes and Fears,” 86.
work, even if it appeared in another publication. De Bow often reprinted articles without giving credit to the publication, and it is possible that “A Mississippian” was lifted from the pages of a Mississippi publication or newspaper article.

To view Mississippians’ contributions only in relation to slavery and sectional debate is to miss the depth of antebellum southern planter intellectual life. While taking for granted much of the extensive labor force which made their experiments and political pursuits possible, many Mississippians wrote in a spirit more in keeping with De Bow’s original vision for the future of the South and West in the larger America. While most of these sorts of writers submitted articles prior to 1855, some persisted throughout the period and beyond the war. The first named Mississippian to appear in the pages of De Bow’s Review was Dr. John Wesley Monette. A Virginian by birth, Ohioan in his youth, and later migrant to the state of Mississippi in 1821, Monette was a graduate of Transylvania College who frequently contributed his articles to various southern periodicals on the history and geography of Mississippi as well as his epidemiological studies on cholera and yellow fever in the 1830s. De Bow took a great liking to Monette’s work, as he reappeared frequently, until Monette’s death in 1851 prevented further contribution.

James Noyes is by far one of the more intriguing of the Mississippians contributing to De Bow’s Review. He outlived a generation as an obituary appeared for him in the Natchez Daily.

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Democrat on January 14, 1892, suggested. An Englishman by birth, Noyes owned and operated Hollywood Vineyards outside Natchez, Mississippi. Daniel Pratt, an Alabama industrialist highlighted by De Bow in his Gallery of Industry and Enterprise, corresponded with Noyes about beginning his own vineyard. Noyes expressed enthusiasm at meeting “the father of manufacturing interest of Alabama,” but as circumstances dictated that the two men could not meet in person, Noyes offered to train a servant handpicked by Pratt and teach him everything he knew. Noyes was “deeply interested in the prosperity of vine culture of the South,” and after reading an article in De Bow’s that he believed unfairly criticized the use of wine, he wrote an article famous today among Twenty-First century historic wine connoisseurs, “The Wine Culture at the South.” When submitting his article, Noyes also offered a bottle of his own wine to De Bow, which De Bow reviewed in the preface to the article, “Nothing could be conceived more exquisite than the flavor it possesses; and a gentleman who has travelled extensively in Europe. . . conceived that nothing he has met with upon the Rhine could compare with it! He was in extacies. So were we.” Noyes offered up wine culture as an alternative where cotton and corn had exhausted the soil, and he accurately predicted the rise of wine culture in America arguing, “We shall soon find in this country, as they have long so found it in Europe, that some neighborhoods are famous for wines.” His wine making was not mentioned in his obituary in 1892, though his service working at a foundry in Columbia, Alabama, service to the Natchez City Police, and membership as an Odd Fellow were included. His reasoning for siding with the Confederacy is unclear, as he seemed to own few slaves and argues in his article that he did much of the tending

108 Curtis J. Evans, The Conquest of Labor: Daniel Pratt and Southern Industrialization. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 106; and James Noyes to Daniel Pratt, 26 March, 19 April 15 November 1849, Folder 44, Pratt Paper, Alabama Department of Archives and History; James Noyes to Daniel Pratt, 31 August 1850, Folder 44, Pratt Papers, ADAH.

109 J. Noyes, “The Vine Culture at the South,” De Bow’s Review 6, Number 3 (September 1848), 200-204. Quotations from 200 and 201.
to his vines. His second article to *De Bow’s Review*, which appeared in July 1866, did not mention a single word about wine or viticulture. His was an article of the history of invention and discovery, a safe article for the postwar journal looking to start again entitled, “The Old and the New.”

Despite his loyalties, the fruit of his labors allowed Noyes recognition well past his sad obituary. Bottles embossed with “Imperial / Levee / J. Noyes / Hollywood / Miss.,” and in the form of a cluster of grapes and grape leaves on a stump,” have sold at auction for as much as eighteen thousand dollars as recently as 2005, making the surviving bottle one of the most expensive sold at auction.

That a solitary vinter like James Noyes found community with other Mississippians and southerners speaks to the success of *De Bow’s Review*. Learning about the agricultural ventures and projects, reading opinions on matters of trade, politics, or slavery, and writing his own article, James Noyes joined and actively participated in the discourse of fellow Mississippians, like Miles McGehee, Samuel A. Cartwright, William Grayson, and Percy Roberts, as well as other men like them from throughout the South. However, De Bow’s vision from the beginning for the use of the *Review* was two-fold. Bringing together men of the South and West through contributions to and readership of the *Review* was only part of his plan. De Bow’s own interest in the agricultural reform movement was inspired by his experience as a delegate to what was the first Southern Commercial Convention in Memphis, Tennessee. While writing his writing series of articles for the *Charleston Mercury* about the convention and its proceedings, he understood the useful nature of such material to a much larger audience than the 1845 convention. Similarly, a journal for the movement would help men interested in commercial interests to appreciate the

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110 J. D. Noyes, “The Old and the New,” *De Bow’s Review* 2, Number 1 (July 1866), 1-10.
convention movement’s passion, vitality, and vision, and be drawn to participate themselves. He intended that the Review would serve as a virtual forum, much like sessions of a convention, but also as a conduit for bringing men into physical proximity at future meetings. One of the few men who attended the conventions with regularity, De Bow became the Southern Commercial Conventions’ greatest champion as well as one of it’s most involved participants, as a promoter, member, and leader.

The Southern Commercial Conventions, like the Review, facilitated relationships between disparate southern men in physical forums, which helped create the connections, ideas, and vision of the South necessary to secede. The delegates to the conventions were not strangers to each other. Reputation or traditional familial, educational or political relationships created familiarity, and their participation in the conventions broadened their circles of contacts and strengthened existing ties. Beginning in 1845, this community of men sought each other’s company initially for commercial purposes, but by the 1850s, they shifted their focus to more political and partisan subjects. Men opposed to the changes in tone and content of the proceedings stopped coming, and those who desired a forum for sectional discord attended. As early as 1858, the New Orleans Picayune stated, “When the South gets ready to dissolve the Union, all she has to do is to reassemble the Southern Commercial Convention which met at Montgomery and give the word.”112 Barely three years later, a number of former Southern Commercial Convention members became delegates to their states’ respective secession conventions, voted to secede from the Union, and fought and the Confederacy. After the war, some returned home to help rebuild the war-torn southern economy.

Though the conventions themselves are underappreciated by scholars and are a ripe topic for research, the parameters of this chapter and project do not allow a complete portrait of the movement, its community, or its impact.\textsuperscript{113} While historians as well as De Bow go to lengths to apologize for the sectional tensions and proceedings, the convention illustrated the complete transformation of the purpose of the conventions and contained one of the most passionate, eleventh-hour calls for unity and Union by a southerner—and Mississippian—at a critical moment in the national political crisis. That Henry Foote—a Whig and a Unionist—was able to take the podium and deliver such a speech in 1859 illustrates the vitality and spirit of the competing visions for the future of the South.

The Southern Commercial Conventions differed from the well-known Cotton or Southern Planter’s Conventions of the same era in important ways. Planters’ conventions were less organized, more sectional and political, and focused almost entirely on agricultural issues and concerns associated with the planter class. Northern newspapers and commentary of the era’s southern conventions were critical of meetings that reconstituted southern political leadership in exotic locations away from the constant meddling debate of critical and judgmental Yankees.\textsuperscript{114} Southern Commercial Conventions attracted a similar class as the planters’ conventions, but the

\textsuperscript{113} Vicki Vaughn Johnson’s \textit{The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions} (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), provides the best overview of the movement, and she offers important insights into the delegation membership and the spirit and ideas proposed and discussed at the conventions. An older work, engaged by Johnson and utilized by this author, Van Deusen’s \textit{The Ante-bellum Southern Commercial Conventions} is also a good primary source. Both works, as well as works that mention the work of the conventions offer broader strokes and composites of the membership. The sheer amount of material available in \textit{De Bow’s Review} regarding the conventions is often untouched by scholars because broad portraits do not allow for a more detailed analysis of specific conventions. Particularly information of the 1857-1860 conventions is defined broadly as radical, unruly, and a departure from the spirit and vision of the earlier conventions, but some arguments miss how the later conventions incorporated the language and vision of the earlier conventions into their arguments and vision for a Confederate nation.

nature of their purpose drew men from diverse professions. The social nature of the conventions, which lasted for several days, indicated the unusual presence of women. A number of reports of the convention noted women sitting in the galleries of convention meetings, with a sincere interest in the business and political affairs discussed.\footnote{Johnson, \textit{The Men and the Vision of Southern Commercial Conventions}, 35.}

The Southern Commercial Conventions represented a region’s effort to seek economic prosperity through the investment in and support of commercial ventures, including agriculture, but also advancement in transportation and communication technologies, interest in trade legislation and policy, and support of fledgling industry. Their agendas were set in advance and encouraged long-range planning and leadership beyond the bounds of traditional offices. From the beginning, the conventions desired to create an optimistic tone to their proceedings, even in the face of harsh economic conditions and realities. Much like \textit{De Bow’s Review}, the meeting encouraged innovation and investment in new technologies and methods, which would assist men in trade and help shape the larger American market. Holding their meetings in the South and West’s growing commercial centers and cities, helped the Southern Commercial Conventions embrace urbanization and city planning, recognizing the role of local businesses and regional connectivity in shaping and supporting the southern economy. Eschewing political debates and tightly controlling convention agendas and membership ensured more collegial and productive meetings, which was important in a period of sectional discord. While their recommendations and resolutions carried little legislative power, men did have the opportunity to express their support through votes, and the ideas and projects espoused at the meetings obviously meant a great deal to the men who attended, as evidenced in personal correspondence, repeated attendance, or personal investments and ventures. The convention’s formality and structure
attracted participants from all over the nation and earned it some respect in the press, and probably had much to do with the movement’s longevity from 1837-1872.\footnote{De Bow’s Review and at least Charleston Mercury, Natchez Courier, New Orleans Picayune, New York Times. Though the movement seems to officially begin on a larger regional level in 1845, founding organizations and leaders began smaller efforts in 1837 that coalesced into a regional movement in Memphis in 1845.}

A total of twenty-two Southern Commercial Conventions took place between 1837-1872. The convention movement evolved out of direct trade conventions held from 1837-1839, which believed southern investment in commercial industry and internal improvements (largely shipping) as well as direct trade with Europe could make the South commercially independent and increase the wealth of southerners. The first conventions met in southern cities along the eastern seaboard: Augusta, Richmond, Norfolk, and Charleston. Their discussions centered on established commercial interests and relationships of the South, between the region and the North as well as Europe. The lack of representation from the southwest as well as their emphasis on commercial relations with Europe illustrates that the “South” defined and imagined by early conventions excluded new southwestern states, and the West was not yet part of their vision for economic security or political viability.

In 1845, John C. Calhoun’s mere arrival in Memphis, Tennessee, to serve as president of the Southern Commercial Convention represented the success of America’s investment in internal improvements, which conveyed a number of convention delegates to the city from points North, South, East, and West. Though the convention’s call had been primarily to the South and West, Calhoun’s presence lent respect to the proceedings, which met primarily to discuss the importance and continued support for internal improvements. De Bow’s attendance at the meeting was life-changing, as it convinced him to begin the Review and devote his life’s work to improving the economic progress of the South. He was joined at the convention by a delegates
from “all the valley country to the Gulf, and from a portion of the seaboard,” including Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, the Iowa Territory, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. In addition to Calhoun’s presidency, other prominent statesmen included future 1860 presidential hopeful, John Bell, and prominent South Carolinians, James Gadsden, and William H. Trescott. The Mississippi delegation boasted one hundred seventy-nine members, the second largest delegation.\footnote{117}

De Bow described the Memphis meeting of the Southern Commercial Convention as a “convention not second to any which has assembled since the adoption of the Federal Constitution,” and he noted, its proceedings were not without agitation\footnote{118} Americans found the Memphis convention disturbing for two reasons. The first was the convention’s focus on “the increase of facilities of intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans,” which included the navigation of Western rivers, maritime defense of riverbanks and levees, and railroads.\footnote{119} The benefits of internal improvements to commerce were not in dispute. Americans disagreed over from where the money to build or invest would come. That Calhoun stood before a public audience and argued that the Mississippi River and her tributaries were an “internal sea” entitled to as much protection as the Atlantic coasts, was a bold move. Democratic support of traditionally Whig positions on issues was not exactly an everyday occurrence, especially when Calhoun suggested there might be Federal monies available for the project. De Bow reported that Senator Calhoun “had struck his flag and gone over to the side of internal improvement,” a moment rewarded with “a great burst of approbation and applause which rung through the hall.”

The willingness on the part of Democratic congressmen from the South to support positions contrary to party values to aid in the economic security or independence would only continue.

The Memphis convention proceedings centered on the transcontinental railroad. As one of the largest internal improvements proposed since the Erie Canal, the railroad would require federal funds, but the real question was the railroad’s route. Gadsden’s proposal of a southern route for a transcontinental railroad was one of the key discussions of the Memphis convention. The delegates passed a resolution supporting Gadsden’s route because it connected not only the West with the South, but tied those regions to trade routes of the North. The proposed line would begin in San Diego, cross western Colorado, run along the Gila River or in the direction to the Passo del Norte, stretch across the State of Texas to its northeastern boundary, and terminate at some point on the Mississippi between the mouth of the Ohio and the mouth of the Red River. The committee report argued that the route was superior because it was shorter than other proposed routes and encountered fewer physical obstructions, which would make the project cheaper. Of all the projects, it was deemed the most “American” as a northern route would not open markets to their widest potential.120 Southerners also hoped that support of such internal improvements would spread southern influence in the West and encourage settlement by people invested in or supportive of slave labor in western lands.121

The Memphis Southern Commercial Convention was also controversial because of its regional focus and membership, consisting of largely southern or western members. While De

120 De Bow believed that northerners could not offer each other new goods. Why would Oregon and Iowa swap for each others flour and pork, when they could readily find an open market for their products in the South, which could offer products with which to barter that were needed. “The Memphis Convention,” 230.

Bow believed the convention to be a “powerful instrument of good” because it was a civil, rather than political convention, critics had their doubts. De Bow noted those outside the meeting believed the meeting would “terminate in one vast political machine, charged with disastrous results to the republic.” There was also the issue of propriety of such an assembly, that it was dangerous to bring together men from only certain parts of the Union. Even if such a meeting could take place, few doubted order could be kept, believing “it was impossible that a body thus constituted would talk long upon railroads, canals, river navigation, and commerce, without flying at each other in free trade and tariff conflicts, without falling to president-making and general electioneering.”\(^{122}\)

De Bow utilized his strong nationalism to overcome the naysayers. He argued the convention exhibited the “strong trait in American character,” that men could love the Union and strive to elevate the government and the nation by such interest in commerce, no pervert it. The Memphis convention members understood the fears regarding their actions, and passed a resolution that upheld the Union, that North, South, East, and West were “ONE PEOPLE in sympathy and interest, as in government and country, and hold their countrymen of every State to the duties and responsibilities of a closely connected and indissoluble Union.”\(^{123}\) De Bow himself was caught up in the fervor of Union, converted to the cause and inspired to work on its behalf by what he saw. He closed his report of the convention with a quote that would no longer hold true for him or the South just fifteen years later in 1860. Yet in 1845, he feels nothing but joy at the convention that has brought together so many different groups of people, writing:

We cannot but dwell for a moment upon that happy union and co-operation which it [the Memphis Convention] evinced on the part of the whole South and West. They are bound

\(^{122}\) J. D. B. De Bow, “Convention of Southern and Western Merchants,” *De Bow’s Review*, Volume 1, Issue 1, 7 and 9.

\(^{123}\) J. D. B. De Bow, “Convention of Southern and Western Merchants,” 9.
together by ties which can never be severed . . . Bound together in this way, their destinies are one. . . . No other sections in the Union have reasons so strong for maintaining their interesting relation. . . . We rejoice to see the Palmetto State and the time-honored Dominion sending their sons to shake hands with the hardy pioneers of the distant Arkansas. We hail Texas, our younger sister, leaving her Gulf-seat to hold converse with the distant Lakes. It is a beautiful commingling, and long, long after the occasion has passed away, the remembrance of this assemblage on the high bluffs of the Father of Rivers, will live fresh in memory: every bosom will retain the kindly influences, which were exerted, and when the South and the West are interested, we will ever feel that we are brother all—all citizens of one GLORIOUS UNION!

The convention had served its purpose and then some. Regional connections between South and West were established as well as connections between the “souths,” including “old” Virginia, “new” frontier of Arkansas and the independent Texas. In 1845, De Bow’s vision of the future of the South within the Union—his words—were full of nothing but promise and unity, blue skies for miles.

Organizers of the movement desired cooperation between the sections, and the subsequent meetings in 1847 and 1849 were quite successful in drawing more states and continuing serious discussion regarding internal improvements. The 1847 meeting in Chicago was not heavily attended by southerners, which focused more on improvement of western river navigation and trade. In 1849, there were two meetings, one in St. Louis and the other in Memphis. The St. Louis convention members decided to favor a transcontinental railroad route with an eastern terminus and a connecting trunk line to Memphis. The Memphis convention disagreed, continuing to support a Memphis terminus. The second convention at Memphis was more diverse in membership than the 1845 convention, drawing men from New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Georgia. The disagreement between western and southern members regarding the future of the transcontinental line was not resolved beyond statements of opinion.

After the Memphis meeting, the Southern Commercial Convention went on hiatus from 1849-1852, a period of notable sectional strife culminating in a serious discussion by some southern
states regarding secession over the compromise of 1850. The disagreement between southern and western members resolved itself over time, as subsequent meetings alienated northern and western states.

Political storms erased the blue skies of the movement’s first meeting in 1845, and the Southern Commercial Conventions struggled to maintain political neutrality and their commercial focus. Beginning with the Baltimore convention in 1852, organizers imposed strict formal rules and restricted debate, to keep orderly and productive meetings. The conventions adopted Thomas Jefferson’s *Manual of Parliamentary Practice for the Use of the Senate of the United States* to assist in that end. A central committee helped regulate inter-convention debate and disruption by men seeking a captive audience regarding political matters of the day. They also began long-range planning for future meetings, complete with press coverage, advertisements, and session discussion topics.124 The convention also expanded its discussion topics beyond internal improvements, reflecting southern involvement and concern about education, inducements for European immigration, manufacturing and industry, labor supply, tariffs, and direct exportation and trade with Europe. The 1852 Baltimore and 1853 Memphis meetings were well attended and bore few harbingers of what would come in 1854.

The decision to build the national railroad through the western territories of Kansas and Nebraska marked the first event of the 1850s to push the Southern Commercial Conventions toward sectional positions. Delegates evidenced the tension in the air when the meeting began in Charleston, South Carolina. While Memphis’s convention boasted 1000 delegates, Charleston succeeded in gathering 857 delegates from thirteen states—all southern slaveholding states. The absence of any delegates from the West signifies the convention’s transformation into a southern

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movement, despite any pandering to the West made. The primary focus of the meeting was the Pacific Railroad and a frank discussion of Stephen A. Douglas’s instigation of the Kansas and Nebraska issue and popular sovereignty. The organization of the Kansas and Nebraska territories proved that the national government would not support a southern route. The decision deflated the South, shutting down an important means for economic prosperity. Individual states could not deal with foreign nations—particularly Mexico, who might see a southern route as in their interest and provide national funding—and most states did not have the financial ability to fund railroads in their own states, let alone a cooperative effort. De Bow reported “the upmost harmony” marked the convention with no doubt the importance of the proceedings would be long-felt. It is tempting to assume that the harmony to which De Bow referred to was not one of national unity, but a regional recommitment to greater regional independence.125

As controversy seemed to settle regarding the railroad, the Southern Commercial Conventions of 1855 and 1856 ebbed. Poor attendance plagued the 1855 New Orleans and the 1856 Richmond conventions. Convention organizers set the date for the New Orleans convention in January, which precluded many national and state legislators from attending since they sessions met beginning the first of the year. The meeting received little press coverage, and low rivers hindered travel. Again in 1856, this time in Richmond, bad weather and smallpox epidemics coupled with the January meeting date, restricted attendance. The second incidence of poor attendance prompted convention officials to schedule a second meeting in Charleston in December.

A lot happened between January and December 1856 to ensure that the Charleston Southern Commercial Convention would experience a large turnout. The Kansas statehood debacle, the caning of Charles Sumner by Preston Brooks in the Senate chamber, John Brown’s Pottawatomie Raid, and the rise of the Republican Party gave rise to the idea of an imperiled South. When the convention met, the assumption in the minds of most of the men who attended was that politics would be discussed. Prior to 1856, the conventions focused on commerce and spoke to a national audience, even if it was not a national convention. In 1856, the convention spoke to the South. The number of politicians among the conventions delegates increased, including a growing interest in disunion. While historians seem to disagree whether the 1856 or 1857 conventions served as the point where the movement turned increasingly sectional and political, changes made to the procedures and rules of debate in 1856 opened the conventions to more floor debate and the introduction of issues not present on the preset agenda. This in turn, attracted men interested in a forum for political discussion outside the halls of Congress. Specifically, prior to 1856, states at the convention received a single vote regardless of how many members made up the convention. In addition, any attempt to discuss politics would be curbed by the chair. After the Savannah convention, states received votes equal to the number of the state’s electoral votes, and the chair of the convention did nothing to curb the introduction of political discussion.¹²⁶

Beginning with the 1857 Knoxville convention and the subsequent 1858 Montgomery and 1859 Vicksburg conventions, the Southern Commercial Conventions shifted focus. With

¹²⁶ Van Deusen, The Ante-bellum Southern Commercial Conventions, 53-57; and Johnson, The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 36, 96, 100, 133-136. The increase in politicians, according to Johnson was 17% before 1858 and 40% after, which shows an increase in political activity, but also shows a continuing core group of men without political affiliation.
James D. B. De Bow at the helm of the Knoxville meeting, the convention maintained a focus of southern prosperity and regional security, while beginning and encouraging discussion on the vindication of the rights of the South and her institutions, namely slavery. At the Charleston convention, members and organizers made an effort to emphasize the importance of slavery to the southern economy and society. The next year members seriously discussed the reopening of the African Slave Trade and speeches pushed members to defend the right to slavery and the unexceptional support of slavery as a litmus test for a southern state’s devotion to the region and its future. By this point, the pro-slavery and sectional focus alienated moderate border states, including Tennessee, North Carolina, and Maryland. Musing about the conventions in 1857, De Bow remarked that the assembled bodies of men built no railroad or steamship lines, but caused the South to understand the importance of transportation, to value her rights more than theories and sentiment about Union, and to see how the South’s resources were such that self-sufficiency was possible.127

The Montgomery convention in 1858 was a rally for the defense of the South. Like many previous conventions, a committee of men charged with reminding men of the upcoming meeting published an open letter. The 1858 letter differed from previous announcements in that it took a defensive posture. Beginning with a history of the purpose of the founding of the Southern Commercial Convention, the committee harkened back not to 1845, but 1837, stressing the convention’s role in attempting to stem a decline in southern foreign commerce. Downplaying the intention of the convention to work with the West as well as the North and East, to build up commerce for the good of the nation, the committee suggested delegates now

convened yearly to gather information from “reliable witnesses as to the causes of the evil, with the hope of obtaining from the wisest and most devoted sons of the South, the suggestion of a plan or system of measures, which should correct it.” The convention “increased knowledge and sympathy for each other, with a better understanding of our wants,” but the committee suggested “cost what it may,” love for Union and regional cooperation—the compact had been violated—were replaced by inflammatory declarations of danger and designs against “the South.” Something more was needed to meet with the dangers of the day, beginning with electing experienced and loyal delegates to the convention:

Send delegates to the approaching Convention at Montgomery, and let them be of your ablest, best tried, and most trusted sons—for the presence of such is demanded by the distempered state of the times and the magnitude of the interests to be considered. Let not the sneers or denunciations of your opponents or your enemies deter you, and shrink not under the cry of “Disunion.”

Delegates were not to shrink from disunion, because fanaticism and oppression threatened and prevented southerners’ from performing their duties in and to the Union. One had to be open to all possibilities—even disunion—for the good of the community.

By 1858, the community formed around a sincere commercial interest to better the South and West’s position in the Union saw the relationships created by the conventions and its purpose in a new light. Southern commercial endeavors took on new meaning in a world seriously considering the reality of political independence. A strong and thriving economy would be crucial in the creation of and to sustain a new nation. One historian noted that more “conservative” southern leaders, including James Henry Hammond, James L. Orr, Howell Cobb, and Jefferson Davis “boycotted” Montgomery, though one might argue that their absence was less a formal boycott than a desire to stay away from the thick of activity that might point to

treaty. Their absence is as telling as those in attendance, which included some of the earliest proponents of disunion: James D. B. De Bow, Roger Pryor, Robert Barnwell Rhett, Edmund Ruffin, L.W. Spatt, Maunsel White, and William Yancey. Yancey, known as the “Orator of Secession,” opened the meeting with an ominous double welcome:

At the request of the Mayor, and in behalf of the Mayor and the Authorities of the City of the City of Montgomery, I bid you welcome to this city. . . . I must be allowed, at least on my own behalf, to welcome you, too, as but the foreshadowing of that far more important body—important as the hour and councils of the dominant section of this country, must, ere long, assemble upon Southern soil. . . . which will have within itself a unity of climate, a unity of soil, a unity of production, and a unity of social relations—that unity which alone can be the basis of a successful and permanent government.  

Maybe Yancey was more bluster than omniscient, but he welcomed men to the city instrumental in the creation of the Confederate government in 1860 and alluded to the meeting as a foreshadow of the Provisional Congress. In addition to opening the meeting, Yancey openly engaged in a sort of fact-finding mission among his fellow members. He openly asked under what conditions Virginians would support secession and questioned the security of slavery in Virginia and border states who had openly debated or considered the gradual end of the institution. Such blatant references and discussion of secession caused quite a stir in southern and northern presses which were alternatively pleased or worried about the portent of such a meeting.

Compared to the 1858 Montgomery meeting and given the nature of the political climate, it is tempting to think that the 1859 Vicksburg Southern Commercial Convention should have

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represented the zenith of the pro-slavery southern sectional takeover of the movement. With merely eighty-one delegates, it ranked as one of the least attended meetings. There were no issues with the weather, no record of low tides or a breakdown in the traditional announcements and reminders about the meeting as in other years. The lack of attendance could be blamed on the notion that the convention gained a reputation for being dangerous, a nest of secessionist vipers.

The choice of Vicksburg as the location of the 1859 meeting signaled the end of Mississippi’s long wait to host a convention, despite a consistent presence and involvement in the movement by Mississippians. Drawn to the movement by their personal stake in the southern economy as farmers and planters, Mississippians participation in the movement served as an extension of their lives into a larger southern community. Attending the conventions ensured access to southerner elite who held power in political and social institutions of the region as well as an opportunity to build relationships among their own class, share their common agricultural or commercial experience and expertise, and use the public forums as a means to project their hope or vision of the South’s future among members of their imagined community and the American nation.\(^\text{132}\)

In spite of the opportunities created by the Southern Commercial Conventions and the importance of issues discussed, most men who participated in the movement attended only one convention. The high rate of turnover and rotation of leadership responsibilities ensured no one group could control the conventions for any length of time and provided a fresh take on the same issues each successive convention. Yet, we should be careful not to label the conventions as fleeting or romantic. The conventions brought men together to form or strengthen new or

\[^{132}\text{Johnson, The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 83.}\]
existing relationships, learn about ventures that interested them, discuss solutions or problems, and envision a future for the South. Like stars in their courses, their time at the convention was brief, but the combination of so many in one place, created memorable experience.

Mississippians took great interest in the conventions from the beginning, as evidenced by their strong numbers at the Memphis convention in 1845. The only conventions to which Mississippians failed to send delegates were the Richmond and Savannah conventions of 1856.133 Their participation ebbs and flows in relation to the location of each convention to Mississippi.134 Mississippians attended the Memphis conventions in great numbers, 179 members in 1845 and 92 members in 1853. Only seven men went to the Charleston meeting in 1854, and despite Mississippi’s proximity to New Orleans, only thirteen men travelled to the Crescent City in 1855. Twenty-two Mississippians travelled to Knoxville in 1857 and at least six men attended the controversial meeting in Montgomery in 1858. Vicksburg’s convention in 1859 brought Mississippians out in numbers unrivaled since the last Memphis convention.

Among the delegates to the various conventions were future secessionists. The presence of such men is unremarkable prior to 1860 because they were primarily drawn to the conventions because of their personal interests. Like De Bow, a number were serial attendees, but they also represented an early and quiet interest in commercial interests rather than political radicalism, but went on to support secession. James Lusk Alcorn, Jeremiah W. Clapp, Henry Stuart Foote, James Lusk Alcorn, Jeremiah W. Clapp, Henry Stuart Foote,

133 While De Bow and other press sources note the bad weather that kept delegates away from the Richmond convention, the absence of Mississippians at the Savannah convention is strange. No mention of them or why no delegates went is listed, and the convention is well attended by most Southern states, including states of the southwest, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas.

134 It is difficult to say with complete certainty the number of men who attended each convention. De Bow’s Review printed full participant lists for some conventions, but not for others. The 1853 Baltimore and 1858 Montgomery conventions have no lists. Reports for votes cast at each convention are deceptive as Mississippi received seven votes corresponding to her electoral votes, but it is hard to find more than six Mississippians who attended the 1858 Montgomery Convention.
C.K. Marshall and Thomas A. Marshall each attended more than one convention and maintain that interest after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{135} Attracted to the conventions with a genuine interest in the original aims of the Southern Commercial Conventions, their presence at the conventions did not grow in number as the political crisis, but increased when the general attendance of Mississippians grew at specific conventions. Whether those who attended meetings spoke to each other is unknown, many addressed the general convention through remarks or speeches as each man saw fit to his interests. For example, James Lusk Alcorn’s interest in levees along the Mississippi River before and after the war influenced his attendance at the Memphis conventions of 1853 and 1859, and Methodist minister C. K. Marshall’s interest in southern education and religion found a public forum for his idea of proper southern education would teach southern men the doctrines of “philanthropy and Providence, on which we [the South] rest for our support, defense, and responsibility.”\textsuperscript{136}


\textsuperscript{135} Foote attended the 1853 and 1859 conventions. Alcorn attended the 1853 and 1869 conventions. Clapp went to the 1853, 1854, 1857 conventions as well as three postwar conventions including 1869. C.K. Marshall attended the 1845, 1853, 1854 conventions, and T.A. Marshall attended conventions in 1854 and 1859.
and Tarpley died before seeing an independent South in 1860. C. K. Marshall, in his ministerial capacity, opened the convention with a prayer and may have been a spectator to its proceedings. McRae was a member of the Mississippi congressional delegation and would serve as a state representative to the Confederate House from 1862-1864. The largest groups of future secessionists occurred at the 1845 and 1853 Memphis conventions and the 1859 Vicksburg convention. Each secessionist served with at least one other delegate as well as the members of the Mississippi delegation. They also represented an even mix of Democrats and Whigs, and they were prosperous. Each owned significant amounts of property and slaves, and their attendance represented a desire to improve upon their investments and further the economic position of their class, state, and region. Oddly, they represented only a fraction of Mississippi counties, located mainly in the northern and central portions of the State, including Adams, Coahoma, Hinds, Lawrence, Marshall, Tippah, and Warren.

Though Mississippi delegates to the conventions turned out in great numbers, especially when the conventions occurred in nearby Memphis, their presence reflected an interest in their commercial pursuits and to create relationships among men who shared in a similar economic vision. Mississippians seemed to be a much more staid group, evidenced in the number of serial attendees, which also included men who held no political office and could still be classified as

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Quitman; 1857: J.B. McRae, W.W. Lea; 1858: J.B. McRae, possibly J.A.P. Campbell; 1859: Foote, J. J. McRae, Walker Brooke, C.S. Tarpley, Thomas A. Marshall. Two men of this thirteen are in question, given the nature of misprints: William M. Lea and John Jones McRae. Lea is listed as W. W. instead of W. M. but the county matches. McRae may have attended more than the 1859 convention, as there is a J. B. McRae from the same county, and McRae was a newspaper man in the 1850s making him a likely attendee as part of the press. In addition, James L. Alcorn, Jeremiah Watkins Clapp, Charles Hooker, and Harvey Washington Walker served in postwar conventions. The source for C.K. Marshall’s role in the conventions was mainly found at this website, last accessed March 2013, http://history.emory.edu/home/assets/documents/endeavors/volume2/RobHale.pdf
convention elite for their commercial success and prestige, like Nicholas Daniel Coleman.\textsuperscript{138} For them, the conventions were not an extension of their political lives, but of their commercial interests. While Mississippians participated at every meeting, it is important to note that they were often overshadowed at the later meetings in 1857 and 1858 by their “old” South peers. The meeting in Vicksburg should have provided them an opportunity to join the “colonial” South and prove their commitment to the South’s future as an independent nation.

According the press who reported on the convention, Vicksburg was not what it should have been, compared to the climates of the Savannah, Knoxville and Montgomery meetings. Mississippians entertained the possibility of what could be and would be if the South remained in the Union at a time when such opinions were rarely given a public platform. The \textit{Natchez Courier} reported the convention was out of step from previous conventions, and The \textit{New Orleans Picayune} noted that both sides were covered. The \textit{New York Times} had nothing but praise, something quite unusual for the typical reporting done by the \textit{Times} of the conventions. Even De Bow had misgivings about Vicksburg and helped to argue that the members were out of step with public sentiment in the South and contained Republican agitators. Yet, the convention dominated by Mississippians who would later secede from the Union second only to South Carolina, appreciated the issues of the day. Discussions reflected a typical convention in that members disagreed on the reopening of the African slave trade, but agreed on the merits of slavery and that the Federal government could not interfere with the institution. Members were

\textsuperscript{138} Coleman attended five conventions and held leadership positions at four meetings. While he moved to Vicksburg in 1832, he became a Unionist.
also aware that any active discussions on trade or other politically divisive issues would further divide southern interests and give strength the Republican Party.\textsuperscript{139}

The highlight of the Vicksburg convention was a less than friendly debate between Henry Foote and a team of Leonidas W. Spratt and James D. B. De Bow. Foote served Mississippi as a Senator and Governor in 1847-1852 and 1852-1854 respectively. He was influential in getting the Compromise of 1850 to pass, staving off the South’s first secession movement. His speech is evidence of his hope that the Unionist spirit existed at least in Mississippi. Spratt assisted by De Bow argued a position for the reopening of the slave trade and condoned the use of secession as a means to bend the North to their will. Henry Foote responded with a speech that evidenced the passion and frustration of a man bursting with what might have seemed to him as a very rational Unionist position in the face of what he termed as simple treason. Before he resigned his seat at the convention in disgust, Foote used the platform of the convention to try to stem the tide of disunion, condemn the positions and question the honor of men like De Bow and Spratt, and make one final public plea for Union. That De Bow disagreed with Foote was an understatement, but the former published the Foote’s speech with only introductory, although derogatory, remarks in \textit{De Bow’s Review} in August 1859.\textsuperscript{140}

Foote took no issue with the assertion of many of the convention that slavery was right, but he disagreed with the reopening of the slave trade and the argument that only by violence


could slavery be preserved. He upheld the right of the South to defend her rights, but not to carry out “a system of aggression,” which he termed treasonable.\footnote{“Speech of the Hon. H.S. Foote of Mississippi,” \textit{De Bow’s Review}, Volume 27, Issue 2, August 1859, 215.} He restated his position more strongly by asserting, “But I do say that under the constitution of the United States, armed opposition, or the levying of war against the government of the Union for the purpose of overthrowing the laws, by two men or many, is made high treason.” In Foote’s view, the South and slaveholders ought not to be viewed as aggressive—misunderstood—and called aggressive by their opponents, even invited to aggression, but largely they were a “peaceable class, a patriotic class; a high minded, chivalrous body of men.” Foote refused to stoop to the level of aggression, but he asked his audience if they were. He wondered aloud, “Does anybody, then, blame me for denouncing this attempt [Spratt’s speech] to sow among us treasonable seeds which hereafter would spring up in baneful fruit, unless the cursed seeds are trampled into the earth at once, thus.” Foote, at that moment in his speech, De Bow noted, “suited the action to the words,” which is an odd reference to an impassioned man possibly stamping his feet at the podium. The worst was yet to come.\footnote{“Speech of the Hon. H. S. Foote of Mississippi,” 216.}

Foote turned his remarks into an open question of Leonidas Spratt’s honor, calling into question just how far men like Spratt were willing to go to achieve their aims. Foote acknowledged South Carolinians were a noble people, but they were also “pestered with demagogues” since the great men—an unspoken allusion to Calhoun—passed away. Foote defined Pratt’s honor in a series of rhetorical questions asking, “What notions of honor has the gentleman! Honorable to violate the law! Honorable to violate a constitutional enactment! Honorable to oppose the Constitution and laws of the Union. . . Does he know who made the
Constitution of the United States? Wiser men than he or I can ever hope to become.” He further insulted him by equating him to a madman. His lack of reason made his speech like the “wild maniacal raving of some man who was utterly insane and beside himself.” Against the ravings of secession Foote believed he was one of the last pillars of Union, lamenting that he be called to repel the doctrine and its threat to undermine the interests of the South.143

Foote closed with a heartfelt declaration that the American government should be charged with the safekeeping of slavery. That the guarantees for the institution could be found in the Constitution, protected by Federal power sustained only by the United States Government, the Supreme Court of the Union, and by the judicial officers of the Union. The government was not an evil system, but a noble system. The most important in every point of view, pecuniary, moral, social, and as tending to advance civilization. He offered, “There is where our ancestors laid the charge, in part. In part we have it in our keeping; and I, for one, shall constantly demand of the Federal Government, through all its functionaries, to maintain our rights inviolate.”144

The Vicksburg Southern Commercial Convention ended on a somber note following Foote’s fight with Spratt and De Bow. Foote resigned his seat and later moved to Tennessee in complete disgust. He tried to straddle the line between the Union and the Confederacy, which resulted in a rather tumultuous life during the war. President Charles Clark closed the session in Vicksburg rather pleased with its deliberations as well as his experience among its members. His remarks echo the feelings of community De Bow experienced in 1845, but times had changed, and war loomed. The lines were drawn, and he expressed a certainty as to where and for what his fellow delegates stood, and alluded that their original purposes had brought them together for an even greater purpose. He concluded:

Toward yourselves I have that feeling of regard which is not often acquired on such very short associations. I see gentlemen here whom I have never seen before—gentlemen from parts so distant that I will never probably meet you again, gentlemen, my hand will be in yours, and my heart will go with it. And in the great contest that may arise hereafter, and while I know you will be found on the same side as myself, that hand will be with yours and I will march with you shoulder to shoulder.145

CHAPTER THREE:

THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

“We do not take possession of our ideas, but are possessed by them. They master us and force us into the arena, where like gladiators we must fight for them.”¹

Jefferson Davis, James Lusk Alcorn, and L. Q. C. Lamar arrived at the winter of secession from disparate places in their lives and political careers. In 1860, Davis was fifty-two years old, Alcorn was forty-four, and Lamar was thirty-five. The three men represented Mississippi’s finest politicians—men of intellect, maturity, and experience. As contemporaries separated in age by about a decade, their personal stories and struggles help highlight the trajectory of the Mississippi secession generation’s career paths, which were similar and different in important ways over the course of three separate, yet interconnected, periods of antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction America. Their lives and fortunes, as well as their positions on secession, changed with the push of national and regional events and the pull of sectional ties, often against a national interest.

While the first two chapters of this work explored the creation of educational and agricultural communities to understand and answer the larger questions of the antebellum period

¹ Heinrich Heine, quoted in Charles J. Swift’s unpublished biography of James Lusk Alcorn. James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter MDAH).
and South, and specifically Mississippian, gravitation toward the unlikely political decision of secession, this chapter focuses on Davis, Alcorn, and Lamar and their personal decisions to support secession. By doing so, there is also a focus on how each man understood the meaning of secession, including secession’s legality, necessity, and dangers. This is not to suggest secession foolish, spur-of-the-moment decision, but highlights that it was also a period of anguish, uncertainty, as well as frustrated resolution. To a man, they lack the fire and passion ascribed to secessionists by contemporaries and later scholars. For these three men, this absence of emotion does not signify a lack of conviction but personal struggle within each individual to balance his identity, responsibilities, and relationships between his fellow man, region, and American nation.

The three men appear in this chapter in order of their perceived importance during the secession crisis—Davis as a ranking leader in the Democratic Party, Lamar as a Davis disciple aspiring to national stature, and Alcorn as a former Whig deciding between parties as a staunch pro-slavery Unionist and student of Calhoun. Of the three, only Lamar had contact with the other two, Davis through their Democratic Party Connections, and with Alcorn through the secession convention. As the senior Senator from Mississippi in the United States Senate, Jefferson Davis stood as a viable, well-groomed Democratic hopeful for the presidency. His resume included military service in the Mexican War, a term in Congress, multiple terms in the Senate, and an appointment as Secretary of War in the Pierce Administration. Credited as a member of the Davis camp, Lamar defeated Alcorn in a heated campaign for the First District’s representative to the United States House of Representatives. Upon losing election, Alcorn stood at a rather dismal crossroads as a Whig in an increasingly Democratic state.

Jefferson Davis is rarely portrayed as a man of the hour, much less the most-qualified man to lead the Confederacy after William Lowndes Yancey declared “the man and the hour
have met,” in 1861. In William Freehling’s studies on the coming of the Civil War, Davis is portrayed as a man pushed into the spotlight, while Robert Barnwell Rhett, Sr., stewed in the shadows, relinquishing the revolution to Davis’s hesitant and incapable administration. Such complex portrayals, complete with jealousies, betrayals, and outright hatred of their fellow southerners, are far more accurate, than the few simple sentences often allotted to secession in most books regarding the coming of the Civil War. But secession was rarely a simple act, not for Davis or any other secessionist. Each decision involved a complex maneuvering of personal beliefs, requiring the reshaping of one’s social and political identity, the loss of friends and family, and the death of the American nation as it had been previously known. Freehling captures Robert Barnwell Rhett, Sr.’s frustration at the inauguration of Jefferson Davis in Montgomery with great success. Rhett, a firebrand and secessionist from South Carolina saw the Confederacy’s choice of Davis to lead the new southern nation as a surrendering of the revolution, and Davis as a man not up to leading a united South on to what might become a bloody road. As Freehling drew him, Davis lent respectability to the passion of the movement, and yet men like Rhett saw in Davis reproof to a cause that men then had worked their whole lives to see to fruition. Though Freehling would go on to say that Davis’s performance during the Civil War would mock any doubts that men like Rhett held against Davis, it is important to note that even at the birth of the Confederacy, men’s opinions of secession and then disunion continued to keep them apart at a time when only unity could save them and their cause.²

The characterization of an unsuspecting and humble Davis has been challenged by Charles Dew, who claimed that secession and Civil War was a not-so-perfectly orchestrated plot to free the South from the political environment of compromises and abolition, which

southerners perceived as a threat to the southern institution of slavery, and later defined as the southern way of life. Dew illustrated the backroom dealings and political relationships orchestrated prior to war and leading to disunion. Davis’s connections to secessionists, as seen through even a cursory glance at Davis’s correspondence prior to Civil War, should make anyone leery of the view of Davis as an innocent southern statesmen chosen by accident or compromise—or even disinterest on the part of Jefferson Davis himself.³

Jefferson Davis was a man troubled by the truth uttered by William Lowndes Yancey, “The man and the hour have met.”⁴ In 1861, Davis had just recovered politically from his historic leadership in the secession crisis of 1850. Davis’s successes up to that point had been balanced by his connection to secessionists at the Nashville Convention in 1850, where Davis himself, along with Albert Gallatin Brown, William Lowndes Yancey, and Robert Barnwell Rhett threatened the North with secession if the North would not extend slavery into the territories. Advocating that Henry Clay’s Compromise of 1850 was a defection of southerners against the South, Davis stumbled head-first into the position of “vanquished champion of secession” when Clay’s compromise stymied sectional conflict for another decade. Davis tried and failed to win an election for Mississippi’s gubernatorial chair against the Unionist Whig

Henry S. Foote. The moment proved instructive for Davis. Mississippians were relieved that disunion and war had so closely been avoided, illustrating the strength of Union sentiment. Relating the crisis over the Compromise of 1850 as a precursor to that of the secession crisis in 1860, William J. Cooper, Jr., claimed that Davis in 1850 had begun the political theory of secession in order to fit the confines of the situation at hand. Davis was careful to distinguish between disunion and secession. By maintaining his patriotism with words of affection for his country, Davis in 1850 declared secession to be a political act of utmost patriotism and fealty for country. Speaking proudly in 1850, Davis proudly stated, “I, sir, am an American citizen,” and called the Union “my country.” At the same time, Davis asserted that his first allegiance was that to the State of which he represented and then followed up this statement by stating, “I belong to no State and no section, when the great interests of the Union are concerned.” Only if the Union trampled the rights of his state would Davis’s love of country be undermined by allegiance to his state.

Hard-pressed by constituents to prove his love and patriotism after the crisis of 1850, Davis reentered public service by way of an invitation to join the cabinet in President Franklin Pierce’s administration. Davis saw in Pierce a friend in the White House who would protect the South and of the institution of slavery from the foes of abolitionism. Considering this and Pierce’s patriotism during the war with Mexico, Davis saw in the Pierce administration an end to


6 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 203.
the sectional anxiety caused by the Compromise of 1850 and, quoting Shakespeare, said of the new administration, “Now is the winter of our discontent / made glorious summer.”

President Pierce appointed Davis to the position of Secretary of War. A highly efficient Secretary, Davis seemed to spurn his old fire-eater friends and worked closely with Pierce to strengthen the army, renovate the United States Military Academy, and became an advocate for internal improvements, including the Pacific Railway that included a southern route through Memphis or Vicksburg. Though he left behind thoughts of secession and spent time reinforcing the Union, Davis continued to harbor the belief that slavery should be extended into the territories, even supporting the annexation of Cuba and a reopening of the slave trade.

Abandoning his cabinet position out of a desire to not be accountable to anyone, and in the face of allegations that his interest in military preparedness was solely to assist the South in the event of secession, Jefferson Davis could not remain long outside of politics. He returned to the Senate in 1857 and was present for the caning of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner by the fiery congressman, Preston Brooks. As physical altercations between North and South in the Senate dangerously precipitated later regional splits in the nation, Davis was cautious about returning to a position of supporting secession until even his own constituents, according to Foote, stated, “Davis is at sea,” and had gone on themselves to support secession wondering if their senator would ever catch on. Though his constituents noticed Davis’s caution, his private correspondence reveals new connections with fire-eaters, including Robert Barnwell Rhett and J.

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7 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 242. The quote is from the first two lines of William Shakespeare’s Richard III.
8 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 247-276.
J. Pettus. In his forthcoming debates in the Senate concerning the states’ rights to secede, Davis seemed to be at his 1850 position on secession by 1858.

In a private letter to Arthur Clark Halbert, a prosperous planter from Mississippi and obviously a close friend, Jefferson Davis thanked Halbert for his letter containing an article from the Charlestown Mercury concerning a public response to his July 4, 1858 speech aboard the Joseph Whitney. Davis’s return letter of August 22, 1858, attempted to respond to the criticisms leveled at him in the Mercury’s article, which stated, “the Jefferson Davis that we loved to honor is no more.”

The Mercury’s article attacked Davis’s placement of fidelity for his nation above his region. Davis explained to Halbert that his extemporaneous Fourth of July speech on the Joseph Whitney was not recorded, nor was it worthy of the Mercury’s attack, but Davis related to Halbert that he spoke concerning the manner in which the states rallied around the national flag during the Mexican War. Davis’s letter to Halbert was written to make sure his comments were understood, because he feared being misquoted or misunderstood by men wishing to malign his character.

Davis perceived the Mercury’s trouble with his Fourth of July remarks to be connected to his “pride of nationality, adherence to the constitutional union of the states as the instrument through which their concentrated power was ordained and established.” Davis began at this time until his dying day to argue his understanding of the relationship of the states to the Federal government, and the right of secession each state held. Davis argued that within his party in Mississippi during the 1850s secession fervor never advocated for disunion, but the right that


secession could be used as a weapon of “last resort for the then existing grievances.” Davis saw a difference between himself and “conventions led by native fanatics, and foreign emissaries, assembled avowedly to destroy the Union.” Davis believed that fanatics saw secession as a means not only to threaten but accomplish disunion; whereas Davis seemed, at least publically, to define secession much like one would define a filibuster, as a weapon of the minority in the face of majority oppression. Fanaticism, according to Davis, came not just in the form of men in favor of secession, but also in the North, in the form of abolitionists, both bent on the country’s destruction, or at least the Democratic Party’s destruction. Yet, Davis perceived secessionists as a defensive group of politicians who insulated the South from abolitionist attack. 12

In an open letter to “Mississippi Citizens,” Davis found himself redressing critics and their misrepresentations, trying to make clear his opinion on matters of public importance. Dated December 18, 1858, Davis’s letter suggested that, though Mississippians might deprecate independent action on the part of the South, they had to admit to the possibility of such action and the “conclusion of that admission is the duty of preparation.” Davis illustrated to his constituents a form of patriotic vigilantism, stating:

We owe it to the past and to the future, that the justice of our cause, and the moderation of our conduct should be vindicated. We owe it to ourselves, that we should be ready to redeem whatever pledges it is proper to make. By the justification of our position and the exhibition of physical power to maintain it, we strengthen the hands of the friends of the constitution outside of our own limits, and secure the unity of thought and of action at home. The labor must therefore, be twice blest—blest in its capacity to avert danger, and blest in the power it confers successfully to meet it, if it cannot be consistently avoided. 13

Davis had experience in making a large mistake as to the South’s willingness to secede. During the secession crisis in 1850, Davis was one of the most strident proponents of forceful resistance

offered by the people of the South, protesting against encroachments upon their rights, particularly when it came to deciding the status of slavery in new territories.\textsuperscript{14} The Compromise of 1850 and the work of Unionist forces made arguments for secession and the guarantee of rights outside of Union null. Additionally, Davis also had to consider the earlier example of South Carolina’s lonely stand during the nullification crisis in the 1820s and 1830s. As a result, Davis urgently saw the need to suggest Mississippi’s preparedness to meet with their struggles, though the abolitionist evils Davis spoke of in the December 18, 1858 speech were just as vague and implied as they had been in 1850.

Davis languished with the thought that “the madness and wickedness of fanaticism and sectional jealousy” might tear apart the country of their fathers. While discussing the evils that Mississippians faced, Davis suggested that until they were invaded, it was their duty to their fathers to invest and hope in the compact of the Union their fathers had created. Only when invaded, Davis implied, would the next step be “to emulate our sires in the defense of constitutional rights, without counting the cost which that defense may entail.”\textsuperscript{15}

Davis’s speech to the people of Mississippi harkened back to revolutionary ideals that he believed every American held. His hope was that the day of disunion may never arrive, but Mississippians needed to prepare themselves for the possibility. Utilizing language of fear and patriotism, he described the situation in terms of honor. As part of their duty to his forefathers, state and family, men should be prepared for separate state action. He stopped short of openly advocating secession, a reluctance which stemmed from his participation in the failed secession


movement in 1850 and experience seeing how a quickly compromise could shut down revolution. Davis pledged to support secession only as a last-minute affair, wishing to wait and see if the threat of secession could sway public opinion after the election of Lincoln. His past experiences precluded him from placing himself securely in the secessionist camp for fear of repeated failure. His reticence cost him dearly among outspoken secessionists, but it spoke of a political maturity and understanding in a volatile political environment. Davis’s public and private thoughts concerning secession in 1860 warned anyone who would listen about the troubled temperament of the South, attempting to be in Washington and elsewhere a barometer of the pressure of the coming tempest.

At the beginning of 1858, Harper’s Weekly recognized Davis’s position as a viable member of his party and of the South. Devoting the front page to his likeness and a large story, the Harper’s article attempted to temper northern views of Davis as a “extremist or fire-eater” by depicting Davis as “precise, cool, even cold, full of statistics and principles, without emotional excitement, though with a kind and gentle disposition.” Portraying Davis as the “last person in Congress a visitor would pick out as a fire-eater,” it seems that Davis’s attempts to show himself as a thoughtful and tempered man of the South had caught on in the public press.¹⁶

Yet in 1859, Davis’s was anything but calm. His ire at abolitionists reached a boiling point after John Brown’s “murderous raid” on Harper’s Ferry in Virginia, which Davis considered to be an aggressive Republican attack, a “conspiracy,” and a “rebellion against the constitutional government of a State.” Davis supported the creation of an investigating committee and took an active role in the investigation. In the year between John Brown’s raid and the election of 1860, Davis’s played the role of an outspoken senator and stump speaker

¹⁶ Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 282.
against what he believed to be sectional prejudice against the South. Davis’s rhetoric could match that of any man in favor of secession, but he expressed a preference for secession only if the entire South acted together. Davis told a Jackson audience in 1859 that if Mississippi seceded alone, he would hug the union to his heart. He urged the South—not just Mississippi—to prepare for separation and even conflict. Davis himself worked toward this cause in Congress by suggesting the implementation of railroad improvements to connect the railroad from Jackson to the Gulf Coast, as well as the creation of volunteer companies and stockpiles of arms and ammunition.¹⁷

One of Davis’s closest confidences prior to the beginning of the Civil War was former President Franklin Pierce. Following his resignation from Pierce’s cabinet, Davis continued to correspond with the Democrat from New Hampshire about ongoing events. On January 17, 1859, Davis wrote to Pierce about his concerns that extremists in Congress were causing problems. Davis remarked to Pierce that his tour of New England convinced him that, contrary to his previous thoughts, the differences between sections “is less than what I had supposed.”¹⁸ On January 30, 1860, Davis again took up his pen, writing to Pierce that the prospects for the future “are gloomy.”¹⁹ Davis again wrote to Pierce on June 13, 1860, shortly after the Democratic conventions in Charleston, South Carolina met, dispersed, and met again in Baltimore thanks to the dramatics of the Alabama delegation and other pro-secessionists who announced their dissatisfaction with the proceedings, especially Douglas’s anti-slavery platform plank, by a dramatic walk-out led by William Lowndes Yancey. Upon witnessing the Democratic Party

¹⁷ Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 302.
pulled apart by sectional difficulties and now two candidates put forth for the 1860 election, Davis remarked to Pierce, “I have never seen the country in so great danger.”\(^{20}\)

Davis believed that, “the citizenship of each citizen was due to the state of his residence,” and that “his citizenship in the United States resulted from his prior right as one of the citizens of the State.”\(^{21}\) Davis’s logic followed that if a state found its rights maimed by the Federal Union and decided it was necessary to terminate its place in that Union, then in the same way the states had entered the Union, one by one as independent states, so could a state leave the Union in the same manner. Davis invoked similar language throughout 1860, prior to Lincoln’s election, as if setting the grounds for secession if and when the time came.

In February 29, 1860, in response to New York Senator William Seward, Davis reminded the northern senator from the Senate floor that:

[T]he Senator from New York arraigns those who speak in a certain contingency of providing for their own safety out of the Union, as being in opposition to his love for the Union; and he manifests his incapacity to understand our doctrine of State rights by the very simile which he had a collision of opinion as to whether the marble should be white or whether it should be manifold in its color, and at last agreed together—forgetful that our fathers were occupied in providing a common agent for the States, not building up a central government to look over them. The States remained each its own temple. They made an agent. Their controversy was as to the functions and powers of that agent—not as to the nature of the temple in which they should preserve their liberties.\(^{22}\)

Davis’s insistence on separate state governments appearing in the Federal Union by proxy of an agreement, but not a cemented order, laid the groundwork and language which would appear later in many secession convention arguments and discussions, including that of Mississippi.


\(^{22}\) Speech, Jefferson Davis at Corinth, Mississippi, 21 September 1860, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, vol. 6, (1989), 279.
In September 21, 1860, at a speech in Corinth, Mississippi, Davis asserted that the election of Abraham Lincoln, whom he considered a ‘Black Republican,” would be regarded by Mississippi as

a declaration of hostility, and would hold herself in readiness to co-operate with her sister States of the South, in whatever measures they may deem necessary for the maintenance of their rights as co-equals in this confederacy.  

Davis did not explain this confederacy of Southern States, but suggested that it existed, well before the election of Lincoln, to make ready with preparations and agreements between states and states’ secessionist leaders.

In the same speech at Corinth, Davis described secession and his views quickly following his description of his state’s views on Lincoln’s election by stating, “This does not declare secession as the remedy, nor assume for the South what remedy should be adopted, yet it unquestionably does include a resort to that last alternative of separation.”

Davis’s speech suggested that though secession was not in and of itself the solution to the crisis of having a ‘Black Republican’ as president, the option of secession was the solution that would be applied if all other efforts to avoid conflict failed.

On November 10, 1860, Davis wrote an odd letter to Robert Barnwell Rhett, Jr. The editor of the Charleston Mercury and a fan, like his father, of journalism, politics, and secession, Rhett Jr. was not a fan of Davis, and later became one of Davis’s loudest critics. During this period, Rhett Jr. appeared to have solicited views of the crisis from prominent southern leaders, including other Mississippi leaders. Though the original text of Rhett’s initial letter is lost, Davis’s reply seemed measured, and given that he was talking to press for good reason.

\[23\] Cooper, Jefferson Davis, The Essential Writings, 181.
\[24\] Cooper, Jefferson Davis, The Essential Writings, 181.
Davis wrote to Rhett with the supposition that Lincoln had secured the national election for president. In saying this, Davis doubted Mississippi would take direct action as South Carolina would, stating:

Whether the Legislature will direct the call of a convention, of the State, or appoint delegates to a convention of such Southern States as may be willing to consult together for the adoption of a Southern plan of action, is doubtful.\textsuperscript{25}

Davis doubting this seemed odd considering that Mississippi Governor John Pettus did in fact call a state convention on November 12, and in his speech from the Senate floor, Davis admitted to counseling his state on the matter of secession. Pettus decided to call the convention only after meeting with the Mississippi house and senate delegations four days prior, in which Davis remained solidly against secession as long as viable peace options remained. While Otho Singleton and William Barksdale favored secession, L. Q. C. Lamar sided with Davis, making Pettus the tiebreaker to call the convention.\textsuperscript{26}

Speaking on the subject of secession to Rhett Jr., Davis declared that Mississippi was not likely to act on her own. One of the major obstacles to secession, according to Davis, was its lack of a port; whereas South Carolina could secede and her trade would be unaffected, Mississippi still convened trade through Union ports. Davis raised Rhett’s attention to a rather fascinating problem presented if Mississippi were to secede on her own: that one had to make sure that Georgia would join in the effort. Davis’s language suggested that he believed Alabama would go for secession, but there would be a fight for secession in Georgia. Davis believed that if South

\textsuperscript{26} Percy Lee Rainwater, Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession 1856-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1938), 167-168.
Carolina seceded and efforts were made to force her to rejoin, southern states—unlike in the Nullification Crisis of 1832 when the south stranded South Carolina—would come to her aid.27

From his statements at Corinth, Davis took a leap into the secessionist camp on December 14, 1860. Just six days prior to South Carolina’s announcement of the dissolution of the Union, Senator Jefferson Davis, in a letter to his constituents, announced that the argument for staying in the Union had ended, that all hope of relief in the Union for the South was gone. In his short missive he stated,

We are satisfied the honor, safety, and independence of the Southern people require the organization of a Southern confederacy—a result to be obtained only by separate State secession—that the primary object of each slaveholding State ought to be its speedy and absolute separation from a Union with hostile States.28

At the same moment he suggested secession, Davis along with other southern senators and representatives supposedly met in the rooms of Reuben Davis to talk about a declaration written by Louis T. Wigfall of Texas and James L. Pugh of Alabama—the Southern Manifesto.29 Davis signed the manifesto on December 14, marking a departure in his conciliatory stand on secession up to this point. Davis was elected to the Committee of Thirteen, a group meant to discover what President James Buchanan meant when he spoke of “the present perilous condition of the country.” At first he declined, but was prevailed upon.30

With Davis’s signature affixed to the newly minted Southern Manifesto, Davis felt free to associate once again with secessionists. In January 1861, Davis and a group of men including Louis T. Wigfall, John Slidell, and Judah P. Benjamin wrote a letter to an envoy from the State

of South Carolina to President Buchanan. The envoy, Isaac W. Hayne, went to Washington in an attempt to make a peaceful negotiation with Buchanan concerning Fort Sumter. Davis and his group of friends claimed they represented states that had already seceded from the United States or those who would by February 1. Desirous of forming a common destiny with the state of South Carolina and anxious to avoid the commencement of hostilities, Davis and his fellow cosigners asked that Hayne counsel South Carolina to allow Major Robert Anderson to receive necessary food and supplies as well as an open communication line to President James Buchanan, as long as the President promised not to send reinforcements. While this set the stage for President James Buchanan’s dilemma with the Star of the West, one of the more important things to note here is Davis’s connections before the war to known secessionists as part of a larger movement among southern states to push for secession.

Davis’s involvement caused events to move forward at a rapid pace. He declared in a letter to Edwin De Leon, who would later become a Confederate diplomat abroad, “We are advancing rapidly to the end of ‘the Union.’” Davis’s letter to De Leon also suggested that President James Buchanan had helped their cause more than “wickedness would have achieved.” Davis implicated Buchanan and implied wickedness had been considered, but left the specifics to De Leon’s imagination. Certainly Buchanan’s interpretation of his presidential powers (that he could do nothing) coupled with his association and friendships with southern men conveniently restricted him from acting decisively against the South during the secession crisis. Even when he proposed action, Buchanan came as close to committing treason as any United States President would when he suggested to his rapidly diminishing cabinet the idea of allowing South Carolina

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jurisdiction over United States forts to ease tensions. Just what wickedness Davis referred to is unknown, but his allusion to it suggests it had been considered among the men with whom Davis associated. Davis admitted that even he no longer respected or conferred with the president from Pennsylvania, despite Buchanan’s sympathy for the South. Davis believed at this moment, due to inaction on the part of the Federal government, South Carolina was in a “quasi war” and that the possibility of hostility was apparent.32

According to the directions he received from the Mississippi Secession Convention, Jefferson Davis said farewell to the Senate on January 21, 1861, and then departed for home. Davis’s farewell included for those in the audience a descriptive idea of the difference between secession and nullification. Nullification, according to Davis, belonged to the class of weapons that a state used when the Federal Government reneged on its constitutional obligations. When a state nullified a government action, it did so in order to remind the government of its obligation to respect the state’s constitutional rights. An instrument of preservation, nullification was not an endeavor to overthrow or leave the Union, but to redress wrongs and heal wounds within the Union. In his speech, Davis suggested that states used nullification because of their “deep-seated attachment to Union,” praising John C. Calhoun who used the measure peacefully in previous crises between the South and the Federal Government.33

Secession, according to Davis, was justified on the basis that the States were sovereign entities. In describing secession and a seceded state’s relation to the Federal Union, Davis explained:

[T]here are no laws of the United States to be executed within the limits of a seceded State. A State finding herself in the condition in which Mississippi has judged she is, in

which her safety requires that she should provide for the maintenance of her rights out of
the Union, surrenders all benefits (and they are known to be many), deprives herself of
the advantages (and they are know to be great), severs all ties of affection, (and they are
close and enduring), which have bound her to the Union, and thus divesting herself of
every benefit, taking upon herself every burden, she claims to be exempt from any power
to execute the law of the United States within her limits.\(^{34}\)

Davis’s definition of the action of secession is quite legalistic, suggesting secession as an action
akin to a mutual ending of a contract. Davis set the tone for what he considered a peaceful action
by making sure to say that a seceding state would not require of the Union any of the former
privileges or protections once held. In Mississippi’s case, as Davis furnished the example, the
perception of an endangered institution, slavery as just an example, was enough to cause a state
to secede, taking with her nothing but that which constituted her borders upon ratification of her
state constitution in 1817. In claiming the right to secession, Davis quickly followed that
secession need not have been just a southern phenomenon. To illustrate his point, Davis tried to
explain that he would have supported Massachusetts in a similar bid for the same right to leave
the Union had the commonwealth decided to secede over the issues of the Fugitive Slave
Trade.\(^{35}\) This said, Davis placed the argument in terms that both sides could understand. His
argument using Massachusetts fell short, as southern States at the time were not willing to cede
Massachusetts her own state right to establish laws preventing the return of slaves to
slaveholders, on the basis of southern rights to property and integrity of the agreement of states
to form a Union.

By the Federal Union’s desire to deprive the South of its rights embodied in the
Declaration of Independence and Constitution, Davis argued that southerners tread the path of

\(^{34}\) Speech, Jefferson Davis Farewell Address to the Senate, 21 January 1861, *The Papers of

\(^{35}\) Speech, Jefferson Davis Farewell Address to the Senate, 21 January 1861, *The Papers of
their forefathers in striking out independently to secure their lives, liberties, and pursuit of happiness. What is perhaps more interesting about Davis’s case for secession was his view that secession was not linked to bloodshed by stating,

This is done not in hostility to others, not to injure any section of the country, not even for our own pecuniary benefit; but from the high and solemn motive of defending and protecting the rights we inherited, and which it is our sacred duty to transmit unshorn to our children.36

Claiming no hostility to men of the North, Davis also took time to express his hope for peace a second time by stating,

I therefore feel that I but express their desire [Mississippians] when I say I hope, and they hope, for peaceful relations with you, though we must part. They may be mutually beneficial to us in the future, as they have been in the past, if you so will it. The reverse may bring disaster on every portion of the country; and if you will have it thus, we will invoke the God of our fathers, who delivered them from the power of the lion, to protect us from the ravages of the bear; and thus, putting our trust in God and in our own firm hearts and strong arms, we will vindicate the right as best we may.37

In both of these two passages, Davis put a lot on the trust of the goodwill of the North as well as left no question in the minds of those who heard him that the South would stand and fight for their trampled rights. Though we know of Davis’s dealings with secessionists because of the benefit of hindsight, northerners claimed they had no clear idea that Davis and others plotted in backrooms in Washington and beyond, not only in terms of supporting secession through words, but also through arsenals, forts, and armies. The actions of Davis during the Pierce administration and later southern members of Buchanan’s cabinet in relation to preparing the South in the event of conflict, were considered by contemporaries as treasonous, but none ever formally charged or convicted. Davis’s invocation of the founding fathers placed the action of

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secession squarely into the realms of the American tradition of independence from tyranny. Secession was not only necessary because of the threat to slavery; it was necessary because it was what good patriots did when their rights and privileges were threatened. Though a topic for another day, Davis closed with a mention of the cause of the South being one of religious fervor, one that would be repeated, by both sides, over the course of the war.

Jefferson Davis received a February 1861 telegram, as his wife would recount, “as a man might speak of a sentence of death.” The telegram, addressed from men like Robert Toombs and Robert Barnwell Rhett, informed him that he had been “unanimously elected President of the Provisional Government of the Confederate States of America.” Davis, as many historians have pointed out, was not the fire-eaters’ first choice for president. His candidacy was largely the result of the need to compromise, as a sign of moderation to those states that had yet to join the Confederacy at the time of Davis’s inaugural speech. Chosen over men like Robert Barnwell Rhett, William Yancey, Robert Toombs, and Howell Cobb, all virulent fire-eating secessionists, Davis put a moderate face on a passionate secessionist movement’s finest hour.

Standing on the steps of the Montgomery capital at 1 o’clock in the afternoon on February 18, 1861, Jefferson Davis took the podium to deliver his inaugural address. Like his farewell address to the Senate, Davis related to his audience his hope that “the beginning of our career, as a Confederacy, may not be obstructed by hostile opposition to our enjoyment of the separate existence and independence which we have asserted.” Later in the speech, he also

assured his audience that the Confederacy had no “interest or passion to invade the rights of others” and was “anxious to cultivate peace and commerce with all nations.”

Going back to his letter to Isaac W. Hayne in January 1861, Davis asserted the Confederacy aimed to avoid war by insisting, “posterity will acquit us of having needlessly engaged in it.” Davis’s insistence that the secession of southern states was peaceful was largely the result of Hayne creating a tentatively peaceful situation at Fort Sumter in South Carolina. To Davis, it would be “the wanton aggression on the part of others,” that would begin any conflict. Whether the aggression that preceded secession occurred because of a scenario on the part of secessionists like Davis, the speech suggested that it would be the Federal Union trying to reclaim seceded states over which it had no right to legislate or coerce, that would engage the passionate and honor-bound resistance of the South.

Though Davis declared secession to be a peaceful move, in the next portion of his speech he suggested that an army should be created because of the “present condition of our affairs.” Upon secession, the harbors and commerce of the seceded states would have to be protected, and Davis seemed to suggest that Congress knew about and was trying to thwart Confederate attempts to protect itself. What Davis suggested was that protection and defense were necessary, because states had forfeited Federal protections and benefits upon their passing of secession ordinances.

Continuing from earlier speeches and correspondence his idea of secession as a patriotic notion inspired by the “American idea that Governments rest upon the consent of the governed,”

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42 Address, Jefferson Davis at Montgomery, 18 February 1861, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, vol. 7, (1992), 47.
Davis asserted that secession was the right of the people to “alter or abolish Government whenever they become destructive of the ends for which they were established.”

In secession, Davis argued, the Confederacy aimed to correct the Union’s “perversion” of the compact between states in the preamble of the Constitution. Invoking the Constitution as well as the Bill of Rights, Davis repeated his honed view that secession was a power of the states used to end the abuse of the Federal Union. Stating that their alliance was not a revolution, but a communion of states within which each state kept its government, Davis explained that the Confederacy now formed a group of states, not unlike that of their former Union, in which the ideals of the founding fathers could be attained, unadulterated by attacks by the Federal government on its institutions.

Davis’s reference to the constitution of the Confederacy in his speech underlines the document’s self-serving purpose. Without mentioning slavery, Davis related that the states’ constitution differed from that of the Union, in that “freed from sectional conflicts” the Confederate states sought to unite their fortunes to “increase the power, develop the resources, and promote the happiness of a Confederacy, [and] it is a requisite that there should be so much of homogeneity that the welfare of every portion shall be the aim of the whole.” The system of government of the Confederacy sought only to benefit the interests of the South, which for Davis meant he could renew his sights on expansion of slavery through conquest of new territory or the reinstatement of the slave trade. Davis’s language suggested also that the Confederacy was

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united in purpose and representative now of the truest, highest ideals set forth by their forefathers.

Davis’s speech on the steps of the Montgomery capital established for the world the fact of secession. He spoke of a people “united in heart” and sacrifices to be made by southerners on behalf of the new nation. He asked for the blessings of God to vindicate, establish, and transmit the principles of their endeavors, though a miracle might have been more fitting. Davis failed to mention of slavery, though it could not have been far from his mind. Each of the secession conventions’ ordinances placed great importance to slavery as the cause of secession, despite southerners’ claims after the fact that slavery was just part of a larger, overall argument for state’s rights. The Confederate Congress, in the process of remaking the constitution to fit its needs, attempted to claim for themselves the legacy of the founding fathers. No provision for secession was made in the Confederate Constitution, though in the re-written preamble the Confederate framers replaced the Constitution’s phrase “a more perfect Union,” with “a permanent government,” claiming that the right of secession had been made implicit in the revolution, and by including such a provision would imply that this government, as the Union it had just left, might need it in the coming future.⁴⁷

Just as Jefferson Davis evinced private doubts and public confidence, so too did his fellow member of the Mississippi Congressional delegation and protégé, L. Q. C. Lamar. A young man compared to Davis the elder statesman, Lamar turned thirty-five years old in September 1860. Sectional divisions plagued America during most of his formative life and

entire political career up to 1860-1861. Lamar’s personal correspondence and speeches from the period revealed that politicians actively flirted with and were troubled by secession as a viable solution to sectional discord. His private letters reflected personal fears, while his public speeches contained proud defenses of southern rights and honor. Not a Mississippian by birth, but by choice, Lamar had spent time in Georgia’s state legislature before realizing Mississippi offered easier and faster access to political power. Arriving in Mississippi in 1855, Lamar would be a resident of the state a single year before the people of his district elected the Democrat as their representative in the 35th and 36th Congresses in 1856. Lamar’s entrance into the national fray of sectional politics could not have come at a more poignant moment.

Lamar stood not at the fringe, but near the center of the secession movement in Washington. He regretted the consequences, but understood the cause. In a letter to a citizen in his district dated March 8, 1858, Lamar suggested that if there was a conspiracy, southerners formulated plans much earlier than December 1860. Lamar revealed his belief that the South should be alert and ready, stating:

Should that time come [when territories refused admission to the Union because of their slave status] I may deprecate, but would not prevent, the fearful consequences. Dissolution cannot take place quietly; the vast and complicated machinery of this government cannot be divided without great tumult and, it may be, ruin. When the sun of the Union sets it will go down in blood. Should we not, then, have our camps prepared, our leaders chosen, our ranks marshaled, and our sentinels at their posts.48

Though speaking to the times in 1858, Lamar’s interpretation of how disunion would tear up the country was in many ways as realistic as it was premonitory.

In a speech given to the House on December 7, 1859, Lamar spoke to a House divided over the selection of the House Speaker. Republicans nominated Representative John Sherman

of Ohio, throwing at the House a firebrand. Adding fuel to a heated debate over slavery, Sherman assisted in the printing of a circular recommending the recently published *The Impending Crisis*, which riled southern statesmen’s tempers and inspired angry and defensive speeches. Lamar, in a moment of unplanned inspiration stated before the House:

> For one, 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.  

Lamar’s choice of phrase ‘per se’ alluded to the fact that he felt that disunion was a viable option in the case that the compact formed by the Union in 1789 broke apart. Lamar, like his mentor Davis, favored disunion only when all avenues of hope disappeared or ended in blockades.

On February 21, 1860, L. Q. C. Lamar returned to the podium in the House to deliver a speech entitled, *The Slavery Question*. To historians, the speech provides at least three important ideas concerning Lamar’s interpretation of secession as well as how southern politicians defined and articulated support for southern rights and secession. First, the speech articulated to Congress the stance of Mississippi concerning the circulating talk of secession and northern attempts to alter or destroy the institution of slavery. Stressing reserve and caution, Lamar insisted:

> Mississippi is not in favor of disunion, per se. She will not make that declaration until she becomes convinced that her Sister States North are deliberately determined to endanger her internal and social institutions, or to impair her dignity and equality as a Confederate State.

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50 *The Slavery Question* lived a long life for a speech that articulated points concerning the pro-slavery argument and the virtues of southern planters. Lamar dusted off the speech in 1888 and quoted from many of the following passages verbatim in hopes to revive many of its articulations on the southern character. In Mayes biography of Lamar, the speech is entitled, “Southern Slavery and Southern Slaveholders.”
Lamar and the leaders of Mississippi considered disunion a viable option, and they considered secession an implied state power. Discussions concerning disunion and secession rarely failed to mention threats made against the institution of slavery, and speakers often phrased statements to articulate that resistance should be expected if southerners perceived northerners deliberately threatened southern rights or way of life.

Second, southern politicians in the antebellum period practiced a habit of crafting carefully selected reminders as to the true meaning of the American Revolution. Lamar failed to disappoint when he reminded the House, “the object of our Revolution” was to establish, “universal equality in political rights, and the indefensible title of all men to social and civil liberty.” The South’s internal institution of slavery, though not directly mentioned but alluded to in this passage, was protected, according to the opinions of Lamar and many southerners, by the Constitution.

Lastly, two paragraphs in Lamar’s speech pointedly attempted to influence northern conceptions of southern planters as “indolent, aristocratic nabob[s],” explaining that they were instead, “careful, patient, provident, industrious, forebearing, and yet firm and determined.” Cotton required men to perform tiring labor in dense forests and river swamps. The climate thick with pestilence created exposure, privation, and sickness. Presenting southern planters as model leaders and adding luster to the American name, Lamar reflected:

The habits of industry, firmness of purpose, fidelity to dependents, self-reliance, and the sentiment of justice in all the various relations of life which are necessary to the management of a well-ordered plantation, fit men to guide legislatures and command armies.

From his speech, one could postulate that Lamar wanted the House, particularly northerners to know that southern men and southern concerns deserved respect and fair hearing. Citing southern success in taking “a race of untamed savages, with no habits except such as inspire disgust, with no arts, no information, and out of such a people to make the finest body of fixed laborers the world has ever seen,” Lamar described southerners as determined to transform and improve their world, and in a sense, prove that they were just as progressive, modern, and forward-thinking as their northern peers. His mention of southern men commanding armies might have been his way of highlighting southern masculinity, but in 1860s political climate, could have been a threat. By this rationale, Lamar presented disunion and secession as viable, carefully considered option for intelligent, honorable and modern men concerned and willing to fight for the well being of their people and homes.

In 1860, Lamar penned two personal letters, one to his law partner, C. H. Mott, and one to his father-in-law, Judge Longstreet. Lamar’s tone, position on secession, and thoughts as to known secessionists and their calls for a united South is conflicted, conveying feelings of disparity, concern, and resolution without felt conviction. The letter addressed to C. H. Mott, dated May 29, 1860, placed Lamar in Senator Jefferson Davis’s camp, attempting to dissuade radicals from splitting the Democratic Party. Lamar stated that he, as a delegate to the Democratic Convention in Charleston, attended under orders from Davis. Davis did not want a divided South and believed that if Douglas was defeated in Charleston, a united South could prevail. Lamar conveyed to Mott that he believed Alabama’s delegates, who, led by fire-eater

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William Lowndes Yancey, had publicly walked out of the Democratic Convention thanks to Stephen Douglass’s refusal of support for a platform plank to protect slavery in all the territories, held a position based on high ground and stood devoted to the rights of the South.⁵⁵ Solidly placing himself in Alabama’s camp he stated:

It [Alabama’s platform] deserves the endorsement and approval of the people of Mississippi. I have linked my future with it, for weal or woe. . . . Northern men give us no other alternative.”⁵⁶

Though expressing his support for Alabama’s delegates, Lamar signed on with Davis on the proposal that Democratic delegates would reassemble in Baltimore with new representatives, but his loyalty to Davis at this time won over his internal feeling that there was too much discord to unite the South. He left Mott with an idea of how much the events of the convention and secession twisted the thoughts in his head: “I am oppressed with emotions of the profoundest and hopeless sadness. . . a mental torture that allowed me no relief except the thought that it could not be otherwise.”⁵⁷

Lamar’s mood changed little as election results announced Republican Abraham Lincoln as the nation’s next president. Writing to his father-in-law, Judge Longstreet, with a heavy heart described his own feelings on the election as well as those of his fellow men stating:

The election of Lincoln has diffused a feeling of dissatisfaction throughout the State. Some are anxious and dejected (myself among them), others confident and hopeful of resistance, a large mass awaiting the overt act, a few bad men rejoiced at the overthrow of democracy by any means, and ready to hang and quarter the secessionists.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ McPherson, Ordeal By Fire, 121-122. Yancey held that if the slave code plank were defeated because of Douglas’s adherence to the Douglas’s Freeport Doctrine, Alabama delegates would walk. Yancey and other fire-eater delegates left the convention in Charleston, South Carolina, (which nominated Douglass for president) and met again in Baltimore to nominate their own candidate, John C. Breckinridge.
⁵⁶ Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 83.
⁵⁷ Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 83.
⁵⁸ Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 83.
Lamar’s account illustrated the discord within a southern community even as late as November 1860. Lamar seemed to differentiate his political opinions from that of secessionists as well as accept that secession, at least of South Carolina might bring an end to the stalemate, stating:

If South Carolina will only have the courage to go out, all will be well. We will have a Southern Republic, or an amended Federal Constitution that will place our institutions beyond all attack in the future.\(^{59}\)

The latter statement in Lamar’s letter to Judge Longstreet and much of his personal correspondence suggested that secession was a political ploy—much like South Carolina’s bid in the Nullification Crisis—meant to get debate and attention in national political issues. Lamar hoped action would bring about national answers and perhaps compromise to stem violence.

National politics reached a critical level in 1860, and as a representative of his state, Lamar acted from 1858-1860 not as a man bent on disunion, but on finding a solution to a series of serious questions, including slavery, which southern politicians increasingly felt helpless to protect. Lamar and other southern legislators in this period frantically reminded North and South that Americans had a duty to preserve the values of the founding fathers in terms of granting all citizens their rights and liberties. Abraham Lincoln’s electoral sweep of the North and victory without depending on a single vote from southern states, as Lamar related, created a sense of frustration and impending doom. Lincoln’s silence on the matter did nothing to help the matter. Traditionally a presidential candidate, and later, a president-elect, did not electioneer or speak up to their inaugural address. Party members spoke in the candidate’s or president elect’s stead, and in the case of Lincoln, even when he prepared remarks for speakers, the opinions heard from Republican Party members often reflected the most extreme views of men seen as leading abolitionists, doing nothing to help southern fears.

Secession and disunion, according to L. Q. C. Lamar in 1858 was not a goal, but he could not discount its possibility. Lamar’s association with Jefferson Davis, a known moderate in the Democratic Party by 1860, and Lamar’s remarks to friends and family concerning secession reflected little hatred for northern politicians or the Union. At a time where both sides, including Abraham Lincoln, appealed to American’s shared revolutionary heritage, Lamar saw secession as a solution only when all hope was lost. Though he recommended preparation for secession’s reality as early as 1858 and saw the Alabama platform as the only true plan to protect southern interests, Lamar’s language and actions betrayed a hesitation and a sense that he considered secession a very serious and critical step which caused him distress. As a representative of his state, Lamar kept Mississippi’s interests first. He converted to secession sometime between Lincoln’s election and South Carolina’s secession. By 1861, Lamar placed himself in the center of the tempest and never looked back.

While Lamar experienced initial turmoil and then hope in the process of secession, James Lusk Alcorn, when one can find him in the historical record, seemed concerned enough about his role in secession that he told anyone who would listen that his support for secession had been less than heart-felt, and that the action he took on behalf of secession’s cause was nothing less than actions of an honor-bound man in the impetuous, fever-like atmosphere of 1860-1861.

A native Kentuckian born in Illinois in 1816, Alcorn moved to Coahoma County, Mississippi, in 1844. Like many men served Mississippi in her formative years, Alcorn represented a cross between a western frontiersman and a southern slaveholder. Unlike men like Davis and Lamar, who as Democrats, enjoyed security as members of the dominant Democratic Party, Alcorn’s political outlook had been diminished by the Whig Party’s fall from power, and
one can follow his career through various incarnations of Whig-affiliated groups up until secession.

Alcorn illustrated his support for Whiggish principles as he continued to advocate for the protection of slavery within the Union under the Constitution, though he found himself in a rapidly diminishing minority. A Mississippi State senator from 1848-1854, Alcorn returned to the State House for two successive terms in 1856 and 1857. Prior to his election as a delegate to the secession convention in 1861, Alcorn ran unsuccessfully for a seat in Congress in 1856 against L. Q. C. Lamar. Biographer Lillian A. Pereyra described the Congressional election of 1857 as a colorful campaign between friends, and she also described Alcorn’s bid for the seat as a means to stay politically viable. Alcorn, like many southern Whigs of the period between 1857-1860, used the intervening years to consider his options as southern Whigs transferred allegiance first to the Know-Nothing Party and then faced political obscurity in 1860.

Alcorn’s service to his state and the larger nation over the course of his lifetime should have merited a lasting legacy. As Maurice Halbwachs observed, “A functionary is judged by the actual service he provides.” Future generations of southerners honored or remembered men like Davis and Lamar in the form of street or park names, statues, and schoolbook fame. Alcorn’s name is remembered in the twenty-first century in connection with Alcorn State University, built to educate the progeny of former slaves, and named in honor of Alcorn, a strong believer in public schools. Though the honor could only be appreciated by a generation after his own time, Alcorn’s awareness of his legacy in his generation and affiliation with the Whig and Republican Parties made him, and later biographies about Alcorn, defensive. Of the three men highlighted,

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Alcorn’s voice is the weakest, not because he was less popular or held lesser offices, but as a result of the selective memory of the South. Few historians give him attention outside of his post-war sparring with the military governor of Mississippi, General Adelbert Ames of Maine, both of whom vied for popular Republican and southern voters in the 1870s.

Alcorn was reviled in his lifetime. First, he was a southern Whig without a party leading up to the war. Then, he became a secessionist, where he enjoyed brief fame for helping bring the moderates to secession only to be distrusted by Democratic leaders during the war. His persistent Whig positions after the Civil War and eventual membership in Republican Party branded him a traitor to his own people and left him distrusted radical northern Republican Party members. He managed to achieve a great deal in his post-civil war career, despite buying into secession in the eleventh hour. That few of Alcorn’s biographers address these forgotten pieces of history, says something for the climate of successive generations’ attempts to give a balanced view of secession as well as the Civil War and Reconstruction.

As a Whig and later a Republican, Alcorn was the Whig to beat in the late 1850s as Democrats began making gains over the lapsing Whigs, and he was the leading foil to Democratic leaders following the Civil War. Alcorn serves now, as he did in his lifetime, as a man that did not quite fit into a nice neat category of Douglas Democrat, Fire-eater, or Unionist. Not unlike Abraham Lincoln in the North, Alcorn struggled in the years the Whig party languished and died—attempts to find a place for himself and his proslavery views without giving into his sworn Democratic enemies.
Historian David Nathaniel Young argued that Mississippi Whigs operated under flags of other political movements, but did not relinquish their de facto party existence.\textsuperscript{62} Young believed that the strength of Whiggery could be felt in the successes of Mississippi’s Constitutional Union party and their candidate John Bell in 1860.\textsuperscript{63} Even outside of the 1860 presidential election, Whigs like Alcorn played important roles as representatives elected to their state’s secession convention—continuing to serve as the foil to the Democratic majority. Young’s research led him to place the number of self-ascribed Whigs at twenty four to eighty-four Democrats—a minority. Yet, following the war, these same Whigs and others reappear in post-war Mississippi society to lead their state during Reconstruction and the ensuing transition from military to home rule. One major question is whether Alcorn’s postwar affiliation with the Republican party sealed his fate in his generation’s or successive generations’ purposeful forgetfulness of painful historical events and actors. Obviously many historians consider the turmoil between Alcorn and Republican military governor Ames to be one of the more classic examples of the return to home-rule. At the same time, if one considers that Alcorn not only had to fight Ames but he was also at odds with the Democratic majority—conveniently disenfranchised because of their wartime and secession loyalties—making the fight both regional and political.

Few historians view post-war ex-Whigs into anything less than scalawags and carpetbaggers who, after being the less-guilty losers or triumphant victors, charged with great responsibility—partially because of disenfranchisement, but also partially because of men like Lamar who claimed to step aside graciously—to rebuild Mississippi.\textsuperscript{64} Yet, thanks to their stand

\textsuperscript{63} Young, “The Mississippi Whigs,” 19.
\textsuperscript{64} Post-war studies with focus on scalawag leadership in Mississippi include: James Alex Baggett’s \textit{The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction} (Baton
on secession, it is precisely how men like Alcorn found themselves with an impossible task, but with precisely the most agreeable political environment for former Whigs since their glory days in the 1840s and 1850s.

Losing to a rapidly growing Democratic majority and a candidate who would soon become a Party darling, Alcorn turned away from his normally active role in Mississippi politics and declined the nomination for State Governor in 1857. In the intervening years of 1857-1860, Alcorn held the state’s highest paid office as the president of the Board of Levee Commissioners. The position seems to have been unappreciated in his own time, and by a number of historians, but Alcorn was nothing less than the father of Mississippi’s levee system.

One only has to look at a map to determine why men like Alcorn would have interest in levees. Alcorn’s plantations, located in the Delta, would have benefited directly from levee organization and construction. For Alcorn, levees were not only important, but they affected the well being of his own plantation. If Alcorn’s political views and work had inspiration and a goal, it was his work with Mississippi’s troubled levee system. Alcorn’s remarkable role in the organization of levee boards and committees continues to mark the Mississippi landscape in the Delta in the form of historical markers noting Alcorn’s efforts in levee construction. The markers also stand as a tribute to Alcorn’s own actions during the secession crisis, which put him in the uniquely uncomfortable position of having to watch William T. Sherman and the United States


Army’s efforts to destroy the levees to flood their way to Vicksburg. Alcorn’s attention continued to be drawn to the levees during his subsequent service as a governor and advocate for their reconstruction in the years following the Civil War.

Inaction in public office did not mean that Alcorn retired from political interests altogether. In his scrapbook, James Lusk Alcorn continued to keep up with current events and interests in the late 1850s. Though the scrapbook lacked any commentary from Alcorn himself, it contained articles and speeches clipped from newspapers suggesting an affinity for the ideas expressed and an understanding of the importance of the ideas in relation to sectional discord, which merited them a place in his book. For example, Alcorn followed the events involving territorial expansion, new state lands opening, and slavery rather closely. Many clippings mention land open for settlement in Minnesota, Oregon, Nebraska, Washington, New Mexico, Utah, and Kansas, and included the number of square miles of land available. Alcorn pasted into his book a speech given by the Honorable John Kelly of New York concerning the issue of slavery in the territories. In a part of a speech by Kelly delivered on May 26, 1856, Kelly stated that, “If they can only establish the policy of government that slavery shall go no further than they will have struck the fatal blow that is to destroy slavery with all its appalling horrors. They will have doomed slavery and your rights under the constitution.”

Kelly in this passage worked to confirm the fears of many secessionists that within the Union men were working to destroy slavery, and in many ways Alcorn’s own view that slavery could only be protected within the United States and its constitution, seemed to be debunked by someone from the North.

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66 Box 1, Folder 2, Alcorn Scrapbook, James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, MDAH.
One particular article from the *Mobile Register* seemed to confirm Pereyra’s suggestion of Alcorn’s endeavor toward aristocratic tendencies. Entitled “A Reverence for Authority” the article stated:

But in addition to the dangerous tendencies inseparable from our form of government, other influences have conspired to produce the present dissolute condition of the public mind. The facilities afforded for accumulating wealth by this new country, with its vast mineral treasures, its rapidly expanding commerce, have tempted to the pursuit of gain a large majority of the American people, and withdrawn in them almost entirely from all active participation in the affairs of state.

Several consequences have followed. First an overwhelming social importance has been given to the possession of money. Second, the government (we mean its subordinate executive departments upon which the good order of the community depends) has been surrendered into the hands of the idle, lazy, thriftless, who have sought to derive from it, the influence and rewards which properly belong to honest industry.\(^67\)

Alcorn’s interest in this article is unknown. Many of Alcorn’s biographers suggest that his interest in political power came from the fact that he watched Democrats rise to power through the industry of their slaves and vast amounts of money. Alcorn saw himself as a speaker for the common man, not just the planters. That Alcorn himself was a planter with a number of slaves and who, unlike many men, actually made money from the war through black market trade in his own cotton.

A speech by the Democratic nominee for Congress L. Q. C. Lamar also graced the pages of Alcorn’s scrapbook. The speech concerned resolutions passed at a meeting in Oxford concerning the issue of bleeding Kansas. Lamar’s words obviously supported the admission of Kansas as a slave state. Alcorn, judging by his taste in articles as well as his own handwritten chart of states with respective population of slaves and slave owners as well as populations of free and slave states, had a bit of a preoccupation or concern about events leading up to secession.

\(^67\) Box 1, Folder 2, Alcorn Scrapbook, James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, MDAH.
Alcorn’s first biographer, Charles J. Swift’s unpublished manuscript lies in the Mississippi State Archives in the Alcorn Family Collection. Not a critical biographer, Swift’s account differed so much from that of Alcorn’s published biographers, and in many ways reminded this author of Lamar’s son-in-law biography of Lamar—an attempt by family to answer for their relative’s controversial actions on account of secession, civil war, and reconstruction. Swift’s account focused a great deal on Alcorn’s lineage, making sure the reader knew he was the stuff of what we might consider ‘American’ in the terms of coming from immigrant stock. Swift detailed Alcorn’s paternal heritage descending from Irish immigrants who immigrated to Pennsylvania, and Swift took pains to note that members of Alcorn’s paternal family fought in the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.68

Swift’s mention of immigrant paternal links seemed very odd in contrast to Alcorn’s affiliation with the Know-Nothing Party following the Whig Party’s breakup in the 1850s. In addition, Swift believed that Alcorn’s parents, who moved west from Pennsylvania to Illinois, a state which would prohibit slavery or involuntary servitude with its constitution in 1818, affected Alcorn’s belief that the institution of slavery was secure in the Federal Constitution and that secession would not save, but jeopardize the institution’s security.69 Alcorn’s own scrapbook revealed that he in fact read articles concerning the subject, but without notes from Alcorn himself one cannot assume that he necessarily supported anti-immigrant views.

Alcorn’s published biographers portrayed James Lusk Alcorn as a founding father of the frontier state of Mississippi. P. L. Rainwater’s account of Alcorn consisted of an introduction to a small publication of a selection of Alcorn’s letters to his wife during the Civil War, as well as

68 Swift, unpublished biography of James Lusk Alcorn, 1-4, James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, MDAH.
69 Swift, unpublished biography of James Lusk Alcron, 4-6, James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, MDAH.
remarks concerning Alcorn in a study of Mississippi during the secession crisis. Stressing Alcorn’s presence as a delegate to the Mississippi State Constitutional Conventions of 1851, 1861, and 1890, as well as his position as Mississippi’s first home-rule governor during Reconstruction, Rainwater portrayed ‘his Alcorn’ as an Old Whig with extensive planter interests, who cared more about his levee project on the Mississippi and local issues until political conditions necessitated opinions on national issues.\textsuperscript{70}

Lillian A. Pereyra, in her account \textit{James Lusk Alcorn: Persistent Whig}, articulated that Alcorn saw Mississippi as a fluid society that he could manipulate in order to rise to an aristocratic patriarch—lawyer, politician, and planter. Seeing himself in this aristocratic position, Alcorn’s efforts throughout his lifetime, according to Pereyra, should be viewed as an attempt to attain this mythological ideal. Only through his ‘persistence’ in Whig ideals as set forth by John C. Calhoun and aggressive and consistent political activity and leadership in Mississippi politics could Alcorn achieve his lofty and idealistic goals.\textsuperscript{71}

Whatever Alcorn hoped for his actions in 1861, secession was a recurring nightmare for Alcorn, and one that he seemingly did not want attached to his name. He wished his energies could be spent elsewhere and seemed quite determined to put secession behind him. As a Whig in the Mississippi State Senate in the 1850s as well as a delegate to the 1851 Constitutional Convention, Alcorn could be considered a veteran of the secession movement even in 1860. He, like Jefferson Davis, articulated opinions concerning secession from opposite sides of the Mississippi political spectrum. Both men were united in a belief of black inferiority, but unlike Davis who chose the company of and message of secession from national fire-eaters, Alcorn and


other Whigs responded to the Compromise of 1850 and 1850s heated elections with a resounding call for unionism—and succeeded. Whigs were elected to the governor’s seat, state offices, and a majority for the legislature as well to the Senate.

Alcorn had been part of a Whig-led Unionist front against a Democratically led separatist movement in 1850. In the aftermath of the Nashville Convention of 1850, the State of Mississippi held a constitutional convention, and for the occasion, Whigs including Alcorn, created a new state Union party to fight disunionist sentiment. Alcorn was named to a committee of resolutions, which produced a declaration proclaiming devotion to the Union, protection of slavery under the constitution, and the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law. In addition to these resolutions, Unionists also insisted that the right of secession was not sanctioned by the Constitution, claiming that the framers intended to create a government, and not place within their work the details of the Union’s destruction. Unionists also decided that the ordering of a convention without submitting the question of secession to voters was an assumption of power by the legislature—a step that would be repeated in 1860.72

Unionism became a rallying point for men such as Alcorn as early as 1850, so by the time of the secession crisis of 1860, there was a similar response by voters as well as representatives for Union. With the Whig Party defunct by the 1860s, Alcorn and others refused to relinquish their de facto party existence or claims to voter consciences and organized as independent Whigs, Union Democrats—anything to oppose the hard-liner radical separatist movement.73 That most fire-eaters came from the Democratic Camp as well as some ex-Whigs whose interests in slavery’s preservation outweighed any Whiggish ideals never seemed to cause Alcorn to falter in his loyalty to the waning Whig Party.

A political chameleon who changed party to suit crises and thereby gain political power, Alcorn arrived in Jackson a rare find—a Unionist in a secessionist convention. Alcorn felt that there was a lot to lose in secession, and he admitted that he worried more for his “own honor” as it was dearer to him “than the country or life itself.” Alcorn campaigned for pro-Unionists for the January 1861 secession convention in Mississippi and his biographer felt that Alcorn’s influence could be witnessed by the Delta’s choice of pro-Union delegates to the secession convention. Though labeled as a cooperationist by his peers, Alcorn’s words must have resounded with many as many historians love to quote hisanguished announcement of his concession—perhaps delivered with as much venom as conviction: “The die is cast—the Rubicon is crossed—and I enlist myself with the army that marches on Rome; I vote for the ordinance.” Believing his action was “one of simple rebellion,” Alcorn did not believe that secession would lead to war.

74 P.L. Rainwater, Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession, 159.
75 Baggett, The Scalawags, 46-47.
76 Carter, When the War Was Over, 228.
CHAPTER FOUR:
A CONVENTION OF CROSSED DESTINIES

Few Mississippians doubted the importance of the Mississippi Secession Convention’s deliberations in Jackson, Mississippi, from January 7-26, 1861. While later generations would call the convention “fateful,” Mississippians looked to Providence for assistance.\(^1\) The convention was called to order at noon on Monday, January 7, 1861. The Reverend C. K. Marshall opened the Convention with a prayer, something even the members of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 were reluctant to attempt.\(^2\) Reverend Marshall asked God for protection and guidance in troubled times, assigned blame for current events, provided justification for the convention’s actions, and alluded to the fears of the era:

Almighty and Everlasting God, we come into Thy presence on this solemn occasion, so freighted with the interests of all we hold dear as a people—so momentous in high purposes, and holy resolves. . . . This is a day of sore trial to Patriots and Christians, and we are gathered together here to devise measures of government for our protection and well-being, and we fear to trust the issues of the conflict on the formation of our plans to

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\(^2\) Benjamin Franklin’s correspondence complained that the Convention did not begin each day’s proceedings with prayer. His proposal to ask God for assistance in this manner went unheeded due to a number of arguments, not least of which Alexander Hamilton’s belief that to do so would invite public awareness of dissention among the convention delegates. For sources of this see James Madison to Thomas S. Grimke, 6 January 1834, Microfilm reel 24, Series I General Correspondence, The James Madison Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Franklin himself notes how fellow delegates received his suggestion. John Bigelow, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1904), see footnote, page 378; and Farrand, Max, ed. *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), see footnote, Volume I, page 452.
mere human wisdom and prudence. . . . praying that Thy Fatherly blessing may so inspire this body that their action and labors the cause of liberty, religion, agriculture, commerce, government, our domestic peace and general prosperity, may be promoted and maintained. . . . Thou, Oh! God, has seen the malign and mighty agencies which many of the sister states of this great national family have for years past employed for our great annoyance, reproach and overthrow, as equals in the Confederated Union: and how they have pursued the purpose of depriving us of our just rights and destroying in our midst the institution which Thy Providence has solemnly bound us to uphold, defend and protect. God of our fathers, leave us not to ourselves . . . raise up for us great and worthy men to utter the words of Thy providential Teaching—shield us from every menacing danger—give unity of sentiment and harmony of action to all the people—deliver us from the power of our enemies and from the sword of our brethren abroad. But if their sword be drawn against us, Oh! God of Justice and Mercy, be to us a very present help in the day of conflict, and victorious in arms we will ascribe the glory of our deliverance to Thy Great Name.³

Marshall chose a prayer to relate the wrongs suffered by Mississippians as well as their rights and obligations. An entire culture was on the brink of desolation. Religion, agriculture, commerce, and government were just as endangered as rights and liberties. The institution of slavery, named “the greatest material interest in the world” in the Ordinance created by the body, was a God-given institution white civilization was bound by God to uphold, defend, and protect. In naming the Convention a sore trial for “Patriots and Christians,” Marshall alludes to the idea that Mississippians understood the true legacy left by America’s founding fathers, and as Christians their duty here was neither desired nor celebrated. In asking for God’s blessing and the forgiveness of sins, they also skimmed over a cursory desire for general peace and a staying of the “hand that seeks the blood of a brother.”⁴ Deliverance from evil was requested, though the evil is certainly not of their own making or actions, but that of their persecutors in the North.

Mississippians believed the hour of decision had arrived. Much of the excitement and momentum of events is lost to history. Southerners seceded in a manner within their understanding of the democratic process, which for most states allowed the conventions’

³ Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, 3-4.
⁴ Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, 5.
delegates and not a popular vote to make the decision to secede from the Union. They held
technology to a high level of decorum while tearing apart the bonds of states to their Union,
declaring their independence, and forging ahead with the work of creating independent state and
later a new national government.

The term “secessionist” as it is used in this work implies that a secessionist made an
individual choice on the part of a larger body to remove their state or the confederate states from
the Union. Some southerners who had the opportunity to vote for secession could be considered
“secessionists,” though this was not the case for most of the Mississippi populace. Secessionists,
specifically those who argued about, created and voted for secession in their particular states,
would have been considered “founding fathers” had secession and civil war made a southern
nation a reality. Just as many founding fathers are distinguished as “signers,” one could argue for
specifics in this case, particularly at the end of the war when specific individuals were barred
from their rights of citizenship. As such, only ninety-eight men signed the Secession Ordinance
of Mississippi, and an even fewer number of political men nominated by or associated with the
convention worked to make secession a reality beyond the state level.

Those men acted on the orders, at times, of those who elected them to their positions as
delegates to the convention and beyond, but they were also swayed and moved by the men they
came into contact with in Jackson during the convention itself. Later, they often changed their
stances as the war progressed and ultimately failed. Though their political affiliations discussed
below give indications of their support of secession, a number were still unconvinced or
attempted impartiality until the convention vote. No one arrived at the moment that disunion
became the only answer to sectional conflict at the same time or inspired by the same events or
ideas. Correspondence or speeches prior to 1860 or after the war give some indication of the
“when” and “why” a man committed to secession, though many announced their decisions with their vote and then sealed their commitment by joining the Confederate army.

Few secessionists later described their arrival at the decision to support secession as a joyous occasion or an easy decision. Many described heavy-hearts, regrets, or even argued their “youthful” indiscretions—at age 35, middle age for the average American at the time—were the result of an immature mind and heart swayed by impassioned speeches about defense of honor, rights, and institutions. The events of the 1850s, whether the Compromise of 1850, the refusal of many in the North to honor the Fugitive Slave Law, westward expansion, the failure of a southern route for the transcontinental railroad, the Dred Scott decision or John Brown, provided many Mississippians with moments when their Unionism gave way to thoughts of disunion. The state of southern politics made a case for trying extreme measures. Members of the former Whig Party did not feel welcome in the Democratic Party, despite a shared interest in preserving slavery and southern states’ rights to defend the institution at all cost. The dismal field of candidates put forth by fractured elements of the Democratic Party in the 1860 election and the triumph of the Republicans convinced many men that the system was irrevocably broken.

There were no Republicans at the Mississippi Secession Convention, but everyone else showed up. Despite there being one hundred delegates, only twenty men identified themselves as strictly a “Democrat.” Many added to that label to illustrate issues or beliefs they held dear. Eleven men called themselves a “Southern Rights Democrat,” while six delegates called themselves a “Secession Democrat” and one considered himself a “States Rights Democrat.” Only eleven straight “Whig” Party adherents attended, though four “Old Line” Whigs, two “Secession Whigs,” and single members describing themselves as a “Secessionist Whig,” a “Clay Whig,” an “Old Whig,” a “States Rights Whig,” a “Whig Secessionist” and a “Secession
Old Line Whig” were also present. Moving beyond political designations, there were a number of men devoted to rights, including five “Southern Rights” men, two “States Rights” men, and eleven members of the “Southern” party, some of whom had formerly been either Whigs or Democrats. Four men declared their fidelity to state by announcing their party affiliation simply as a “Mississippian.” A few tried to stay impartial in their vote but dedicated to the South in their party, including an “Independent” and an “Independent Southern Party.” One man stood as a “Union Cooperationist,” while five men chose no party affiliation. Still others chose to affirm their commitment to secession specifically without a nod to parties, including men who avowed themselves as a “Disunionist per se,” “Extremely and Intensely Southern,” “Secessionist,” and “Secession.”

A few notes as to what these descriptors meant is necessary. The traditional designations of Democrat and Whig are self-explanatory. Despite the demise of the Whig Party in national politics, twenty-three members of the convention considered themselves as some sort of Whig. The choice of more explicit adjectives to describe their version of Whiggery is helpful. Many of the “Old Line Whigs” remained ardently Unionist as did many straight “Whigs.” Those who designated themselves as Democrats of any sort, “States Rights,” or even “Clay Whig,” supported and voted for secession. Immediate secessionists or some sort of mention of secession in the title also assured anyone concerning their position on the issue. A small group of independents and southern cooperationists stood against secession on principle. They believed secession represented abandonment of southern rights and saw secessionists as cowards in the face of no real danger. Encouraging Mississippians to believe in the checks of the Constitution,

Cooperationists argued that Republicans held only the executive branch of government, not the legislative or judicial branches.\(^6\)

Abraham Lincoln was not a ballot choice for Mississippians. Only John Breckinridge, John Bell, and Stephen Douglas appeared on the ballot. Breckinridge supporters launched a campaign, which included stump speeches by Senator Jefferson Davis and future secession convention delegates Congressman L. Q. C. Lamar and former State Attorney General David Chalmers Glenn. The goal of their campaign was to ensure Breckinridge’s victory as well as unite Mississippians politically in the event of Lincoln’s election. When the results were announced, Stephen Douglas earned less than five percent of Mississippi’s popular vote. John Bell carried only thirty-six percent of the popular vote, consisting of former Whigs and Unionists from Mississippi’s brush with secession during the sectional controversy that erupted over the Compromise of 1850. As a result, Breckinridge won the state handily despite losing the national election, garnering fifty-nine percent of the popular vote.

Lincoln’s victory in November became the catalyst for pro-secession forces in Mississippi and the South. On November 14, 1860, Governor Pettus issued a call for a special session of the legislature to consider Mississippi’s future in the Union. When the legislature met, they passed an act providing for the election of delegates on December 20, 1860, and the convening of a convention on January 7, 1861, in Jackson.\(^7\) Unlike the elections ten years previous for delegates to the Convention of the State of Mississippi in 1851, which discussed Mississippi’s possible secession in the wake of the Compromise of 1850, Unionists were rare. Breckinridge’s victory in the state heralded a change in minds of Mississippian.

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\(^7\) Wooster, “The Secession Conventions of the Lower South,” 55.
Secession lost in 1851. Following the passage of the Compromise of 1850, many southern states convened conventions to discuss whether or not they would accept the terms of the controversial compromise which did little for the South except tighten a Fugitive Slave Law. Northern states often ignored. California was brought into the Union as a free state, and the slave trade was banned in the nation’s capitol. A dim hope remained for the New Mexico and Utah territories to become future slave states through popular sovereignty. The terms of the compromise were meant to serve as a balm to sectional discord, but they had the unforeseen consequence of driving the more extreme elements of southern society to talk of disunion and secession. Mississippi’s convention members staved off secession thanks to the sheer number of men devoted to the Union.8

On Monday, November 10, 1851, the Convention of the People of the State of Mississippi convened in Jackson, Mississippi and adjourned Monday, November 17, 1851. Unionists and Unionism dominated the convention, striking down secession with more than a simple majority on most votes. The convention upheld the Compromise but not without a few well-intentioned resolutions, which did not mince words upon the subject of secession. The fourth resolution, passed by a vote of 73-17, stated clearly:

That, in the opinion of this Convention, the asserted right of secession from the Union on the part of a State or States is utterly unsanctioned by the Federal Constitution, which was framed to "establish" and not to destroy the Union of the States, and that no secession, can, in fact, take place without a subversion of the Union established, and which will virtually amount in its effects and consequences to a civil revolution.9

From their perspective, secession was unconstitutional, and the Constitution did not contain the seeds of its demise. The delegates themselves argued that their acceptance of the Compromise of 1850 was a mature consideration; however, there was a catch. Despite the swell of pro-Union sentiment and their heavy-handed dismissal of secessionist forces, the delegates of the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1851 threw down a challenge. Mississippians did not entirely agree with the terms of the compromise, but they would “abide by it as a permanent adjustment of this sectional controversy, so long as all its features shall be faithfully adhered to and enforced.”10

A number of men from 1851 would find themselves in a similar type of convention ten years later. Of the body of men who met in 1861, five members of the 1851 convention were elected to again consider secession, including David W. Hurst of Amite County, James L. Alcorn of Coahoma County, Wiley P. Harris of Lawrence County, Porter J. Myers of Perry County, and Orlando Davis of Tippah County. Of these men, Myers and Hurst retained their reluctance for secession almost until the end. Their signatures appeared on the Ordinance of Secession in spite of what would be a decidedly losing battle to keep the Union intact.

By 1861, Mississippians’ urgency to protect the Union was dying. Elections of delegates to the Secession Convention in 1861 were close and hotly contested. Pro-secession candidates threatened Unionist or Cooperationist candidates in almost every county.11 Some delegates who appeared at the convention had won their seats by only a few votes.

Whigs and Unionists had close victories. In Attala County, Elijah H. Sanders and J. W. Wood defeated E. M. Wells and Josiah Adams Patterson Campbell by thirty-five votes. Sanders would try to limit the effects of the convention, and Wood never signed the Ordinance of

Secession. The votes that kept him from voting for secession would not keep him from helping to create the Confederacy, as Campbell would be elected by the Secession Convention to serve as a delegate to the Montgomery Convention and as a deputy in the second through fifth sessions of the Provisional Congress. In Washington County, Jacob Schall Yerger defeated his opponent W. L. Nugent by only seven votes out of 251 cast. In other close races, including that of A. C. Gibson in Issaquena and A. C. Holt, pro-secession candidates edged out Unionist and cooperationist candidates. Thomas P. Young fended off four pro-secession candidates. John Jones Thornton and William Denson carried Rankin County by 236 votes, beating out J. M. Jayne and W. B. Shelley, both Democratic leaders who supported secession. The victory of the Unionist ticket containing A. E. Reynolds, W. W. Bonds, John A. Blair, and Thomas P. Young in Tishomingo County was really a rarity.

More typical, the Southern Rights ticket of Wiley P. Harris, W. P. Anderson, and William B. Smart won Hinds County over the cooperationist ticket of William Yerger, A. R. Johnston, and Fulton Anderson by a large margin—911 votes. Yazoo County chose two states rights candidates, George B. Wilkinson and Henry Vaughn, over C. F. Hamer and Frederick Smith. In

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12 May 1861-February 1862. He then entered the army as a Captain in Company K, 40th MS Infantry. Wounded at Corinth, he returned to help at Vicksburg and served on staff duty the remainder of the war. Ezra J. Warner and W. Buck Yearns. *Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress* (BatonRouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 40-41.

13 A. E. Reynolds was a very respected son of Tishomingo County, and though the ticket included three other men, Reynolds was its chairman and cast the vote of the county. Last accessed on 29 October 2012, Tishomingo County Archives and History Museum, Tishomingo County Historical and Genealogical Society website: http://msgw.org/tishomingo/AEReynolds.pdf Returns for the election of delegates to the Mississippi Secession Convention can be accessed by Records of the Secretary of the State of Mississippi, Series F, volume 83. The unavailability of the original documents at this time requires the author to cite Ralph A. Wooster, “The Secession Conventions of the Lower South,” 56-57.
Marshall County, a five-man ticket of pro-secession candidates polled 5433 votes of the 7790 cast.¹⁴

Despite the near chaotic turn of events since Lincoln’s election, there were only 210 candidates for 100 convention seats. Thirty-one counties only sent a single delegate, including Amite, Bolivar, Claiborne, Coahoma, Clarke, Covington, Franklin, Green, Harrison, Hancock, Issaquena, Jasper, Jackson, Jefferson, Jones, Lawrence, Leake, Madison, Marion, Newton, Perry, Pike, Scott, Simpson, Smith, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tunica, Washington, Wilkinson, and Wayne. Some counties in Mississippi selected delegates who ran uncontested. In Jackson County, States Rights Democrat Alfred E. Lewis, a twenty-eight year old sheep farmer and planter ran unopposed, becoming the county’s sole delegate. The same held true for Thomas C. Bookter in Oktibbeha County, a twenty-six year old planter/farmer with no political experience before or after his moment in 1860 found himself the sole delegate from his county sitting in Jackson with some of the state’s most important men voting to pull his state out of the Union. Finally, while his brother Hugh Reid Miller was part of a four-man delegation from Pototoc County, Andrew Miller, a wealthy fifty-nine year old farmer, ran as the sole candidate unopposed for a seat as the single delegate from Tunica County.

The delegates elected to the 1861 secession convention represented each community’s confidence in their elected representatives, not necessarily a vote of confidence in secession. The sheer number of delegates listing their political affiliation as “Southern” showed a desire to find a solution to sectional strife that benefitted the South. A number of counties mixed the makeup of their delegations to attempt some sort of balanced representation, proving that secession was not unanimous. In Lafayette County, the community elected as its delegates L. Q. C. Lamar, a

moderate secessionist and Democrat, and Thomas D. Isom, a cooperationist. At various points in
the convention, Lamar and Isom stood at opposite sides of the vote, but when it came time to
sign the ordinance, both men placed their names on the document as representatives of Lafayette
County.15

The Mississippi Secession Convention of 1861 represented the social, economic, and
political life of the state. Only thirteen of the delegates of the convention were natives of the
State of Mississippi. The remainder claimed nativity in the rest of the country, including
Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina,
Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and South Carolina. The presence of so many
men born outside Mississippi forty-three years after its entrance into the Union is a testament to
the continuing pattern of westward migration in antebellum America. The largest sources of
nativity outside Mississippi followed lines of direct migration, and those coming from northern
states were born there but travelled west with their families at an early age. Many were present in
the state in the 1850 United States Census and largely improved in their real estate and personal
property holdings by the 1860 United States Census, proving one could do quite well for one’s
self in the Southwest.

A biographical survey of candidates at the convention presents a cross-section of
Mississippi social, economic, and political life. The delegates ranged in age from twenty-one to
sixty-one years old, making the convention one of crossed destinies. The average delegate was
about forty-one years old, with thirty-nine members forty to twenty-one. Though many delegates
would later argue their support for secession occurred in their youth, the average life expectancy

15 Wooster, “The Secession Conventions of the Lower South,” 260-261, and examples of Lamar
and Isom voting against each other, Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, 15, 49, and
79.
for white men and women in 1860 was roughly forty-three years. Only roughly twelve percent of
the United States population were age 45 or older in 1860. If secession was a youthful position,
sixty-one delegates were well past their prime and very fortunate to have lived as long as they
had. When asked to state a religious preference, thirty men had no preference or declared
themselves a “friend to all religions.” The non-committed men were joined by a host of men
aligned with familiar denominations: twenty-three Methodists, sixteen Presbyterians, sixteen
Baptists, twelve Episcopalian, two Roman Catholics, and one Christian.  

Delegates occupations vary in antebellum sources, depending on which antebellum
institution asked the questions and who created the final record. The Mississippi Secession
Convention’s survey of the convention delegates contained delegates’ own responses to
questions, making it an accurate portrait of how delegates saw themselves. According to the
convention survey there were thirty-five lawyers, twenty-four planters, sixteen farmers, six
physicians, and one each responding circuit clerk, mechanic, and “varied.” In addition, there
were seven lawyer/planters, one minister/planter, one physician/planter, one physician/mechanic,
one farmer/mechanic, and one farmer/stockraiser. Four men responded that they had no
occupation. Complicating this picture is how the same men responded or were recorded on the
United States Census in 1860. These statistics were also self-reported, though census takers were
encouraged to make the final decision as to how respondents were listed. According to the
instructions to the assistants who went out and surveyed the American populace in 1860, the
“profession, trade, and occupation” line of the survey was to be specific. A farmer was “the

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16 Wooster, “The Secession Conventions of the Lower South,” 61. Wooster provides a copy of
the “Alphabetical List of the Members of the Mississippi Secession Convention” taken from the
Journal of Convention though this document does not appear in other sources.
proprietor of a farm for the time being, who pursues agriculture professionally or practically.” In addition, only one’s primary occupation counted, so one could be both a planter and lawyer, but few actually were listed as both in the census. In 1860, the distinction between planters and farmers was not as clear as the terminology would become by the 1870 census. Unless a man specified “planter” in the census, most individuals who engaged in an agricultural pursuit as their primary source of occupation were given the title of “farmer,” regardless of the amount of real or personal estate. As a result the portrait of the convention members looks different according to the 1860 United States Census, which resulted in thirty-two farmers, twenty-seven lawyers, six physicians, four planters, and two each circuit clerks, ministers, physician/farmers, and lawyer/farmers. There were also one each of a lawyer/district attorney, physician/planter, United States Marshal, and saddler. The amount of slaves owned had no bearing on which term was used, which is why, until the 1870 census, one is hard pressed to find many planters in Mississippi or among the convention members before 1860. Historians have generally given men with upwards of 10-20 slaves the title of planter and considered those with less as husbandmen or farmers. As a result, a number of the convention members rightly claimed themselves to be planters, though many were not, and a number of men who claimed to be farmers on the survey as well as on the census would be considered planters according to historians’ standards.

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18 Instructions to the Federal Census of the United States 1860, 15.
19 The discrepancy between the 100 men reported in the survey and the eighty-one men in the census is that the records for the remaining men were either not found at the time of the writing of this paper or unavailable.
20 Instructions to the Federal Census of the United States 1860, 13-14. Census takers were asked to distinguish between farmers and farm laborers, and they were encouraged to accurately report their best intuitive choice of occupation, regardless as to what the respondent claimed.
Following the opening prayer, the delegates elected William S. Barry president of the convention and Frank A. Pope as secretary of the convention.21 By 1860, Barry was a Mississippi native and tried politician. A self-described planter and lawyer, he owned plantations in Oktibbeha and Sunflower Counties, though he represented Lowndes County at the Convention. He represented Sunflower County in the House of Representatives from 1853-1855, serving as Speaker in 1855. Prior to his national service, he was a member of the Mississippi legislature from 1849-1851. He proved himself an ardent defender of States Rights as a part of the Mississippi delegation joined William Lowndes Yancey and the Alabama Delegation’s walkout from the 1860 Democratic national convention in Charleston. A Presbyterian and States Rights Democrat, Barry’s popularity from the first vote for the Convention’s President set the tone and tenor of the proceedings and left no real doubt as to its outcome.

If Barry was a trusted elder statesman, Frank A. Pope was part of a newer generation. A twenty-two-year-old student from Holmes County, Pope was not elected by his countrymen and received no vote at the convention, but he was tasked with writing down the proceedings for posterity. His writings are all that is left of the proceedings of the convention. All participants were asked to complete a survey, and so young Pope listed himself as a Methodist as well as a secessionist. No further record of him exists, but no doubt his lack of property or slaves and youthful age would have found him in the Confederate Army, either by choice or conscription, fighting for independence of a nation which he had done his part to create.

Upon the election of Barry and Pope, L. Q. C. Lamar motioned that the convention needed to prepare and report “an Ordinance providing for the withdrawal of the State of Mississippi from the present Federal Union, with a view to the establishment of a new

21 Instructions to the 1860 Federal Census of the United States, 7-8.
Confederacy, to be composed of the seceding states.”

Granting the motion, President Barry appointed a Committee of Fifteen to craft the Mississippi Ordinance of Secession on the following day of the convention. The committee consisted of James Lusk Alcorn of Coahoma County, John A. Blair of Tishomingo County, Walker Brooke of Warren County, Alexander M. Clayton of Marshall County, George R. Clayton of Lowndes County, Orlando Davis of Tippah County, Henry Thomas Ellett of Claiborne County, James Z. George of Carroll County, Samuel Jameson Gholson of Monroe County, Wiley Pope Harris of Hinds County, Alfred Holt of Wilkinson County, Benjamin King of Copiah County, L. Q. C. Lamar of Lafayette County, Hugh Reid Miller of Pontotoc County, and Elijah H. Saunders of Attala County.

The Committee of Fifteen is an odd but important group of men. The committee consists of Mississippians who would come to lead the state and nation for many decades after their meeting in 1860. While Hugh Reid Miller would die from wounds from a battle on Cemetery Hill in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 1863, James Lusk Alcorn, John A. Blair, J. Z. George, Samuel J. Gholson, Benjamin King, and L. Q. C. Lamar would survive their tenure in the Confederate Army. Walter Brooke, A. M. Clayton, Wiley Pope Harris, and L. Q. C. Lamar would serve in various positions in the Confederate government. After the war, many of these men would attain positions of power and influence, including as members of every branch of Federal government as well as state and local executive, legislative and judiciary positions. Four members of this committee and two other delegates from the 1860 convention, including James L. Alcorn, John A. Blair, J. Z. George, Wiley Pope Harris, Thomas Dudley Isom and Walter Leake Keirn, would meet again thirty years later at the Constitutional Convention of 1890.

\[22\] Instructions to the 1860 Federal Census of the United States, 9.
While most sources recognize L. Q. C. Lamar, the Chairman of the Committee of Fifteen, as sole author of the Ordinance of Secession, many members of the Committee of Fifteen claim to have helped write the Ordinance, and the proceedings illustrate that all members had a say and a vote on the most important measures. The original draft of the Ordinance is written in the hand of Henry Thomas Ellett.\(^{23}\) Given the nature of the document and the momentous event it signaled, it is helpful to examine the details of the men who drew up the original draft. Despite being members of the Committee of Fifteen, two men eventually voted against the ordinance, making the Committee vote 13-2. All eventually signed as a show of unity.

Most of the men who helped compose the ordinance were from the northern part of Mississippi. If one drew a line straight across the State of Mississippi at Jackson along the present day Interstate 20, only five members were from the southern part of the state, and all of them from the western corner around Vicksburg and Natchez.\(^{24}\) Only two men could be considered to be from the Delta region of the state, James Lusk Alcorn and James Z. George. The remainder of the committee hailed from the northern and central sections of the state, including two men who would eventually cast their votes against secession and the ordinance they helped write, John A. Blair and Elijah H. Saunders.

Members of the Committee of Fifteen deserve a closer examination. Much like their peers in the larger body, the Committee of Fifteen could be identified by their antebellum

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\(^{23}\) For example, the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress website, last accessed April 2013, lists L. Q. C. Lamar as the drafter of the Ordinance. It also lists Ellett as a member of the committee that drafted and reported the Ordinance. http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp. See Franklin L. Riley, ed. *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, Volume 5 (Oxford, Miss.; n.p., 1902), 238, regarding Ellett’s copy of the ordinance.

\(^{24}\) Walker Brooke, Wiley Pope Harris, Henry Thomas Ellett, Benjamin King, and Alfred Holt.
political party allegiances. The chaos of 1860-1861 shifted their political alignments in relation to their support for secession. For instance, the Committee of Fifteen consisted of five Whigs, despite the party’s breakup prior to the 1860 election. James Lusk Alcorn, Walker Brooke, George R. Clayton, Orlando Davis, and Benjamin King would have been considered by their Democrats and many Mississippians to be Whigs. While Brooke, G. Clayton, O. Davis, and King remained Whigs, Alcorn identified himself as a member of the Southern Party. Alexander M. Clayton, Henry Thomas Ellett, Samuel J. Gholson, and Hugh Reid Miller remained Democrats. The other Democratic members of the Committee of Fifteen claimed new political affiliations. John A. Blair, Wiley Pope Harris, and Elijah H. Sanders each declared themselves to be “A Mississippian,” which also seems to be a statement of loyalty to their state over that of the Federal Union. James Z. George showed his desire to unite his fellowmen by choosing the same affiliation, “Southern” as his fellow Whig committee member, James L. Alcorn. Alfred C. Holt deemed the rights of states to be so near to his heart that he declared his party to be that of “States Rights.” Finally, L. Q. C. Lamar chose not to list a political affiliation despite his strong ties to the Democratic Party and his recent position as a Democratic Congressman.25

One might argue the Committee of Fifteen was a smaller version of the larger body. Of the fifteen members, only two were native Mississippians. Four were Georgia natives, three Kentuckians, two each were born in Virginia and Tennessee, and one each was born in New Jersey and South Carolina. Religiously, there were three Baptists, two Episcopalians, two Methodists, five Presbyterians, one Christian, and two members without known affiliation. The majority of the committee were lawyers with a few farmers, planters and one physician. With the exception of Alfred Holt, for whom little information exists, the committee men each owned at

least $1000 in real estate and not all were slaveholders. The oldest member, Alexander M. Clayton, was fifty-eight years of age and was also the richest member of the Committee of Fifteen, with $200,000 in real estate and $150,000 in personal estate, including 140 slaves. The youngest member was James Z. George who was thirty-four years old in 1860 and owned $25,000 in real estate and $63,000 in personal estate, including thirty slaves. Together, the Committee members owned more than 400 slaves. Two members, Wiley Pope Harris and John A. Blair, owned no slaves, and Benjamin King, Hugh Reid Miller, and Walker Brooke owned ten slaves or fewer.

The Committee of Fifteen completed their draft of the Ordinance in a single day. When the Convention was called to order at 10:15 a.m. on Wednesday, January 9, 1861, L. Q. C. Lamar reported an Ordinance had been written and moved that the Convention go into secret session to discuss the document. Secret session might be considered unusual, but the Federal Constitution was hammered out in the stifling heat of Philadelphia in similar sessions. Certainly, one might argue that such deliberations could have been construed, as those in Philadelphia might have been had the Americans lost the Revolution, as treasonous. Mississippians as well as other seceding southern states reflected on the similarities between themselves and the American colonists in 1776. They strove in their actions, personally and as a convention body, to reflect the gravity of the situation at hand. In particular the language of the secession convention’s

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27 For 1860 census information: James Z. George; p. 54, line 21, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, Town of Carrollton and Police District, County of Carroll, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 578) and 1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules.
declaration of causes as well as the ordinance attempts to justify their actions in relation to principles upon which the nation was founded as well as the history of the American people’s struggle with Britain. Implied is their patience and long-suffering attempts to work within a broken compact, and they did not hesitate to assert as early as the second sentence of the declaration that their “position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery”—its importance to their economy and future prosperity, its expansion and ties to political power, and its guaranteed position as a right in the Constitution. For far less cause than this, the Mississippians of the Secession Convention argued, our fathers separated from the Crown of England. Believing “subjugation awaits us in the Union,” Mississippians must either submit to degradation and loss of property or secede to secure peace and prosperity. The belief was that they followed in the footsteps of their Revolutionary fathers, embracing separation so as to retain their rights rather than become the slaves to the tyrannous North.28

The institution of slavery, rather than no taxation without representation, is what grounded their position. Called the “greatest material interest of the world,” Mississippians declared the cultivation of their commercial products depended on the labor of “none but the black race.” Southerners saw recent events as proof that slavery was under threat, thereby endangering their commerce as well as southern civilization. As with the Declaration of Independence, the Mississippi Declaration of Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union includes a list of grievances. Mention of the “North” by name occurred only once in reference to the region’s excitement and prejudice. The “it” repeatedly referenced in the Ordinance refers to the government. Beginning

28 Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, Appendix, Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union, 4.
with the Northwest Ordinance and highlighting many of the periods of American territorial acquisitions, the declaration connects at westward expansion and the institution of slavery with commercial promise. The South’s growth and prosperity has been threatened by the government’s desire to confine slavery within its present limits, denying the “power of expansion.” In addition, the government allowed states to nullify the Fugitive Slave Law in every state, breaking the compact of the Constitution and denying the South an equal footing in the union. The press, the pulpit, the schools have been turned against the South and, seemingly, the document suggests the federal government was behind John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry in 1859. With the promise of ruined agriculture, prostrated industrial pursuits, and the destruction of an entire social system, the delegates asserted that Mississippians had no choice.29

A mere 361 words ended Mississippi’s union with the “compact entitled ‘The Constitution of the United States of America.’” The use of the words “union” and “compact” underscored Mississippi’s understanding that their relationship with the federal Union was indeed that of a compact between states rather than a united nation. In a few short sentences, Mississippi also relieved herself of the constraints of many of the nineteenth century’s compromises between North and South as to the nature of how individuals could use or move property—read slaves—as well as any obligations to a larger entity. All obligations and duties, whether it be postage stamps, currency, or tariffs, would no longer be valid. Any oaths to the United States were annulled. To keep order, the same ordinance did keep rights and laws made

29 Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, Appendix, Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union, 3-5.
by the State of Mississippi during its tenure in the Union intact, and in the final section of the ordinance noted the people’s consent to form a federal union with other seceded states.\footnote{Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, Appendix, Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union, 6-7.}

Before Mississippians could make a decision on the Committee of Fifteen’s Ordinance of Secession, there were three efforts by convention members to mitigate the effects of the convention and secession. The first effort was proposed by Jacob S. Yerger of Washington County. Yerger, not on the initial list of delegates to the convention, arrived late. A native of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, he moved from the Keystone State to Tennessee in 1816 with his family. Educated in Tennessee, he moved to Vicksburg in 1837 to open up his own legal practice, which was quite lucrative. An active Whig in his early life, including as a delegate to the 1852 Whig Convention, Yerger eschewed political ties upon becoming a judge in 1855. Yerger was also a planter with $20,000 in real estate with 158 slaves in 1850.\footnote{For 1850 census information: Jacob S. Yerger; p. 123, line 34, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Washington, State of Mississippi; 1850 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, Roll 382) Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29 and 1850 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules.} He was described by one biographer in this way: “He holds to the sentiment of Persius, ‘The conscience is the test of every mind: Seek not thyself, without thyself, to find.’”\footnote{James D. Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1881), 273.}\footnote{Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 276.} His votes throughout the convention consistently fell against secession, as he believed it unnecessary, impolitic, and ruinous.\footnote{Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 276.}

In short, he loved the Union. Yerger offered in his motion an alternative to secession entitled, “an Ordinance providing for the final adjustment of all difficulties between the free and slave States of the United States by securing further Constitutional guarantees within the present
Union.” The title reflects a belief that the Constitution held the solution to present tensions. Though the convention voted down Yerger’s amendment 78-21, the expression of a difference of opinion showed that secession in Mississippi was not viewed in the same light by all of its members. The twenty-one men who voted for Yerger’s version included Walker Brooke, John A. Blair, Wright Walker Bonds, Arthur Benjamin Bullard, Malachai Crawford Cummings, Alexander King Farrar, Robert Watkins Flourney, John B. Herring, David Wiley Hurst, Thomas Alexander Marshall, Miles Hill McGehee of Bolivar, Porter Jacob Myers, Daniel Henderson Parker, Arthur Exum Reynolds, Elijah H. Sanders, William A. Sumner, Marcus D. L. Stephens, John Jones Thornton, Josiah W. Winchester, J. S. Yerger, and Thomas P. Young. Of the twenty-one men, only seven were Democrats. Despite being the party associated with a more direct defense of slavery and southern values, only one significant slaveholder voted with Yerger, Robert Watkins Flourney, Sr., a forty-nine-year-old farmer from New Albany, Pontotoc County, who owned an $91,000 estate, with fifty-six slaves. Other Democrats were smaller slaveholders, including John Blair of Tishomingo County who owned no slaves, William Sumner, a circuit clerk with only three slaves from Calhoun County; and Arthur Benjamin Bullard a Presbyterian minister with significant real and personal estate holdings, including eleven slaves.

Whigs at the Mississippi Secession Convention were more willing to work within the system, believing the Constitution to be the best protection for their rights and property, including slaves. Some of the Whigs who voted with Yerger held substantial amounts of property, but owned less than twenty slaves, including Walker Brooke, David Hurst, Thomas A.

34 Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, 11.
Marshall, Daniel Henderson Parker, Marcus D.L. Stephens, John Jones Thornton, and Josiah W. Winchester. Yet some of the Whigs who voted for Yerger’s amendment were substantial planters. Alexander King Farrar hailed from one of the oldest counties in Mississippi, residing in Natchez, Adams County. Though listed as a farmer on the 1860 census, Farrar is what most consider a planter with $600,000 in real estate and $300,000 in personal estate, including 204 slaves according to the 1860 Census.\textsuperscript{36} One could argue Farrar had a vested interest in slavery as well as the survival of agriculture and commerce declared threatened in the Ordinance. Similarly, other men who voted for Yerger’s amendment were in similar circumstances. Elijah Sanders from Kosciusko, Attala County in the center of the state, held an estate values at $106,000, including thirty-six slaves. With a $450,000 estate and more than 180 slaves, Miles H. McGehee and his plantation “Sunnywild” in the Mississippi delta depended upon the labor of slaves for its prosperity. Even Malachai C. Cummings and Arthur Exum Reynolds in the northern counties of Itawamba with estates valued at $90,000, including fifty-seven slaves, and $135,000, including twenty-two slaves, respectively, believed caution in proceeding with disunion was a good idea.

After Yerger’s failed amendment, James Lusk Alcorn, sensed that perhaps some men would go along with secession if there were some assurance that other southern states would join a southern confederacy. He might also have perceived the native origins of many men in the

convention who might be opposed to joining a Confederacy that might not include their native states. He proposed to amend the Committee of Fifteen’s ordinance by adding a section that read:

*Be it further ordained, That this Ordinance shall not go into effect until at least the States of Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana shall through their respective Conventions, resolve to secede from the Federal Union, and resume their sovereignty.*

Though a number of men anxious to put off immediate secession voted for this amendment, it failed by a vote of 78-21. Of these twenty-one men, seventeen of them had shown their reluctance to secede when voting for Yerger’s amendment, including Bonds, Bullard, Cummings, Farrar, Herring, Hurst, McGehee of Bolivar, Myers, Parker, Reynolds, Sanders, Sumner, Stevens, Thornton, Winchester, Yerger, and Young. Alcorn’s motion also drew in a number of men who supported secession but understood the peril of seceding with South Carolina and faced with borders of states who had yet to decide their fate in the Union.

In fact, most of the additional men who voted for Alcorn’s amendment, excluding Alcorn who was a Whig and Independent Stephen D. Johnston of Desoto, were Democrats in favor of secession. Included in this group were two additional members of Itawamba County’s delegation, Russell Owen Beene and William Henry Haywood Tison. Beene was a forty-five-year old lawyer with little in the way of real estate, a sizable personal estate, but owned no slaves. Tison was eight years younger than Beene declared himself a farmer and a mechanic in the convention’s biographical survey, though he had a legal background, and he is listed as a U.S. Marshall with a combined real and personal estate of more than $27,000 and eleven slaves. All the men from Itawamaba’s delegation were Democrats, though Beene and Tison came from Baldwin and Cummings and Bullard were from Fulton. While the former pair voted consistently to delay secession on all three measures and ultimately against the Ordinance, Beene and Tison

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favored secession, delaying only to secure other states to the confederacy and put secession to a popular vote. Both ultimately voted for the Ordinance, and the entire delegation signed the final document.\textsuperscript{38}

Beene and Tison were joined by two significant planters with large estates: Edward McGehee of Como, Panola County, and James Monroe Dyer of Lexington, Holmes County. McGehee listed his political party as “extremely and intensely Southern” on the Convention’s biographical survey. A planter, though the census misleadingly calls him a farmer, McGehee owned a home and land valued at $70,000, and his personal estate of equaled $80,000, including more than seventy slaves, much of which would be lost by war’s end. James Monroe Dyer was another prosperous planter and lawyer. He owned both a town and country estate as personal property valued at more than $70,000 including at least twenty slaves.\textsuperscript{39}

The final two Democrats who joined with Alcorn’s amendment were smaller slaveholders and men who had yet little political pull beyond their own county. William Denson was a popular Baptist minister and the founder of the Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church. He listed himself as a minister and a planter on the Conventions survey, though the 1860 Federal Census listed him with $8,000 in real estate and $12,000 in personal estate, which included seven slaves. John Hathorn Powell, Jr., of Jones County was not on the original list of convention delegates. A

\textsuperscript{38} For 1860 census information: Russell O. Beene; p. 136, line 37, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Itawamba, State of Mississippi; \textit{1860 United States Federal Census} (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 583); W. H. H. Tison; p. 11, line 30, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Itawamba, State of Mississippi; \textit{1860 United States Federal Census} (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 583) and \textit{1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules}.

\textsuperscript{39} For 1860 Census citations for E. F. McGehee; p. 120, line 32, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Adams, State of Mississippi; \textit{1860 United States Federal Census} (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 589) and James M. Dyer; p. 13, line 19, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Adams, State of Mississippi; \textit{1860 United States Federal Census} (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 582) and \textit{1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules}. 
farmer with $1500 in real estate and $2700 in personal estate, including five slaves, Powell was not the typical convention delegate. In December 1860, he ran on an anti-secession platform and won over his opponent 166-89. Despite his supposed Unionist leanings, Powell supported secession. His vote for Alcorn’s amendment, and later Brooke’s amendment to put secession to a popular vote showed caution, but Powell ultimately voted for secession at the final vote. His actions supposedly earned him the honor of being burned in effigy in Ellisville, Mississippi. His votes and positions are not unique. While Jones County earned a reputation as a rogue Unionist County in the midst of secessionist Mississippi, Powell was one of many uncertain of whether secession in any form was the appropriate choice. If anything, his votes betray a conscience willing to act along with the crowd, whether through concerted state action or popular vote. That he voted against Yerger’s wait-and-see amendment and ultimately for the Ordinance of Secession tells us he was personally in favor of secession and voted against the wishes of the people who sent him to the convention.\footnote{For 1860 census information: William Denson; p. 156, line 25, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Adams, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 590) and John H. Powell; p. 36, line 29, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Adams, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 584) and 1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules.}

After Alcorn’s amendment failed, Walker Brooke of Vicksburg, Warren County, put forth the final impediment to immediate secession. Brooke would not plunge into the abyss without caution, and his biographers would later argue his motion “was not compatible with circumstances, or in accord with the times.”\footnote{Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 317.} In addition, in his service to the Confederate Provisional Congress, Brook would be “more disposed to obey the dictates of cool judgment
than the fiery impulses of the moment." In the true spirit of the American experiment of democracy, Brooke desired the final approval of the masses—ratification—to make secession a real act. He proposed an election to be held in the State of Mississippi on the second Monday of February 1861. Voters would “endorse on their tickets the word ‘ratification’ and those voting against it the words ‘no ratification.’” All Brooke desired was a simple “up and down vote” by the people of the State of Mississippi to confirm secession, making it a political action of an entire voting people as opposed to one hundred of the more politically connected and wealthiest men of the state.

Brooke’s amendment lost with a vote of 70-29. By this point, a number of men have consistently made their vote against immediate secession, including Alexander King Farrar and Josiah W. Winchester of Adams County, Elijah H. Sanders of Attala County, David Wiley Hurst of Amite County, Miles H. McGehee of Bolivar County, William A. Sumner and Marcus D.L. Stephens of Calhoun County, Daniel Henderson Parker of Franklin County, Arthur B. Bullard and Malachai Crawford Cummings of Itawamba County, Porter Jacob Myers of Perry County, John B. Herring of Pontotoc County, John Jones Thornton of Rankin County, Arthur Exum Reynolds, Wright Walker Bonds, Jr., and Thomas P. Young of Tishomingo County, and Jacob S. Yerger of Washington County. Some of these would then go on to vote a fourth time against secession, voting against the actual secession ordinance.

Others who voted in the twenty-nine for Brooke’s amendment included men who had voted for Yerger’s amendment to suspend action on secession and work within the system to find resolution to sectional dispute. Underlying this position was a belief in the democratic system itself, the people in popular elections served as a check on the entire system, and the constitution

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42 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 317.
could not contain the seeds of its own demise. The first vote to halt secession and work things out constitutionally lost at the convention. A popular election was the next logical step. This group of men included, Robert Watkins Flournoy, John A. Blair of Tishomingo, and Thomas Alexander Marshall and Walker Brooke of Warren County. More than a few men who voted first for Alcorn’s amendment voted for Brooke’s call for a popular vote, including James Lusk Alcorn, Russell Own Beene, William H.H. Tison, John Hathorn Powell, and William Denson. The likely scenario here are men who supported secession, but desired the confidence and democratic sentiment of a popular vote as well as the security of being a part of a multiple-state confederacy. Such decisions would also render the northern criticism of a “conspiracy” or “slave power” action baseless. Included in this were Thomas Dudley Isom of Lafayette County and F.M. Aldridge and William R. Barksdale of Yalobusha County. According to local lore, Lafayette County sent two men to the secession convention: one in favor of secession and one in favor of the Union. The story goes, on the ride to Jackson, Lafayette County’s L. Q. C. Lamar talked Isom into voting for secession, and Isom voted for secession on every roll call, except that of the Brooke amendment. In the case of Aldridge and Barksdale, such local histories did not exist. Both were attorneys who lived and worked in Coffeeville. William Barksdale was the largest slaveholder of the two with twenty-one slaves to Aldridge’s five, though both men seemed to own similar amounts of property and neither were particularly political prior to the war.

The amendments offered by Yerger, Alcorn, and Brooke proved to be the testing grounds of the opinion of the convention. The session had begun at 4 o’clock on the evening of January 9, 1861, and the vote taken on the adoption of the Ordinance of Secession was the last vote of the day. Mississippians were not unanimous on secession, but they had an affirmative vote of 84-15.
Some of the men who had debated the wisdom of immediate secession and voted to delay ultimately were won over. Given the nature of the votes above, the vote for secession is not as surprising. The entire delegations of the counties of Adams, Amite, Franklin, Perry, Tishomingo, and Washington voted against secession. That Adams County’s delegates Farrar and Winchester were against slavery is obvious due to their voting pattern, but it creates a moment of confusion. Both men were Natchez residents as well as Whigs. Their ties to the institution of slavery were well established, yet they chose to vote against secession. Slavery may well have not been the issue, rather the order of government and the proper way to resolve conflict. The continuance of many Whigs in Mississippi was due in large part to their inability to find common political cause with the Democrats they had fought throughout the preceding decades. Despite the chaos of the times, men continued to exhibit and act upon their conscience and adhere to political values, despite a defunct party. Whigs throughout the convention refused to work with Democrats. As each of the amendments offered before the vote attest, Whigs stood out from a sea of Democrats and proposed measures to limit the impact or immediacy of secession, an act they disagreed with more out of their respect for the constitution and procedure, rather than long-term personal issues with the other party.

Whigs were not the only men who held onto Union or desired caution. Over the course of the evening’s session, Tishomingo’s delegates seemed to work in concert. Seemingly no order from their constituents existed for them to vote together, though they did, despite a delegation made up of two Whigs and two Democrats. Their votes suggest a good deal of convincing still was going on in the ranks of the delegates. The Rankin County delegation split their delegation vote in half, the Whig, John Jones Thornton, voting against and the Democrat, William Denson,
voting for secession. Itawamba’s delegates were all Democrats, yet two of their number, Malachai Bullard and Arthur Benjamin Cummings, voted against secession.

Once delegates agreed on secession, the main work of the convention was far from completed. The convention that began on Monday, January 7, 1861, did not adjourn until Saturday, January 26, 1861, at 3 o’clock in the afternoon. The members of the secession convention considered secession for more than its political ramifications. While the vote for secession spoke volumes in the convention’s ability to bring together the diverse views of separate state secessionists, cooperationists, and Unionists, economic concerns and fear of a loss of political power, either on the national, state, or local level, were also important considerations.

The news of secession had to be spread to other southern state secession conventions who had yet to decide on the issue. Much like Paul Revere and his riders on April 18, 1775, southerners created a means of communication between sister states to transmit the message of secession and ensure a state’s support of those who wished to join the fledgling nation. Men were selected by their governors, legislature, or secession conventions to travel to other southern states’ secession conventions and officials. Called “Apostles of Disunion” by historian Charles Dew, these men represent what some believed to be the more secretive and ominous aspects of the push for secession. The level of organization of the process has long enticed popular imagination from the nineteenth century forward as evidence of a concerted plot to secede and break up the Union, involving not only the southern states, but the sitting president, James Buchanan.43

Commissioners from South Carolina and Alabama reached the Mississippi Secession Convention on January 10, 1861. Armstead Burt of South Carolina and E.W. Pettus of Alabama

put forth a request to speak to the convention in secret session. The presence of commissioners from other states at the convention, as well as Governor Pettus’s appointment of commissioners in December and the convention’s election of more commissioners, supports Charles Dew’s thesis that states acted in concert to promote southern interests. The convention agreed to hear the men in secret secession and on January 12, 1861, Burt addressed a letter to the president that the secretary of the convention entered into the minutes:

The objects of my mission to the convention of the people of Mississippi having been accomplished, my official relation to that body is at an end. I cannot take leave of that Convention without expressing my sense of the alacrity and heroism with which it has met and discharged its high duties. Its generous appreciation of the action of South Carolina, and its noble sentiments of fraternal consideration and regard for that State excites my sincere and profound gratitude. The counsels of Mississippi and South Carolina are united and their hand clasped in a common and glorious cause.

The convention passed a resolution stating that Burt fulfilled the important duties of his delicate mission, but the words that passed from commissioners’ mouths to the ears of convention delegates. The convention failed to record the events and words spoken in the secret sessions in its minutes.

The Mississippi Secession Convention as well as Governor John J. Pettus selected commissioners to Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. By sending commissioners to South Carolina and Georgia, Mississippians supported and shored up their allegiance with sister states already predisposed to secede. The men sent to Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee faced a harder struggle in populations where secession was not as popular. At least two men were appointed before Mississippi herself seceded, suggesting Pettus’s optimism regarding secession’s success and the actions of fellow southern

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44 Pettus would soon be the governor of Alabama. *Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention*, 17.
45 *Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention*, 37.
46 *Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention*, 40.
Mississippi commissioners known to current scholarship include, Judge Alexander Hamilton Handy, Charles Edward Hooker, William L. Harris, Jacob Thompson, Fulton Anderson, and Thomas J. Warton. Many secession commissioner speeches are lost because they were made in secret sessions and not recorded, like Burt and Pettus. Apart from the ordinances of secession and declarations of sentiment issued by seceding states, the speeches of secession commissioners offer individual arguments for secession.

Appointed commissioner to the State of Maryland in October 1860, Alexander H. Handy of Canton, Madison County, failed in his ambassadorship mission. A native of Maryland who moved to Mississippi in 1836, Handy was a trusted, long-serving judge from Mississippi’s High Court of Errors and Appeals. Chosen because of his ties to the state, one might imagine his disappointment upon hearing the Governor of Maryland refused to call the Legislature of State, which resulted in its inability to call a convention to discuss secession. Not to be thwarted in his effort, he gave a public speech in Princess Anne, Maryland, on January 1, 1861, on the subject of secession. Handy explained the policy and purposes of the ascendant Republican party and argued that the principles announced by the Lincoln administration and the Republican Party subverted all equality in the Union, destroyed the rights of the southern people, and amounted to a revolution of the Government. So supportive was he of secession and sure of its constitutionality, which by then was severely questioned and had provoked war by the Union, that Handy wrote and published a pamphlet in 1862 entitled, “Secession considered as a Right in

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Of these men, at least speeches exist for scholarly use in some form, Handy’s speech before the Marlyand Institute Hall, Harris’s speech before the Georgia Convention, and Anderson’s speech at Virginia’s Convention. Charles Edward Hooker was the commissioner to the South Carolina Convention, and Thomas J. Wharton was the commissioner to Tennessee. Jacob Thompson was a member of President James Buchanan’s cabinet until January 1861, when he resigned, probably to play a larger role in the creation of the southern confederacy. He was appointed commissioner to the North Carolina Convention.
the States composing the late American Union of States, and as to the Grounds of Justification of
the Southern States in exercising the Right.” Handy’s biographer, writing in 1881, described the
piece—even twenty years after secession proved to be a failure—as something “every lawyer
should read who seeks a thorough knowledge of the history, character, and interpretation of the
Constitution of the United States.”48

Like Handy, William Littleton Harris was appointed by the Governor to visit his native
state. Harris travelled to Georgia and presented to its Legislature the resolutions and wishes of
Mississippi, prior to Mississippi’s own removal from the Union. Upon repairing immediately
following his instructions to Milledgeville, Harris received a warm welcome. Born in Georgia in
1807, he attended the University of Georgia, studied law, and began practicing law in
Washington, Wilkes County. Among the practitioners of this circuit were future secession
supporters Augustus B. Longstreet, Robert Toombs, and Alexander Stephens, with whom he
would have had contact. Upon removing to Mississippi in 1836, he was elected judge of the
Circuit Court of the sixth judicial district and later the circuit bench and High Court of Errors and
Appeals. Along with Judges William L. Sharkey and Henry T. Ellett (another future delegate),
Harris helped revise and codify the laws of Mississippi, which was adopted as the Revised Code
of 1857.49

On December 15, 1860, as a native son reared and educated upon Georgian soil, Harris
boldly announced, “Mississippi is firmly convinced that there is but one alternative.”50 He
argued that the universal dissatisfaction in the South began not in 1860 but 1850, when
southerners yielded everything but their honor in compromise. Devotion to the Union united

48 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 509.
49 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 342-343.
50 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 349.
them in common cause as the North pledged to yield southerners their constitutional rights to own slaves. In 1860, the North broke faith, made threats and mounted what became nothing short of a revolution in government. Harris explained:

To-day our Government stands *totally revolutionized* in its main features, and our Constitution broken and overturned. The new administration, which has effected this revolution, only waits for the 4th of March for the inauguration of the new government, the new principles, and the new policy, upon the success of which they have proclaimed freedom to the slave, but eternal degradation for you and for us. No revolution was ever more complete, though bloodless, if you will tamely submit to the destruction of that Constitution and that Union our fathers made.

None of what Harris reported was true, but Harris’s words represented the extreme positions taken by those who sent him on his mission, with the hope that southerners would respond to this revolution with their own revolution. Secession, then, is seen as a counter-measure to a breach of trust. Despite the very real prospect that Democrats had not lost control of the Senate and House, and the Supreme Court ruled in favor of slavery’s universalism in the realm. Harris intimated he understood the designs of the administration, who he later calls “rebels against justice and common honesty.”

That Mississippian saw Republicans as rebels helps explain the South’s overall position in regard to secession—that the North, not the South, was the aggressor. The Republican platform plank to limit slavery in the newly settled territories in the west showed bravery, but few were willing to concede to freedom to every slave in the Union let alone freedom for black men, women, and children as early as 1860. Without a majority in Congress and the support of the courts, their plank likely would have been just another campaign promise brilliantly dreamed and swiftly rejected. Yet the idea of Republicans in control of the executive branch lent credibility to Harris’s rhetorical question:

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51 Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 348.
Who now expects Mr. Lincoln to become conservative, when the only secret of his success and the only foundation of his authority is the will and command of that robber clan, whose mere instrument he is, who have achieved this revolution in our Government by treading under their unhallowed feet our Constitution and laws, and the Union of Our fathers, and by openly defying high Heaven by willful and corrupt perjury?\textsuperscript{53}

Mississippians were not willing to wait and see what would happen next, taking action founded on “sources of information she cannot doubt as well as on the existence of cause operative upon them alike as upon her, that every Gulf State will stand by her side in defense of the position she is about to assume.”\textsuperscript{54} Nearly all was lost but southerners’ honor and the courage to defend it. Harris argued that their conventions were the ridicule of friends and enemies, “mere instruments of fraudulent evasion and delay” to wear out the spirit of the people and discourage hope.\textsuperscript{55}

Harris pulled out all the stops in trying to woo Georgia to secession. As a native Georgian, Harris appealed to his assembled audience as a representative from a state conceived by “our glorious old mother.” He reminded Georgians of their history. “In opposition to Messrs. Madison, Mason, and Randolph, and the whole Union, except the two Carolinas, Georgia” stood up for and preserved rights to slavery in the creation of the Federal Constitution. Mississippians as well as other southerners owed their rights to the “brightest exemplar among the advocates and defenders of States rights and remedies” and desired “take counsel and solicit sympathy in this hour of our common trial.”\textsuperscript{56}

Harris’ closing remarks alluded to collusion between southern states as well as a decided position of his home state. “Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish, the part of Mississippi is

\textsuperscript{53} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 349.
\textsuperscript{54} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 352. Harris’s allusion to sources of information might have come from real communications with fellow commissioner, Jacob Thompson, who up to January 1861 still attended President Buchanan’s weekly cabinet meetings.
\textsuperscript{55} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 351.
\textsuperscript{56} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 351.
chosen: *she will never* submit to the principles of the Black Republican administration." At the time Harris gave his speech, the Union was intact. South Carolina would secede in five days, but Mississippi would do so twenty days after her. Harris’s confident language suggested he was privy to information regarding the assuredness of her removal or felt confident in the men who would decide Mississippi’s future course. Georgians met from January 16-March 23, 1861 to determine secession, much longer than most states. The vote was also much closer in the early stages, despite an eventual vote for immediate secession after fiery debate. The same convention also rewrote the state’s constitution in light of events, which reinforced protections for the institution of slavery.

Unlike William L. Harris, Fulton Anderson spoke to the gentlemen of the Virginia convention after South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana seceded from the Union. He also had no ties to Virginia, which is unique as most commissioners were chosen because they were native to the state to which they were commissioned. The Virginia Convention began on February 13, 1861, and Anderson spoke to the convention on February 18, 1861. While Harris’s speech to Georgia alluded to that state as the South’s matriarch, Anderson spoke with deference to Virginia’s storied past in America:

> In being compelled to sever our connection with the Government which has hitherto united us, the hope which lies nearest to our hearts is that, at no distant day, we may be again joined in another Union. . . and if, in the uncertain future which lies before us, that hope shall be destined to disappointment, it will be the source of enduring sorrow and regret to us that we can no more hail the glorious soil of Virginia as part of our common country, nor her brave and generous people as our fellow citizens.\(^\text{58}\)

In reporting Mississippi’s decision to secede, Fulton reasserted what he believed to be the primary motivation: the unrelenting and eternal hostility to the institution of slavery. Upon the

\(^{57}\) Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 353.

\(^{58}\) Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 431.
institution of slavery rested the wealth of the southern people and their social and political existence. Northerners could not pretend they did not have ample warning that the electoral success of the Republican Party would have “disastrous and fatal consequences.” Northern folly, recklessness, and ambition, not their own, “shattered to pieces this great confederated Government, and destroyed this great temple of constitutional liberty.” Southerners were guilty of imagining northern fanaticism would pause in its pursuit to abolish slavery, delusional in their belief their rights and property would be safe.

“Hope has died in our hearts,” Anderson declared and continued, “It received its deathblow at the fatal ballot box in November last, and the song of the siren no longer sounds in our ears. . . We ask no compromise, and want none.” Mississippians loved the Union not wisely, but too well, clinging to obligations long abandoned. Anderson reminded Virginians of the specter of John Brown, dead and buried for little more than a year, whose purpose was to “light up the fires of servile insurrection and to give your dwellings to the torch of the incendiary and your wives and children to the knives of assassins.” Mentioning Brown not to “stir up a spirit of hostility or revenge, or to awaken those sentiments of just indignation,” Anderson desired that Virginians consider the event as part of the “irrepressible conflict.” Northerners infidel fanaticism wanted a law higher than that of the Constitution and holier than the Bible. The school-room, the pulpit, the rostrum, the lecture-room, and the halls of legislation, spewed hatred of the South and her institutions—an entire generation poisoned against the region. Nothing short

59 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 436.
60 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 433.
61 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 436.
63 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 436 and 441.
of a holy crusade—of which Brown was just one member—had been launched against the South and southerners could not shrink from struggle.\textsuperscript{64}

Anderson declined to engage the question of secession’s legality. That question must be decided, he argued, “First by those who would force us back into a union with them, which we have repudiated, and when they shall have made up their minds on that subject, it will remain for us to join the issues and accept the consequences, be they peaceful or bloody.” Even in February 1861, Anderson assured Virginians “hostile collision” with their former brothers could be avoided, wishing them no harm and offering prayers for the North’s prosperity, liberty, and peace, which the South intended to find in a new confederacy. Anderson closed his speech with an offer of Virginians to renew their rich heritage:

And when that hour comes, we know, too, where Virginia will stand. Her banner will float proudly over the perilous edge of battle, wherever it rages, and the blood of her sons might enrich every field where Southern men strike for their rights and their honors….be received as an older brother, whose counsels will guide our action and whose leadership we will willingly follow. . . . give us your aid of your advice in counsel, and your arm in battle, and be assured that when you do come, as we know you will do at no distant day, the signal of your move will send a thrill of joy vibrating through every Southern heart from the Rio Grande to the Atlantic, and a shout of joyous congratulations will go up which will shake the continent from its centre to its circumference.\textsuperscript{65}

Anderson’s words leave no doubt in any mind that the seceded states desired Virginia above all other southern states to join their confederacy. The flowery language of the time appeals to the romantic notions of the bonds of family. The appeal to Virginia should not be ignored. Familial ties ran deep, and Virginia’s storied position in the Union brought a sense of legitimacy to the confederacy that the newer states from the southeast and west could not. Many of the American nation’s forefathers were proud Virginians who served their country in war and peace with great success. The vision of Republican farmers who left their farms not for the pull of ambition but

\textsuperscript{64} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 441.
\textsuperscript{65} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 442-443.
duty to state and nation was part of a larger bid that the South was the true inheritor of the revolution’s ideals. Virginia’s location in proximity to Washington, D.C. and her vast resources were not far from anyone’s mind.

All eyes were on Virginia. Anderson delivered one of the more fiery speeches recorded by a secession commissioner, and yet, Virginia voted to remain in the Union. Their convention remained in session and tried to follow events and negotiate peace. Only with the commencement of the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter and subsequent actions on the part of the Federal government to suppress fighting did support for the Union waver. Virginia’s convention delegates voted to secede on April 17, 1861.

Compared to Handy, Harris, and Anderson, Jacob Thompson is an enigma to later generations. Branded a traitor upon resignation of his role as President James Buchanan’s Secretary of the Interior, Thompson used his position in government to get information, create networks of communication, and aid in the severing of the South from the Union. His hand was in every proverbial pie from the beginning of the secession crisis to well after the Confederacy collapsed. Born in Leasburg, North Carolina in 1810, Thompson lived in North Carolina for most of his early life. He graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1831 until he moved to Mississippi sometime between 1832-1834. His first law practice was in Pontotoc Mississippi, and he served as a representative from that county from 1839-1851. After losing his seat, he returned to the practice of law, refusing an offer tenured by President Franklin Pierce to become U.S. counsel to Havana in 1853 and losing a 1855 election against Jefferson Davis to become a Mississippi Senator. In 1857, President Buchanan tapped him to be his Secretary of Interior, which he accepted. His position as Interior Secretary placed him at the heart of Federal government. Buchanan desired in his cabinet secretaries loyal friends as well as trusted advisors.
His cabinet met regularly, and Thompson not only had the ear of the President, he was privy to most of the important decisions and conversations made at the highest levels. During the time he was in office, he built a manor home in Oxford, Mississippi, which he called “Home Place,” famously burned by the Union army in 1864. Local lore suggests that the fire destroyed much of Thompson’s correspondence or that despite Union troops confiscated papers belonging to Thompson, they somehow failed to arrive in Washington. Personal destruction of correspondence cannot be overruled, though no efforts were made after the war to charge him or any other secessionist with treason.

Despite a lack of correspondence, Thompson made little effort to hide his support of secession while a member of Buchanan’s cabinet. In a June 7, 1860 article in the New York Times, a letter written by Jacob Thompson appeared in relation a meeting held in Memphis, Tennessee, to support the members of the Democratic Convention in Memphis who seceded from the party in protest to northern Democrats refusal to endorse a pro-slavery platform. Thompson believed the Supreme Court upheld the principles advocated by the seceding convention members and regretted only a few members seceded in protest, rather than the entire South. He wrote suggesting that Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky ought to be dishonored because they did not join the seceding delegates. The delegates of the convention, Thompson argued, were willing to sacrifice their party affiliation in defense of a great truth and encouraged the delegates not to mourn the passing of the national organization, but to put confidence in the advocacy of the right, and thus, if possible, secure the union of the South. The paper quoted Thompson’s ominous warning:

If, however, blind devotion to the fortunes of a favorite, or fear to join the general issue with the Black Republican Party of the North, shall rule the hour, the day is lost before
the battle is begun, and thick gloom will shroud the hopes of the patriot. But, on the other hand, if we re-unite with a hearty good will, defeat is impossible.66

Thompson’s letter, written well before the presidential election of 1860, clearly demonstrated his views on the issues of the day, and by upholding the secession of the delegates from the convention, suggested the validity of such an action.

Jacob Thompson’s actions in support of secession, both of his adopted state and that of his home state, show an involvement that began and continued well after he resigned his post as Secretary of the Interior in January 1861. Thompson’s first action as commissioner seems to have been a personal letter written December 1860 to the Governor of North Carolina, John W. Ellis.67 Thompson noted that Mississippi had passed an act calling for a convention to “consider the threatening relations” between North and South aggravated by the election of a President Thompson refused to name. Thompson admitted he took great pleasure at his appointment as a commissioner to North Carolina, regretting only that such a commission was necessary. His language betrays a frustration that any state could not be compelled to act, and at one point chides,

The crisis demands action. It is unbecoming a free people to close their eyes to the issue forced upon them, and to cry peace, peace, when there is no peace…One destiny, however awaits all the slave-holding States of this Union, and fate has indissolubly linked their fortunes together: Therefore, it is meet, and wise, and proper and expedient, that they should consult and advise together, for their common defense and general welfare. Thus the hasty and precipitate will be checked, the laggard and spiritless aroused to action, and a universal confidence will be felt, that our rights will be secure, and our government placed on the safest and surest foundation.”68

67 Jacob Thompson to John W. Ellis, December 1860. Published in the Raleigh State Journal, December 22, 1860.
68 Thompson to Ellis, December 1860, Raleigh State Journal, 22 December 1860.
At this point, Thompson does not advocate secession. In fact, the argument he makes to Ellis remains well within the Constitution, arguing only for southern unity to the issues of the day. The devil is in Thompson’s details. Thompson argued Mississippi’s contentment with the Constitution and the rights it guaranteed; however, the rights could only be found on the parchment itself. The northern States and the doctrine of “Irrepressible Conflict,” were what endangered the Union. Thompson language alludes to a present danger, but not an immediate conflict, including the statement, “A people jealous of their liberty will detect danger while it is yet afar off and provide the remedy.” His plea to Ellis is a call to join Mississippi and the other southern states to cooperate in the “adoption of efficient measures for the common defense.” Thompson’s language is safe, but his meaning is implied.  

Historians speculate Buchanan approved Thompson’s travel expenses as Mississippi’s secession commissioner to North Carolina. The calling of the North Carolina secession convention was contested, the first vote in January 1861 resulted in an overwhelming Unionist victory. After Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter and the Federal government’s subsequent call for 75,000 troops, the state moved to call a convention. Delegates were elected on May 13, 1861, and on May 20, 1861, the convention convened and an ordinance for secession passed the same day.

Thompson’s role in events in North Carolina are shadowy, but there is some evidence to his actions. On March 4, 1861 a New York Times correspondent reported on Thompson’s “speech to the people of his neighborhood,” which signaled his return home to Oxford, Mississippi. Described as “another chapter of infamy in the history of the expiring administration” and a “revelation of the secret operations of Mr. Buchanan’s Cabinet,” Jacob

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69 Thompson to Ellis, December 1860, Raleigh State Journal, 22 December 1860.
Thompson’s actions in North Carolina were correctly attributed to a mission received from the Mississippi legislature. By March 1861, Thompson had resigned his position as Secretary of the Interior. His speech, according to the *New York Times* stripped him of all claim to the public respect and was a violation of the spirit of his official oath. The *Times* substantiated the later claim by arguing Thompson admitted to warning southern forces in Charleston of the intended reinforcement of Fort Sumter, preventing the landing of supplies and troops. The warning, given by Thompson in his position as Secretary of the Interior, violated his oath of office, and branding Thompson “the world over, as a traitor and his name must go down to posterity with that of Arnold and Floyd.”

After appointing commissioners and recognizing existing missions to other southern states, the convention moved toward the election of senators and representatives to Mississippi to any government formed between Mississippi and the Confederacy. The convention elected a slate of men who, to a man, had recently held the same office in the Federal government: Jefferson Davis and Albert G. Brown as senators and Reuben Davis, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, William Barksdale, Otho R. Singleton, and John J. McRae as representatives.

The convention’s agenda addressed important issues tied to secession, including interstate slave trade, the protection of cities along the Mississippi River, authorization to raise troops, the postal service, citizenship within the State of Mississippi, and taxation. The military system of Mississippi created by the convention placed Jefferson Davis in the position of Major

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70 John B. Floyd, Buchanan’s Secretary of War, was accused of sending arms south in anticipation of the Civil War under the guise of his departmental duties. He famously fell out with Buchanan and aroused suspicion from Northern leaders, including Ulysses S. Grant. Though Floyd was indicted on charges, he was ultimately not convicted for failure of adequate evidence against him. “Our Washington Correspondence.; Ex. Secretary Thompson’s Infamy the North Carolina Election The Report of the Committee of Thirty-Three the Inauguration Ball, Etc.,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1861.

General and Brigadier Generals Earl Van Dorn, Charles Clark, C.H. Mott (Lamar’s law partner) and J.L. Alcorn.\textsuperscript{72}

Considering the secrecy that revolved around secession in 1861, Mississippi broke up its regular session to move to secret session on at least eight occasions.\textsuperscript{73} The journal noted the information delegates considered insignificant enough to be added to the convention minutes. On Monday January 21, 1861, the Committee of the Whole at one point allowed a reporter from the \textit{Mississippian} into the session, but it was unclear in the journal whether this reporter received anything more than a place as a witness to conversations he would not be allowed to print, which seems to be the case, since no record of the secret meetings exists to date.\textsuperscript{74}

Ninety-eight of the one hundred delegates to the Mississippi Secession Convention signed the Secession Ordinance—though only eighty-five initially voted in the affirmative. J.W. Wood from Attala and John Jones Thornton from Rankin County refused to sign. Secession gained converts in the time between the ordinance’s initial passage on January 9, 1861, and the convention’s adjournment \textit{sine die} on January 26, 1861.\textsuperscript{75} In adjourning the convention, President William S. Barry addressed the assembled delegates with a faltering voice and a tearful eye:\textsuperscript{76}

\begin{quote}
[The convention’s] its record is a part, for good or evil, of the history of the country. In obedience to the will of the people, you have accomplished the work of destruction; but the courage, the thought, the wisdom, necessary to destroy are not always equal to the
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention}, 59. Also nominated for Major General were Reuben Davis and Earl Van Dorn, both of whom would go on to hold positions in the Confederate Army. Van Dorn would take Davis’s place when Davis accepted the presidency of the Confederacy. C. H. Mott was L.Q.C. Lamar’s law partner, a veteran of the Mexican War, and a former Mississippi representative.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention}, 13, 24, 26, 30-31, 39, 41, 64, and 77.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention}, 41.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention}, 79.

\textsuperscript{76} Dunbar Rowland, \textit{Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions and Persons}. 3 volumes. (Atlanta: S. A. Brant 1907), 788.
\end{flushright}
task of rebuilding. . . What lies before us will test the heroism, the higher, the nobler qualities of our race, inherited from revolutionary sires.\textsuperscript{77}

Barry’s soliloquy reaffirmed that the convention acted on behalf of the people of the State of Mississippi. Barry never again used the pen with which he singed the Ordinance of Secession, carefully laying it away with its “half-delivered ink.” He left it to his only son, believing it would become an heirloom of a momentous event in the state’s and the South’s history.\textsuperscript{78}

The convention voted for the immediate printing of twenty-five hundred copies of the Ordinance of Secession and the Declaration of Causes in pamphlet form for the delegates.\textsuperscript{79} Mississippians in the general public read the convention’s minutes in local newspapers. Though secession passed on January 9, 1861, delegates wrangled for weeks over semantics and legal questions before the convention could print a tangible document.

The fruits of the Mississippi Secession Convention as familiar as they were distinct to the American founding documents of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The South wished to distance and separate itself from the United States, but in the moment, borrow from them their forms of governance and freedoms, insisting where the other had failed to uphold the institution of slavery. Preceding the ordinance, The Declaration of Causes resembled the Declaration of Independence as an announcement of revolutionary action accompanied with a list of grievances. Secession as a radical measure needed to be justified. Yet, unlike the Declaration of Independence of 1776, the Declaration’s list included only a tailored list of examples of the “prolonged spirit of hostility to slavery.” Attacks on slavery, defined by the convention as “the greatest material interest of the world,” constituted blows at southern

\textsuperscript{77} Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, 90.
\textsuperscript{78} A romantic suggestion made by Dunbar Rowland in Mississippi, 1976, 788.
\textsuperscript{79} Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, 88.
commerce and civilization.\textsuperscript{80} As the rightful heirs to the Revolutionary tradition, southern patriots left with only two choices—submission and dissolution—announced:

We do not overstate the dangers to our institution. . . . For far less cause than this, our fathers separated from the crown of England. Our decision is made. We follow in their footsteps. We embrace the alternative of separation; and for the reasons here stated, we resolve to maintain our rights with the full consciousness of the justice of our course; and the undoubting belief to maintain it.\textsuperscript{81}

The predication of southern secession conventions to focus on slavery as the sole justification of secession would haunt secession’s survivors. As one representative from South Carolina’s convention lamented, “it was a mistake to rest justification of secession in slavery alone” believing that the ordinances should have focused also on state sovereignty and self-government.\textsuperscript{82} A biographer of Mississippi secessionist William Littleton Harris went so far as to argue:

If Judge Harris could have then seen what he lived to discover—that the contest on the part of the Federal Government was really for consolidation and complete sovereignty—his noble arguments in defense of secession would have assumed a more comprehensive scope, and his predictions would have been, if possible, of a more serious nature, so far as they would have affected a greater number of people. Such an issue, if forseen and presented with the same ability as were the horrors of negro freedom, would have aligned thousands, who fought on the other side, in the ranks of the Confederacy, and thousands of others who remained neutral from a misapprehension of the true nature of the conflict. This issue was by no means a mere collateral and incalculable result, but was, from the first, the logic of the teachings and the gist of the doctrines of the Radical Republican party; but it was smothered, first by the cry against slavery, and then, after the heart of the South had become fired with resistance to the assault upon their institutions, it was drowned in the cry for the preservation of the Union.\textsuperscript{83}

By this account, secessionists were in the right, though they knew not how righteous their cause had been when slavery had been the least of the freedoms endangered in 1861. So diabolical

\textsuperscript{80} Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, appendix, 4.
\textsuperscript{81} Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention, appendix, 4 and 5.
\textsuperscript{83} Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 354.
were the Radical Republicans that they tricked the South into a focus on slavery rather than the true nature of their designs, placing secession on tenuous grounds that did not adequately fire southern passions for assured victory.

Compared to the Declaration, the Ordinance of Secession contained very little concerning secession, only one minor reference as to the people consenting to a Federal Union with other seceded states. According to the document’s language, Mississippi did not secede from the Union—it withdrew. Working in the spirit of the founding fathers, the State of Mississippi resumed all rights, functions, and powers conveyed to the government of the United States; annulled political servants’ requirement of the Constitutional oath; and consented to Union with other seceding states. Secession, as Barry posited and as Mississippi’s delegates affirmed, equaled destruction, but also signaled rebirth, if men were up to the task.

The Mississippi Secession Convention would be the final political act many of the members of the convention would make, and the document bearing ninety-eight signatures changed the fate of every Mississippian. A number of biographers of delegates argued that many men of the convention were not immediate secessionists, rather they were members of a class of eleventh-hour secessionists, “swept along with the current.”

Despite history associating the convention delegates as fire-eaters whose fiery passions enflamed the hearts of the South and inspired the region to ignite a civil war, which would reduce the empire to ashes, ordinary citizens described secession in terms of water—waves, floods, and tides—and they spoke of secession in terms of epidemic. Opinions in 1860-61 portrayed a people unsure of their future in a secessionist state, and at times, almost fearful.

84 Walter Brooke according to James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 317.
Pastor Brownlow, a unionist and the editor of the Knoxville Whig, explained in an editorial on July 6, 1861:

Secession has assumed an epidemic form in most of the Southern States, and men become Secessionists with marvelous rapidity... Men change in a night. Men rise up and dress as Union men, and turn Secessionists before breakfast is over. The worst symptom is the morbid excitement of the organ of credulity. The cry of a loss of one’s rights originates the disease, and it never abates till the patient “goes clear out.”

R. F. Crenshaw of Pontotoc, Mississippi in his December 13, 1860, letter to his cousin, Miss Ella Austin explained the excitement and fear of events:

We are so convulsed here now in Mississippi with Secession... This country has never seen so trying a time during the eighty-five years of its history, as is now convulsing it from centre to circumference... Everybody in this country have turned politicians; the gentlemen for secession - the ladies, of course, for Union.

A teacher at the time of secession, Crenshaw’s letter was a mix of topics, yet the three large paragraphs written in his two-page to keep his cousin aware of Mississippi’s upcoming convention and the unanimity of feeling in the area for secession evidenced his great concern for current events.

Young Crenshaw’s letter illustrated his concern as well as the rising feeling of patriotism, which often accompanied any public official’s explanation of why secession was a viable alternative to staying in the Union. He wrote, “that the man who does not give, not only one day but all his time to his Country is regarded at best but a lukewarm patriot.” Crenshaw’s observation of patriotism seemed troubled, either at his own position concerning secession or

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86 ALS from R. F. Crenshaw of Pontotoc, Mississippi, to Miss Ella Austin of Elkton, Tennessee, dated December 13, 1860. Small Manuscripts 1997, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Emphasis in original.
87 ALS from R. F. Crenshaw to Miss Ella Austin, December 13, 18601. Emphasis in original.
that, knowing the expectations of southern gentlemen concerning honor, masculinity, and duty, he was sure he could fulfill his country’s definition of true patriot.

In contrast to R. F. Crenshaw, Duncan McCollum, a senior at the University of Mississippi in 1861, felt assured of his future role as a soldier in the Confederate military. Recording his thoughts in a small diary, McCollum’s succinct entries left little question as to his feelings or loyalties. On January 9, 1861, the day Mississippi seceded from the Union, McCollum wrote:

Glorious day for Mississippi, seceded at 3 P.M. to-day. News came at sundown. A salute fired. Boys parade a torch light procession went to town and was joined by citizens. Several speeches. Fireballs on campus. Mrs. Lamar illuminated her dwelling.

A well-read individual, his diary spoke of his habit for reading the papers, which in 1860-1861 were full of political speeches and commentary. Before he graduated and left for home, McCollum heard speeches by the Honorable Jacob Thompson and J.C. Neenan; shook hands with General Davis on his way home from Washington and admired the beauty of “his fair lady”; watched the University Grays form and drill; read and reread the Confederate Constitution; and considered the inaugurations and addresses of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln. McCollum peppered his diary with remarks concerning the vast patriotism that swept the campus

88 McCollum did not join the University Grays, seemingly because he had an interest in serving in the cavalry. He joined a company in August 31, 1861, and in late October made a trip to the executive office to visit Governor Pettus to make arrangements for Maynard rifles and sabers. Mustered into the service of the Stateof Mississippi on December 5, 1861, he rose to the rank of captain and survived the war.
89 Duncan McCollum Diary, University Small Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi. Citations noted from specific entries, January 9, 1861.
90 Duncan McCollum Diary, January 27, 1861, February 6, 8, 15 and 18, 1861, March 4 and 27, 1861.
noting on January 8, 1861, “Two secessionist flags on campus,” and on January 28, 1861, “At night see the military companies drill . . . there was much enthusiasm.”

In September 1861, the State of Mississippi called for 10,000 troops. McCollum in his diary spoke, “I am much excited and feel it my duty to answer and defend my country.” Besides a patriotic duty to defend, McCollum also exercised his duty to vote on two occasions. The first on October 7, 1861, he announced, “Vote for J. Thompson for Governor. The other state officers same as before.” His second trip to the ballot box found him casting his ballot with no hesitation, “vote for Jeff Davis for President and A.H. Stevens for Vice President with a good will and for Barksdale for Congressmen.” McCollum’s only sign of hesitation to duty appeared in an entry for November 25, 1861, when he stated, “I have determined not to go off to war just now. I do not like to go to Kentucky in this season.” On December 4-5, 1861, McCollum wrote the final entries of his diary, “I start about 9 A.M. for the wars. It is no easy matter to leave. I was mustered into the service of the State of Mississippi.”

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91 Duncan McCollum Diary, January 8, 1861 and January 28, 1861.
92 Duncan McCollum Diary, September 1861.
93 Duncan McCollum Diary, October 7, 1861, October 11, 1861, November 6, 1861, and November 25, 1861.
CHAPTER FIVE:

WE WILL HOPE FOR THE BEST, BUT LET US PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Southern patriots practiced the politics they preached. As an article in the 1888 Southern Historical Society Papers proudly announced, “They dared die.”\(^1\) Every member of Mississippi’s congressional delegation of two senators and five representatives resigned their Federal posts in 1861 and served in the Confederacy’s military or legislature. At least fifty-three of the one hundred members of the Mississippi Secession Convention joined the Confederate Army or assisted in a military capacity. Through popular election or appointment by the secession convention another twenty-one men served in legislative positions or contributed financial and material assistance to the Confederate cause.\(^2\) Ultimately, one member of the congressional delegation and at least eight members of the convention gave their lives on the Civil War’s battlefields.\(^3\) The statistics for Mississippi secessionists’ service to the Confederacy is in keeping

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\(^2\) Numbers in this chapter are based on information accumulated by the author and represent information gleaned from sources available. Any information that could not be confirmed through nineteenth century sources or is based on tenuous grounds is listed with cautionary information found in footnotes.

\(^3\) A number of additional lives lost are possible. William J. Douglas was relieved from command in 1862 and does not appear on the 1870 U.S. Census. It is unknown whether he died after leaving duty or returned home wounded and died at home. Dunbar Rowland, *Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898* (Madison, Mississippi: Chickasaw Bayou Press, 2003), 334-339. Thomas Lewers was an active member of the 1st Mississippi Cavalry (Adams’/Wood’s). The last report
with that of the majority of antebellum Mississippi politicians. In his 2003 work, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, James Alex Baggett analyzed the civilian and military service of southern scalawags and redeemers who served in government in the antebellum period. In Mississippi, seventy-four out of the one hundred scalawags Baggett studied served in civilian or military service during the war, including four who chose to do their work in the Union. Eighty-four of the one hundred redeemers (also defined as Democrats or secessionists by Baggett) chose military or civilian service, all of whom had served the Confederacy.  

That so many Mississippi secessionists actively chose to go to war or to participate in the Confederate government in 1861-1862 suggests a number of men believed enough in the nation they helped create that they would fight for it. Some voted for secession but had nothing to do with the war or the Confederacy, and of the early supporters, few would remain true until the bitter end. But at least in the beginning, Mississippi secessionists saw themselves as founding fathers of a new southern nation. Secession was a necessary means to a desired end of making mentioning Lewers name occurred in June 1864. In January-April 1865, the regiment was involved in fighting and wounded reported. Lewers’ name is not listed as being part of the camp in a resolution given by other officers of the regiment in May 1865, and he died on August 26, 1865, lending credibility to the idea he died of wounds from battle. Rowland, *Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898*, 384-388. At least two men may have died in wartime service including James M. Nelson and George B. Wilkinson. Nelson does not appear in the 1870 U.S. Census and served in the 16th Mississippi Infantry, Company E, Quitman Guards, which saw service and was heavily involved in the campaigns of Northern Virginia. By 1865, the regiment surrendered four officers and sixty-eight men. A lieutenant colonel, Nelson was not listed. Rowland, *Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898*, 73-81. George B. Wilkinson resigned from the 28th Mississippi Infantry at an undisclosed date, though he was listed in service as late as 1862. Wilkinson is not listed in the 1870 U.S. Census. Rowland, *Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898*, 444-451. Two delegates died between 1861-1865, though searches for military enlistment or service were unfruitful, Stephen Darden Johnston of DeSoto County who died in 1863 and William B. Smart of Hinds County died July 2, 1865.

independence from the American nation. Revolution occurred well before any shots were fired, though its success required active participation and support. A study of Mississippi secessionists’ roles in the Civil War helps to understand how individuals translated ideological and theoretical concerns into political involvement or military action or inaction. Those actively responsible for secession and war attempted to do their part to ensure its success. More than half of the secession convention’s delegates joined the Confederate Army to use military might to defend their vision, and another twenty or so delegates continued their antebellum leadership into the Confederate government or judiciary.

Among the delegates, there was no obvious relationship between wealth and participation in the war. It did help to mitigate under what circumstances he served or his experience. Elder statesmen and members of Mississippi communities with significant property or clout in their communities were appointed, elected or rose by attrition to leadership positions. Yet in the thick of some of the war’s most gruesome fights, leadership positions could not ensure self-preservation. Most were motivated to fight to protect their wealth. Younger or less politically connected convention men who were only beginning their public careers began as lowly Army privates or first lieutenants. Of the more than fifty men who went to war from the convention, at least thirty-one men owned ten or more slaves. For such men, the fight was more about one’s ability to have a future than to protect one’s present. A curious group of men, including James

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5 John A. Blair of Tishomingo County was only twenty-five years old at the time of the Mississippi Secession Convention. He enlisted as a private and rose through the ranks. Dunbar Rowland, *Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898*, 40-50. Israel Victor Welch also enlisted as a private, but made an early exit from the war when he was elected to the Confederate Congress. Thomas Woods enlisted as a private and rose through the ranks until being wounded at the Battle of Malvern Hill, which halted his rise through the ranks at the level of lieutenant colonel. Goodspeed Brothers, *Biographical and historical memoirs of Mississippi*, Volume 2 (Chicago: Goodspeed Brothers, 1891), 1071. Samuel Jameson Gholson was an elder of his community but also began as a private who moved through the ranks. Goodspeed Brothers *Biographical and historical memoirs of Mississippi*, (Chicago: Goodspeed Brothers, 1891), Volume 1, 787.
Lusk Alcorn and a number of antebellum Whigs, desired to play a role in events, but found their antebellum loyalties and positions placed them in an awkward position between active participation and sitting out for the whole war. Perhaps more curious are the roughly thirty delegates who voted for secession and seemed to play no role in the Confederate army or government or any other wartime service.\(^6\)

Wartime service in the army and government of the Confederacy also broadened and changed the relationships between Mississippi secessionists. Their educational, agricultural, and political relationships found new purpose during the war. They sparred with former enemies as Whigs and Democrats, though many tried to downplay and reduce partisan strife for the good of the Cause. Especially among the secession convention’s delegates, men served side-by-side with each other. Letters home from the front were full of expressions of heroics as well as opinions of what political news from home or the national government could be gleaned from reports.

Exploring the individual choices and fates of Mississippi’s secessionists helps us to understand individual secessionists’ ideas concerning their commitment to the ideals and vision for the South expressed in the antebellum period and at the Mississippi Secession Convention.\(^7\)

For some men, their understanding of the meaning of secession and the war changed over the course of the war. Personal and community honor and responsibility cannot be underestimated or understated. Many were politicians foremost, with an eye to how their actions might affect their

\(^{6}\) Some of these men took advantage of the Confederate Conscription Acts’ exemptions for age, number of slaves owned or political or social occupation. When eliminated mid-war, many men found themselves thrust into military duty.

\(^{7}\) The “Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union,” maintains that secession is fully tied to the preservation of the institution of slavery, the inequality existing between the races, and an aggressive North bent on destroying the right to own slaves as well as uphold their racial views. The Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States. *Journal of the Mississippi Secession Convention January 1861* (Jackson: Hederman Brothers, 1962), Appendix.
future political aspirations and viability. A number of men who opposed secession cast their lot with their people and fought for their homes and property, understanding better than many the consequences of what might happen if they failed, and a number of them took advantage of the many opportunities available to men of their economic class to avoid war as well as governmental service. Heroics on the battlefield or civil leadership with the Confederate government endeared men in the hearts and minds of the larger southern public and proved their worth as honorable, trustworthy men. In the nineteenth century, such service proved one’s commitment to a community’s values and morals. The men who died became the South’s martyrs and saints, their memory proudly recounted in large fin de siècle histories. Conversely, directly after the war and during Congressional Reconstruction, men who had little service to the Confederacy were viewed by northern victors as excellent choices for New South leadership positions. Once Reconstruction-era restrictions of citizenship rights of former Confederates were removed or pardoned, the men who fought valiantly and served nobly, sacrificing all in a losing cause, were the only men qualified to lead according to their constituents. The post-war South’s chosen leaders had to have proven themselves in battle and in office to earn the respect of the community.

While the chapter aims primarily to uncover the wartime experiences of secessionists as a group, it is understood that their service as soldiers and leaders or lack of service are not indicative of loyalty to or a rejection of the Confederate cause. Rather, the portraits within this chapter suggest that secession and war created complex realities for Mississippi secessionists, which at times fall outside of traditional ideas of Civil War service and illustrate just how divided southerners were within the Confederacy.
One by one, southern senators and representatives resigned their posts in Washington, D.C. and made their way home. A student at the University of Mississippi, Duncan McCollum, noted in his diary the return of L. Q. C. Lamar on the same day he shook hands with Senator Davis, who stopped briefly at Oxford’s train depot before heading south. McCollum expressed numerous moments of excitement at the prospect of seeing the Honorable Jacob Thompson. On two occasions, February 6 and 7, 1861, McCollum and fellow university students waited in vain for Thompson at the depot. When Thompson finally arrived on February 9, 1861, he received a grand welcome. He remained in Oxford for three days and delivered two speeches. On the last night of his visit, February 12, 1861, college students serenaded him. McCollum recorded in his diary that Thompson “invites us all to take a drink,” and closed the entry, “go of course.”

Duncan’s excitement to see the esteemed Mississippi statesmen is understandable. The Provisional Confederate Congress had just named Jefferson Davis as its president-elect. Lamar and Thompson were local men with familial ties to Oxford and generous relationships with the University of Mississippi. Jacob Thompson served as Buchanan’s Secretary of Interior from 1857 to 1861, when he resigned to prepare for service to his state and the Confederacy. His activities as a secession commissioner while simultaneously serving in Buchanan’s cabinet offered him unique access to both the president’s ear and the inner workings of the American government at a time of national crisis. While his ambassadorship to the North Carolina

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8 No Mississippi senators or representatives were expelled for supporting the Confederate cause.
9 Duncan McCollum Diary, February 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12. University of Mississippi’s J.D. Williams Library, Archives and Special Collections. [hereafter UMASC]
10 A number of Buchanan scholars have noted on Buchanan’s desire for his cabinet members to meet often, serving the bachelor president as members of a rather exclusive gentleman’s club and privy to all information that crossed the President’s desk. Thompson and his fellow southerners would all use their positions to further the cause of a southern bid for independence. Buchanan’s dependence on their advice ensured the South that the Executive would at the very least not interfere when individual states seceded, and at one point, almost persuaded Buchanan to allow
secession convention did little to hasten the state’s departure from the Union, his actions drew criticism from those who questioned why the Federal government should fund an active traitor.¹¹ Prior to his service in the Buchanan’s cabinet, Thompson served in the 26th-31st Congresses as a representative from the State of Mississippi. During the Civil War, Thompson served the Confederacy as Inspector General and from 1864-1865 as a confidential agent of the Confederacy to Canada.¹²

L. Q. C. Lamar, like Thompson, was a distinguished public official of the antebellum period. Lamar served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War in largely administrative rather than military positions in the Civil War. Unlike Alcorn, Lamar found himself as part of the majority of Democrats in prime position to be rewarded for their support of secession and of its figurehead, Jefferson Davis.

Upon his return to Mississippi, Lamar joined the 19th Mississippi Regiment and served as its lieutenant colonel. In July 1861, Lamar experienced vertigo and a possible stroke. Though the affliction affected his speech and left him temporarily paralyzed on one side, Lamar recovered and went on to serve with distinction in the Peninsular Campaign in 1862. Command


¹¹ See the discussion regarding Jacob Thompson in Chapter Four. It was suggested by at least one Northern newspaper and a number of his contemporaries that Thompson’s actions as a commissioner to North Carolina on behalf of the State of Mississippi were funded by the Federal Treasury.

fell then to Lamar when Mott, Lamar’s law partner and colonel of the 19th Mississippi was shot and killed in the campaign. General A. P. Hill, General Roger Pryor, and General James Longstreet commended Lamar’s actions in battle on the Peninsula. On May 15, 1862, Lamar suffered another attack that forced him to surrender his colonelcy in October and return home to Oxford to recover. Later in 1862, Lamar was appointed Special Commissioner to the Empire of Russia, but the Confederate Senate refused to confirm the appointment. From 1862-1863, he served on special missions to France and England. Lamar returned to Richmond in January 1864, and in December 1864, he was appointed Judge Advocate of the military court in the 3rd Army Corps (commanded by General A.P. Hill), with a rank of Colonel of Cavalry. In April 1865, Lamar was included in the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House in Virginia.13

Joining Davis, Thompson, and Lamar in their resignations and subsequent return home to Mississippi was Senator Albert Gallatin Brown. Davis, Thompson, and Brown shared the distinction that secession and Civil War would end their political careers, though such a consequence could not be foreseen given their antebellum prominence. Brown’s career, outside of Jefferson Davis’s, was one of the most distinguished in the antebellum period. Beginning his career in Mississippi’s House of Representatives in 1835, Brown won election to the 26th Congress in 1839. After serving as Judge of the Circuit Superior Court from 1842-1843, he served one term as Governor of the State of Mississippi. Brown entered the United States Senate in 1854, and in 1861 he withdrew.14

Brown was an ardent supporter of secession, though stood opposed to secession parties, a group he likened to the Tories, and he was not a delegate to the secession convention. Convention delegates’ confidence in Brown was not lost despite his absence from the proceedings, as the convention elected him, along with Davis, as Senator of the state to the future Confederate Congress. At the start of hostilities between sections, Brown predicted war would be long, bloody, and exhausting. He feared that the patriotism of the southern people would not hold out. His political career with the Union ended in 1861, but he continued his public service into the Confederate military and government. Like a number of Mississippi’s public men, Brown formed a company known as the “Brown Rebels” and served as Captain. Assigned to the 18th Mississippi Infantry commanded by Colonel E. B. Burt, Brown’s regiment was one of the first troops sent to Virginia. Brown saw action in the battles of First Manassas and Leesburg before leaving the war to serve as a member of both the 1st and 2nd Confederate Congresses and the Confederate Senate in 1862.

Senator Brown was not the only member of the Mississippi Congressional delegation to resign and go directly to war. Congressman William Barksdale is perhaps one of the more obvious men from Mississippi to be called a “fire-eater.” A native of Tennessee and graduate of the University of Nashville, Barksdale moved to Mississippi around 1840 to practice law in Lowndes County. He was a veteran of the Mexican War, fighting with the infantry despite rising to the rank of quartermaster. In 1853, he was elected to a seat in Congress, which he held until

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17 William Barksdale should not be confused with the secession convention delegate William R. Barksdale, both of whom will appear in this chapter.
18 While most traditional biographies list Barksdale as quartermaster, a few of them note that he fought with the infantry despite his position. See a public page devoted to Barksdale, accessed
the start of the Civil War. His tenure was nothing short of exciting, and where there was a fight, one could often find Barksdale. The halls of Congress were not immune to fighting in the mid-nineteenth century, though few threats and challenges became physical. This changed in 1856, when Representative Preston Brooks beat Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts with his cane for maligning the honor of his relative, Senator Andrew Butler. Allegedly, Barksdale stood by Preston Brooks’s side when the angry representative from South Carolina beat Sumner senseless in the Senate chamber, and in 1858, he took part in a violent brawl between Senator Laurence Keitt of South Carolina and Senator Galusha A. Grow of Pennsylvania.19

When he resigned his congressional seat in 1861, Barksdale became adjutant general and then quartermaster general of the Mississippi Militia. On May 1, 1861, he entered the Confederate Army as a colonel of the Thirteenth Regiment of Mississippi Volunteers. He led his regiment at First Manasass and saw action in the Peninsula Campaign. In 1862, he assumed command of a brigade of Longstreet’s Corps, which would bear the name “Barksdale’s Mississippi Brigade.” That same year, he led his men in a failed charge at the Battle of Malvern Hill, the final battle of the Seven Days. Promoted to brigadier general, Barksdale’s Brigade helped secure the surrender of Union forces at Harpers Ferry and saw action at Antietam,


19 He was not one of the members censured by the House following this episode, which included only South Carolina Senator Laurence M. Keitt, who would go on to serve as a delegate to South Carolina’s secession convention and a member of the Confederate Congress and the Confederate Army. He died in 1864 from wounds sustained at the Battle of Cold Harbor. Barksdale was also implicated in a brawl in the House on February 5, 1858, begun by Keitt. See United States Congress, The Congressional Globe (Washington: Government Printing Office), 35th Cong., 1st sess., 8 Feb. 1858, 603. Another episode of congressional violence occurred in 1850. Senator Henry Foote of Mississippi threatened Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri with a pistol during a debate. James P. Coleman, “Two Irascible Antebellum Senators: George Poindexter and Henry S. Foote,” Journal of Mississippi History 46 (February 1984), 17-27.
Fredricksburg, and Chancellorsville. At the Battle of Gettysburg, Barksdale fought for the last time. Urging his men forward with a cry of “Brave Mississippians, one more charge and the day is ours,” he fell wounded in the fighting in the Peach Orchard on July 2, 1863, exclaiming, “I am killed! Tell my wife and children that I died fighting at my post.” While he lay mortally wounded in the field hospital he boasted, “Hancock had better watch his back, Old Peter [Longstreet] has a surprise for you in the morning.” Barksdale died the next morning, and Old Pete’s surprise cost the Confederacy dearly.20

Barksdale’s fellow Mississippi congressmen—Reuben Davis, John Jones McRae, and Otho Roberts Singleton—served the Confederacy from the relative safety of the Confederate government. Elected to Congress in 1857, Davis resigned with the Mississippi delegation in 1861 and served briefly in the Mississippi state troops before his tenure in the Confederate Congress. A noted “proslavery fire-eater,” Davis did not see eye-to-eye with the administration of President Jefferson Davis as evidenced by his bad attendance record, anti-Administration stances, and early resignation from Congress in 1864.21 In comparison, McRae and Singleton served uneventful, but consistent terms in the Confederate Congress. McRae was a native of North Carolina. Educated at the Miami University of Ohio and studied law in Pearlington, Mississippi, McRae was a newspaperman who filled Jefferson Davis’s vacancy in the Senate when Davis ran for Governor of Mississippi. He was elected to the House in 1858 and supported

secession because he could not abide a Republican President. He was elected as a state representative to four sessions of the Confederate Congress and became known as an adherent to the Davis administration. In 1864, his constituents ousted him from office after growing tired of war.\textsuperscript{22} Like McRae, Singleton was not a native of Mississippi. Born in Kentucky, he graduated from St. Joseph’s College in Bardstown, Kentucky, and the law department of the University of Lexington. He moved to Mississippi in 1838 to pursue a legal career in Madison County, Mississippi. He was elected a member of the state’s House of Representatives in 1846 and went on to serve in the state Senate before being elected to Congress in non-consecutive terms in 1853-1855 and 1857-1861. After he withdrew from Congress, he was elected as a representative for Mississippi in the Confederate Congress, where he served for the war’s duration.\textsuperscript{23}

Of the entire Mississippi congressional delegation, Senator Jefferson Davis, saw a great deal of involvement and action in the Civil War as president of the Confederate States of America, but his wartime career began with great internal conflict. The confidence Davis displayed on the podium in Montgomery, Alabama, concerning the righteousness of secession and the cause of the South should be tempered with his private thoughts. Captured in a letter to his mentor and confidant, former President Franklin Pierce, Davis’s words betrayed an uneasiness in the tasks ahead, and his language suggests that once again he was trying to explain his actions in the secession process.\textsuperscript{24} Davis often turned to Pierce in troubled times, and he

\textsuperscript{22} Warner, \textit{Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress}, 164-165.
\textsuperscript{23} Warner, \textit{Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress}, 222.
\textsuperscript{24} President Franklin Pierce served only one term, a victim of the infighting that would come to split the Democratic Party by 1860. While the presidency would be his last political office, he remained a vocal critic of the era until his death in 1869. In addition to his mentorship Jefferson Davis, his former Secretary of War, Pierce found himself under scrutiny before, during, and after the war. His positions are unsurprising—he was a Democrat first, but he was a statesman from an era that loved the Union and attempted compromise and conflict resolution. He preferred Breckinridge to Douglas, but he ultimately supported the later in efforts to keep the party
wrote to personally deliver the news of his departure from Washington to the former President one day prior to his Farewell Address. Stating that his cause was not a matter of choice but of necessity, Davis struggled to relate to Pierce how secession wounded him, because although he was not only defecting from the land for which his father fought, he also felt that the land had turned away from the South. He wrote,

the hour is at hand which closes my connection with the United States, for the independence and Union of which my Father bled and in the service of which I sought to emulate the example he set for my guidance. Mississippi not as a matter of choice but of necessity has resolved to enter on the trial of secession. Those who have driven her to this alternative threaten to deprive her of the right to require that her government shall rest on the consent of the governed.

Davis laid out for Pierce, in a personal letter to a father-like figure, all of the fear, trepidation, and conviction he felt in going forward with the secession movement. For Davis, the election of Lincoln had not been the trigger so much as the “present Administration has complicated and precipitated the question.” Lincoln inherited the problem of secession, Davis suggested, but secession itself was not caused by any action on Lincoln’s part, believing that the president-elect had little choice but to “continue in the path of his predecessor to inaugurate a civil war.”

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an interpretation was quite distinct from that of his contemporaries who saw Lincoln’s election and first actions in office the catalyst for secession and war.

The scene created by Davis’s letter to Pierce is one typical during the Civil War of parting among friends, North and South. Davis predicted to Pierce that “Civil war has only horror for me,” and intimated to Pierce that “whatever circumstances demand shall be met as a duty and I trust be so discharged that you will not be ashamed of our former connection or cease to be my friend.”26 The Davis papers do not contain another letter to or from Pierce after this point, though Pierce did correspond with Varina Davis, if not Jefferson Davis, after the war.27

Davis’s letter to Pierce echoed another difficult correspondence of this time, that between President-elect Abraham Lincoln from Illinois to his old friend from Congress Alexander Stephens of Georgia. On December 22, 1860, Lincoln wrote to Stephens asking with great intent of an answer, “Do the people of the South really entertain fears that a Republican administration would, directly, or indirectly, interfere with their slaves, or with them, about their slaves.”28 Both Lincoln and Davis wrote to their respective regional opposite with feelings of trepidation on the impending national crisis. Lincoln in 1860 wrote a private letter to Stephens asking him about the South’s true intentions, speaking in almost disbelief of how southerners perceived what Lincoln would do once in office. Lincoln, like Davis, restated his views on the subject of slavery, and tried to reassure Stephens with the words, “I wish to assure you, as once a friend, and still I hope, not an enemy, that there is no cause for such fears.”29 Calling upon the bonds of friendship and the hope that crisis had not destroyed their relations, like Davis to Pierce, Lincoln wrote with

the hope that Stephens could help calm the impending storm. In the same respect, Davis wrote Pierce to explain to his friend why he chose the path toward secession, and expressed his hope that this would not end their friendship.\textsuperscript{30} Such letters at the eleventh hour indicate that both Lincoln and Davis showed great measure and sought out trusted comrades in the South and North respectively as a means of trying to grasp the enormity of secession. Davis’s letter, though not asking for counsel, can be viewed in the same light as Lincoln’s letter, two men at the crossroads of their lives and public careers, both working toward an uncertain end in causes both believed, at least on their own admission, with their whole hearts.

That Davis struggled is clear. In a letter to Alexander M. Clayton on January 30, 1861, Davis was exceedingly open with Clayton concerning his fear not being capable to serve in the capacity of president of the Confederacy. A member of Mississippi’s secession convention of 1861, Clayton helped L. Q. C. Lamar author the secession ordinance of Mississippi. Addressing his letter to “my dear friend,” Davis again related that the course of events in time of crisis rolled with rapidity.\textsuperscript{31} To Clayton, Davis remarked that he believed a peaceful separation would come about if the border states seceded, but if the cotton states were forced to maintain their position without these states, war would be inevitable. In terms of serving as provisional president, Davis stated,

If the provisional government gives to the chief executive such power as the Constitution gave to the President of the U.S. then he will be the source of military authority and may in emergency command the army in person. I have said enough to justify me in stating that with the limited knowledge that I now possess it is not possible to decide as to what it is best to do in relation to the position I should occupy. The post of President of the provisional government is one of great responsibility and difficulty, I have no confidence in my capacity to meet its requirements.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} No further correspondence between the two men exists, suggesting secession ended their relationship.
\textsuperscript{31} Crist, \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis}, Volume 7 (1992), 27.
\textsuperscript{32} Crist, \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis}, Volume 7 (1992), 28.
Davis continued on in the letter to suggest that he would prefer not to be in a position of executive power, but that he chose to fill the position of president because the people had chosen him.

For Davis, secession and then war were positions to be filled with duty. In this intimate letter, as well as in the letter to Pierce, when taken into consideration with his inaugural address, Davis comes off as a rather nervous and agitated person. In talking to Pierce he spoke as if trying to convince himself of the step of secession, and in his letter to Clayton he continued along this line of thought, but with the added sense that he was not assured of himself or the position in which he held. Davis’s concern about the border states joining the Confederacy showed that he was concerned with the South’s ability to fight, as many historians have tried to show that Davis would have liked some more time to mobilize the South than the few months that he received.33

Later in February 1861, Davis commenced his trip home toward Mississippi in a rather round-about fashion in order to give a short speaking tour. His speeches regained the strength of that of his speech on the steps of the Montgomery Capital. In two speeches, one in Stevenson, Alabama, and one in Cartersville, Georgia, Davis spoke of war and secession in passionate tones, with no hint of his January trepidation. In Stevenson, Davis vowed to take the war to “where food for the sword and torch, await the armies,” and if southern crops were despoiled, they would grow more.34 Though he hoped for peace, Davis tried to show he was prepared for war. In Cartersville, Davis recalled for the audience his own service to the United States since the age of

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34 Crist, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 7 (1992), 42.
seventeen. In a rare public expression of private thought, Davis told the crowd that he wished the South had not been “driven” to secession “by a hell born fanaticism. . . whose moving impulse and spirit was the destruction of our institutions,” and declared that “we have separated from them, and separated forever.” Davis in this moment defined the threat of the South, the cause of secession, to abolitionism as fanaticism and declared a permanent separation from the North in the birth of the Confederacy.

Whether the question of causation was northern or southern fanaticism, the conflict between sections over Fort Sumter began in April 1861. Recalling a break between cabinet meetings at some point following the firing on Fort Sumter, an improbably named C. S. Armee recalled in the New York Citizen dated on May 4, 1867, that Davis believed that the actions of the South at Fort Sumter should convince the North of the South’s resolve and willingness “that the beginning should be the end.” In this statement, Davis believed that the war would be short due to the North’s realization of the seriousness of the South’s declaration in the face of actual fighting. Praising Sumter’s commanding officer Robert Anderson for his resistance, Armee recalled that Davis was assured that “the first shot of doom to Federalism” would rally wavering states to secede and join the Confederacy’s cause, but also that war would be short-lived.

Following Fort Sumter, Davis settled down to the business of being president of the Confederate States of America. His remarks justifying secession thinned out as the questions of why secession were overshadowed with the business of fighting a war to protect that secession and win independence. The next time Davis spoke publicly or privately about the subject of

35 Davis marked his time of public service from his entrance into West Point in 1825. After graduating from West Point, he served in the Black Hawk War and Mexican War in addition to his political election to Congress and the Senate.
36 Crist, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 7 (1992), 42.
secession was when the Legislature of the State of Mississippi goaded Davis into making a public speech in the House chamber on December 26, 1862. At the time Davis spoke, the Confederate Army defreated the Federal Army at the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862, and General Ulysses S. Grant failed in his first attempt to take Vicksburg. Newspaper accounts from the Jackson Mississippian and the Memphis Appeal revealed that Davis claimed to those wishing an audience with him that he had visited Mississippi “to work, not to speak,” but that he relented stating that he “would do in Mississippi what he would not anywhere else.” Davis’s speech to the overflowing crowd in the house chamber, with its galleries “filled with ladies,” contained a redefinition of his thoughts and actions during the time of secession.  

Davis redefined his role within the first few moments of his speech by reminding his audience that, “Two years ago, nearly, I left you to assume the duties which had devolved on me as the representative of the new Confederacy.” Clearly, Davis defined the role of presidency as the human representation of the new nation, and by using the word “devolved,” and just a few moments later using the term “my duty,” in connection with his position, Davis wished to give the impression that the office was not something for which he had campaigned; however once that office had been bestowed upon him, he would do all within his power to fill the said position. Prior to this point, Davis had related during the preparation for war that he recognized the Confederacy lacked a “national character,” which had not predated the formation of the new country and that one would have to be created while fighting the war. Davis’s speech in 1862 seemed to suggest that Davis himself had taken on the role of being a living example of the

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nation’s “character,” one that he would stubbornly continue after the war in his refusal to apply for pardon or citizenship.

As for secession, Davis reiterated his feelings of the legality of the act of secession by claiming that the South had “chosen to exercise an indisputable right—the right to separate from those with whom we conceived association to be no longer possible, and to establish a government of our own.” Davis predicted war, not because the South had no right to secede and form a new government, but because he knew “the wickedness of the North would precipitate a war upon us.” Secession, in Davis’s mind, would have been peaceful except for the Union refused to acknowledge the Confederacy’s right to secede. Davis tried to pull secession away from an automatic association with war, trying to make southerners understand that secession was both a patriotic act and expected right as inheritors of the Constitution. In addition, Davis wished to make sure that southerners knew that it was the attachment and devotion of the South to the Union’s constitutional compact that led them to this ultimate act of patriotism. Secession was not about wishing to destroy the Union, but to preserve the fundamentals they knew to be true from their founding fathers outside of what was now a compact broken by northern aggression. Davis’s definition of secession moved from being a last resort to a right, and the war was a result of the North’s refusal to respect the rights of southerners.

By 1863, Davis, though redefining secession, stood firm on his idea of who was qualified to lead Confederate troops into battle. A man’s commitment to secession was not enough, and Davis alienated fellow secessionists whom he rejected as military leaders. James Lusk Alcorn, rebuffed in his search wartime service, suggested that Davis and the Confederacy insisted on

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fighting a war using only Democratic Party affiliated leaders. While Davis’s rejection of Alcorn may have been personal, politics was not a primary criterion for military leadership. In a letter to David W. Lewis dated September 21, 1863, Davis regretted the alienation of Robert Toombs, a Georgian Democrat and rabid fire-eater.\textsuperscript{43} Toombs himself had actively campaigned for the job of president of the Confederacy, but had been passed over for Davis, not only for Davis’s conservative stance in the beginning of the secession crisis or Davis’s political experience, but also, as suggested by Davis biographer William J. Cooper, Jr., Toombs’s ailing health and fitness as an elder statesman made him a less attractive candidate for the executive position in 1861.\textsuperscript{44}

A West Pointer, Davis emphasized military experience, something that Alcorn and Toombs did not possess. Though Davis praised Toombs service during the secession crisis he related that,

\begin{quote}
Among some of our people an impression prevailed that I was unduly partial to those officers who had received an education at the Military Academy, and [I] was willing to concede something to that impression.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

As noted by Cooper, in the beginning of the war Davis had personally courted officers from the United States military, and that Davis’s position as a former Secretary of War gave him excellent contacts that put him in a position of being able to select choice candidates for the Confederate Army’s officer corps. Davis’s letter to Lewis also related that Toombs had never received recommendation for promotion from his superior officers, so Davis never promoted him. A more careful examination of Davis’s political appointments to military service would probably reveal more of Davis’s actions concerning his appointment of secession leaders to military posts. For the purposes of this work, Davis obviously felt he could spare both Toombs and Alcorn, men

\textsuperscript{43} Lynda Lasswell Crist, ed., and Mary Seaton Dix, coed., \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis}, vol. 9, January 1863 – September 1863. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1997), 401.
\textsuperscript{44} Cooper, \textit{Jefferson Davis, American}, 327.
\textsuperscript{45} Crist, \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis}, Volume 9 (1997), 401.
who were dedicated to the cause of secession, from fighting or leadership roles in the war, leaving the question open of whom else Davis kept from military service throughout the war or whether Davis only considered certain men worthy of fighting for the cause. In the case of Alcorn, Davis allowed personal reasons to stand in the way of making Alcorn a military appointment. Toombs’ case is a bit more complex. Davis trusted Toombs enough to make him the Confederacy’s first Secretary of State, but Toombs’s criticism of Davis’s attack on Fort Sumter and other frustrations made the appointment short-lived. He joined the Confederate Army, receiving a commission as a brigadier general in July 1861 and served through the Peninsula Campaign, Seven Days Battles, Northern Virginia Campaign, before being wounded at Antiedam. After a brief period of service in a division of the Georgia militia, Toombs resigned from the military and turned his efforts to criticism of the Davis administration and its policies, becoming one of Davis’s sharpest critics. Thus Davis exhibited that the political act of secession, per se, did not equate the ability to fight for independence, but also included some measure of his own personal relationships into his decisions.

Davis addressed the third Congress of the Confederate States of America in Richmond on May 2, 1864. The tone of his address reflected frustration, and reads as if Davis was merely reciting a laundry list of complaints, even while attesting to Confederate unity and perseverance. Davis’s words upheld the spirits of Confederate soldiers and prepared the populace for what would come is unknown. The coming days and months would bring the hard-fought brush battles with Yankees at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor in Virginia that ended in brutal stalemates, the Confederate Army had yet to fall at the siege of Petersburg, and Sherman had yet to begin his Atlanta Campaign. Davis’s message to Congress explained the hardships faced by the southern people. Describing plunder and devastation, destruction of private homes, and the
deaths of women and children, Davis held fast to the righteousness of the Confederate Cause. Calling on people at home to devote their whole energies to the support of the cause, Davis praised the southern people for never faltering in their confidences, “tender to their country,” promising that posterity would hold their priceless service in grateful remembrance.46

In goading these men to service, Davis recalled the occasion which had placed the “States” in this position: secession. This time Davis complained that France and Great Britain had listened to the Federal government in its claim that the Confederacy was a mere rebellion against a lawful authority.47 Davis could not imagine why these foreign nations did not see southern secession as similar to that of the founding fathers during the American Revolution, and not unlike France treating with the American colonies in its beleaguered status, treat the Confederacy with similar respect concerning Confederate independence. Davis held up as proof of their organization the fact that this was not the first or the second Congress, but the third, and with that of the Confederacy’s constitution and rule of law constituted a sovereign nation.

Davis’s speech also considered the prisoner exchange system. Davis confessed his “inability to comprehend their [the Union] policy or purpose.”48 Davis did understand Union purposes. Besides freeing the black populations held in slavery in areas in rebellion, Abraham Lincoln had, by 1863, allowed the admission of blacks into the United States Army. By destroying the purpose for which secession was implemented, the protection of an institution that in the North was now null and void, Lincoln cunningly had begun to chip away at the logic of the Confederacy’s main cause. While Yankee prisoners did not go back to the war upon exchange, it was a well-known fact that Confederate soldiers returned to their units to fight. This and the

46 Lynda Lasswell Crist, ed., and Mary Seaton Dix, coed., The Papers of Jefferson Davis, vol. 10, October 1863 – August 1864. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1999), 379.
Confederacy’s refusal to treat black soldiers as anything but slaves inciting servile insurrection, often killing any black men taken prisoner, caused the exchange system to halt in 1863. It did not resume for the remainder of the war, creating a shortage of men available for duty in the Confederate army. Davis also mentioned that the devaluation and lack of circulation of the Confederate dollar was also a major point of contention, but for the sake of public opinion, Davis was forced to release more paper money into the southern population, despite already high rates of inflation.

Davis ended his speech in Richmond with the hope of still securing independence, but the overall tone of his speech was negative. The assuredness of Union victory was still far off. Only when Lincoln won reelection in November 1864 did the Union hope the end would be near. In January 1865, Francis Preston Blair, a confidant of President Abraham Lincoln, obtained leave to go through military lines, to talk about peace initiatives. Blair’s interview with Davis was published in his and Davis’s versions in the 1880s. While both sides claimed the other’s account contained discrepancies, it is known that Blair’s version was written, in the form of a memorandum, in 1865, with Davis’s being published later with its origin in question. Blair approached Davis on the question of reconciliation, Davis’s own defection from the Union, as well as Davis’s opinion of men like Seward and Lincoln.

On the question of Seward and Lincoln, Davis expressed that he did not know Lincoln, and that he, nor anyone he knew in the South, cared much for Seward. Reconciliation, according to Blair’s account of Davis’s thoughts, would depend on time and events. Reunion, Davis thought, would be difficult, but that he felt that a war upon a foreign country might draw them back together. Though Davis would not live to see the Spanish American or First World War, it

is generally thought by many historians that these conflicts, and the dangers Americans perceived from external threats, provided opportunities for expressions of reconciliation and national unity.\textsuperscript{50}

Davis’s most interesting response to Blair’s questions occurred when discussing the Confederate cause. Blair explained that Davis expressed that Blair “ought to know with what reluctance he had been drawn out of the Union, that he labored to the last moment to avoid it, that he had followed the Old Flag longer and with more devotion than anything else on Earth.” Yet Davis continued that he saw the flag now as that of the enemy, one that he had chosen and while the Confederacy at the time was “laid up,” circumstances might improve.\textsuperscript{51}

Blair’s conversation with Davis illustrated that Davis wanted Blair to believe he had held out until the eleventh hour, that all of his energies had been placed with keeping the Union together rather than bent on its destruction. Davis moved from his conviction that secession was about last resort chances to that of a right inherent, and in being the last man to join the Confederacy, in taking up the duty as its representative member, he would be the last Confederate standing, asserting in his interview with Blair that he was “absolutely free and would die a freeman in all respects.”\textsuperscript{52}

If Jefferson Davis was the last man to join the Confederacy as well as the last Confederate standing, the men who were the first to join secession’s ranks acted as founding fathers. While not united in their beliefs of what secession and war meant for themselves or the larger southern community, each delegate had his own idea of active participation in the


\textsuperscript{51} Crist, \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis}, Volume 11 (2003), 317.

\textsuperscript{52} Crist, \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis}, Volume 11 (2003), 316.
Confederate nation. Not every man could be a soldier or a politician. A few secessionists found places in the Confederacy’s state courts, including Alexander M. Clayton, William Littleton Harris, David Wiley Hurst, and Daniel B. Wright. Some wanted only to be citizens and retire to their plantation to help feed, clothe, and provision the new nation. The wartime records of Mississippi secessionists evidence a fuller picture of white elite male participation in the Civil War and fledgling Confederate nation.

By the fall of 1861, the reality of a long-term war meant fewer volunteers for the Confederate Army. In 1862, the Confederate government passed a conscription act as well as two sets of exemptions. Men ages eighteen through thirty-five became subject to conscription for three years according to the act’s provisions. In addition, exemptions from service were available for militia officers, civil servants, clergymen, apothecaries, and teachers. Later, white men with twenty or more slaves on a plantation were also excused from duty, and the original age range increased to from ages 18-35 to ages 18-40 and then, finally, ages 17-50. One could also buy a substitute to serve in their stead, but this option became prohibitively expensive for those desirous to stay home. Despite the popular saying of the era “a rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight,” it seems as if most secessionists were unafraid of fighting, though many did find refuge in the halls of government and the judiciary or stayed home.

Over the course of the war, the secessionists “met” on the fields of battle. Companies and regiments were formed from the same counties with popularly elected officers who often hailed from public affairs. James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1881), 500-507.

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53 Alexander Clayton was one of Mississippi’s most distinguished jurists. He was responsible for placing in the Confederate Constitution the same guarantees for states as existed in the United States Constitution, and he devised the Confederate States of America judiciary system. During the war he served as circuit judge until he was removed by Governor Ames, withdrawing entirely from public affairs. James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1881), 500-507.

from the ranks of the elite. As a result, a number of convention delegates who represented or lived in the same county served together or at least in the same units during the war, including J. A. Orr and Cyrus Briscoe Baldwin of Choctaw County in the 31st Mississippi Infantry; Samuel Benton and Harvey Washington Walker of Marshall County in the 9th Mississippi Infantry (Bragg’s 2nd Army Corps); Samuel J. Gholson and Francis Marion Rogers of Monroe County in the Monroe Volunteers part of the 14th Mississippi Infantry; and Charles de la Boulay Fontaine and Hugh Reid Miller of Pontotoc County as well as John A. Blair and Thomas P. Young of Tishomingo County in the 2nd Mississippi Infantry. As regiments were joined to larger brigades and even larger divisions and corps, delegates found themselves far from home alongside their fellow secessionists.  

The First Battle of Bull Run or First Manassas in July 1861 was the Confederacy’s first major pitched battle against the Union. As Abraham Lincoln is rumored to have told Irvin McDowell, “You are green, it is true, but they are green also; you are all green alike.” In addition to inexperienced soldiers were the spectators who went out of their way to see what they believed would be the first and last battle of the war. One such spectator, convention delegate Andrew Miller, was visiting his brother and fellow delegate, Hugh Reid Miller, and witnessed the battle. Neither brother would live to see the end of the war. Hugh Reid Miller would go on to fight another year of war. A captain at First Manassas, Miller went on to raise and become colonel of the 42nd Mississippi Infantry. The regiment would become part of Joseph Davis’s regiment that was part of the doomed assault on Cemetery Hill at the Battle of Gettysburg.  

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57 Miller’s biographical sources claim he received his wound on July 3, 1863, no infantry attack took place on July 3, 1863, on Cemetery Hill, Miller received a shot to the chest while on guard
Mortally wounded, Miller lingered in a Gettysburg field hospital for days before succumbing to his wounds on July 19, 1863. His brother Andrew returned home after watching the thrilling beginnings of the war they both helped begin. He participated no further in war as a spectator or as a soldier and died at home on his plantation in 1864.  

Expectations on both sides were high, and the reality of firing on each other difficult to understand. Before the fighting even started, a Mississippi secession delegate from Pontotoc County changed his mind. Robert Watkins Flournoy had been an opponent of secession, a professed Union man. During the convention, he did all within his power to keep the state in the Union, but as post-war biographers of Mississippians during the Civil War era liked to note, when the state seceded, he cast his lot with his people. He organized a military company and went with it to Richmond. Perhaps the length of the journey to the Confederate capital gave Flournoy time to reconsider his actions, but when he arrived, he could not bring himself to bear arms against the United States government and a few days later, resigned his commission and returned home. A strong advocate of the Union his entire life, a biographer wrote that his refusal to fight “required more moral courage than would have been demanded of him at the front.”

The result of the battle, a tactical victory by the Confederacy, convinced the South that despite being numerically outnumbered, southerners were better soldiers. Yankee defeat followed by the chaos of retreat when regular troops found themselves caught up in spectators of duty. See Pontotoc County, Mississippi, Genealogy and History Biographies, Company G, 2nd Mississippi Infantry, Pontotoc County, last accessed 10 December 2012, http://msgw.org/pontotoc/cw/CoGMNOPZ.htm and Rowland, _Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898_, 121-125. Additional information of Company G, 2nd Mississippi Infantry regiment and Hugh Reid Miller can be found at a Pontotoc County, Mississippi genology website, last accessed 16 October 2012, http://msgw.org/pontotoc/cw/CoGMNOPZ.htm. 

58 The information for Andrew Miller was posted on a genealogy website by a Miller ancestor, Bob F. Thompson. The link listed was last accessed in October 2012. http://homepage.mac.com/bfthompson/miller_reid_families/Milreidfam/ps02_380.htm

59 Goodsper, _Memoirs of Mississippi_, Volume 1, p. 741.
the battle proved to the North that victory would take some time. Mississippi secessionists who had cast their vote to begin the war also experienced its first official battle. Fighting alongside his fellow secession delegate Hugh Reid Miller were Charles de la Boulay Fontaine, Thomas P. Young, and John A. Blair of the 2nd Mississippi Infantry. Blair received his first wound at Manassas. Joining the war as a private, he would rise through the ranks to lieutenant colonel. His wound did not deter him from going on to fight at Gettysburg, Reems Station and Petersburg, and his service also included two tenures as a prisoner of war.  

In addition to the men of the 2nd Mississippi Infantry, fellow delegates Jehu A. Orr, Cyrus Briscoe Baldwin, and Marcus D. L. Stephens, a colonel of the 31st Mississippi Infantry, participated in the fighting. In 1862, Judah P. Benjamin commissioned Orr to raise a regiment of which he became colonel and Stephens his lieutenant colonel. Orr commanded through the Mississippi campaigns from 1862-1863 under Generals Van Dorn, Pemberton, and Johnston, until he resigned his commission to take his seat in the Confederate Congress. The colonelcy passed to Stephens who prior to the war was a physician from Calhoun County. Opposed to secession until the last ballot, the former Whig declined a position as assistant surgeon on W. S. Featherston’s staff in the 17th Mississippi Infantry. It seems that Stephens preferred to the life of a soldier to that of a surgeon. He went on to fight in a number of major battles in the Mississippi region throughout the war, including Shiloh, Corinth, Holly Springs, Snyder’s Bluff, Black Bayou, Deer Creek, Baker’s Creek, Vicksburg, Jackson, Brandon, Forest, and New Stanton. When Colonel Orr resigned, Stephens led the regiment to Alabama to join Joseph E. Johnston’s Army under the command of Polk, participating in the skirmishes and battles of the siege of Atlanta as well as the battles of Nashville, where he was wounded in the leg and captured by

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Federal forces. As a result of his wound, the Federals left him for dead in the field. A Federal soldier, a Mr. Hindman from Iowa, found him, wrapped him in a blanket and gave him a fire before his own regiment found him. He stayed between battle lines nursing his wound until he was able to fall back with the army across the Tennessee River and make his way home. He arrived home on January 1, 1865, riding three hundred miles with a broken leg fastened to the horn of his saddle with one of his male slaves walking the road before him and riding behind him across creeks. His sense of duty to his men had been so strong that in 1863, his election to the Mississippi legislature was not enough for him to leave his troops, though it would have prevented his critical wound. The man who had thrown his vote and lot with his people and fought in its first battle against the Union, greeted the surrender at home without a penny to his name.\textsuperscript{61}

Two future Confederate Congressmen joined their fellow secessionists on the field at First Manassas: Albert G. Brown of the 18th Mississippi Infantry and future Confederate Congressman William Dunbar Holder, captain of the 17th Mississippi Infantry. Holder experienced more of the war, including Manassas, Malvern Hill, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Wounded twice, he received his first wound at Malvern Hill and the second at Gettysburg. Arriving in Richmond in 1864 for his first and only term in the Confederate Congress, he represented a very different sort of legislator than those who had served since 1861. The war changed Holder. His war experiences convinced him of the need for a more centralized government that could raise revenue for wartime needs through taxes, increase military strength by arming the enslaved men of the South, and fight a more efficient war through controls over

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\item \footnotesize Goodspeed, \textit{Memoirs of Mississippi}, Volume 2, p. 824-827. For information about individual regiments, see Rowland, \textit{Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898}, 288-294 (31st Mississippi Infantry), and 81-89 (17th Mississippi Infantry).
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transportation. By 1865, his lack of faith in Jefferson Davis and the success of the nation he had once fought for left him no choice but to abandoned his seat and return home.\(^{62}\)

The year of 1862 was a particularly hard year for Mississippians at home and in wartime service. The battles of Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Seven Days, and Malvern Hill claimed the lives of four of the eight delegates who gave their lives during the war, and another delegate would catch typhoid fever in camp and return home to die. Beginning with Fort Donelson in February 1862, the Union won key battles. A number of secessionists participated in the hard Confederate losses at Forts Henry and Donelson, including Samuel J. Gholson, Francis Marion Rogers and Arthur Exum Reynolds. Gholson enlisted as a private and rose to the rank of captain of the 14th Mississippi Infantry, known as the Monroe Volunteers. Wounded at Fort Donelson and his company captured, he would find his way back to the war in time for the battles of Iuka and Corinth later in the year. Rogers would not be as fortunate. A wealthy lawyer, planter, and judge, Rogers was captain of the 14th Mississippi Infantry. He fell in defense of the fort, cheering his men on in battle on February 15, 1862, the first delegate of the secession convention to die in defense of the nation he helped create. His fellow delegate Reynolds escaped the fort with his life, but not his freedom. Reynolds was the Colonel of the 26th Mississippi Infantry, a company he organized. After the Battle of Fort Donelson, he was captured and remained a prisoner of war for six months before being exchanged toward the end of the year. According to his record, he stayed away from combat until rejoining the Army for the Vicksburg campaign in 1863. From the Mississippi campaigns, he was transferred to Virginia in 1864. He participated in the battles of Champion’s Hill, Wilderness, Spotsylvania Courthouse, Hanover Junction, Cold Harbor,

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Gaines Mill and Weldon Railroad. Wounded at the Battle of Weldon Railroad, he was again sent home to Mississippi to recover and paroled at Meridian in 1865.\(^6^3\)

Captain Francis Marion Aldridge of the 15th Mississippi Infantry was a man of hope, though he did not live to see the war’s end. Aldridge was a native of Alabama who received his education at Georgetown College in Kentucky and then moved to Coffeeville, Mississippi to set up a law practice. Aldridge was thirty-seven years old when he was elected a delegate to the Mississippi Secession Convention. Between 1850 and 1860, his practice allowed him to expand his property earnings as well as to buy and own five slaves.\(^6^4\) His career had only just begun before the war intervened. Writing home to his wife on December 4, 1861, from a camp near Monticello, Kentucky, Aldridge expressed a desire to visit his family at home. Camped just a mile or so from the enemy, no one could leave his post and the men were cut off from communications, except for what letters could be obtained by a Knoxville courier, a four-day journey from their current position. Six months had passed since his last letter from home, though he argued that so many events “rapidly crowded together” had prevented him from too much reflection. Despite this, he took the time to express his hope for the future once independence had been won:

\(^6^3\) Information about the 14th and 26th Mississippi Infantry regiments can be found in Rowland, *Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898*, 220-226 and 116-121 respectively. In addition, information for Samuel J. Gholson can be found in Goodspeed, *Memoirs of Mississippi* Volume 1, 787; for Rogers, see regimental history in Rowland; and for Reynolds, Dunbar Rowland, *Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions and Persons* (Atlanta: S. A. Brant 1907), Volume 3, 721.

\(^6^4\) Francis Marion Aldridge, p. 467A, South of the Yalobusha River, Yalobusha, Mississippi; *Seventh Census of the United States*, 1850 (National Archives Microfilm Publication 432, roll 382); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. Francis Marion Aldridge, p. 918, S. E. Beat, Yalobusha, Mississippi; *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860 (National Archives Microfilm Publication 653, roll 594); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. 1860 Schedule 2, Slaves Schedules, S.E. Beat, Yalobusha Country, Mississippi, p 119. (Ancestry.com. 1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules.)
How happy we shall be when the independence of our country is established and peace restored to our domestic circle! I speak of our independence and these facts as a certainty and I think they are. So far we have ever been victorious and if right prevails so we shall ever be.65

Aldridge in 1861 had little reason for despair. Their early victories gave them pride in their military prowess and hope for victory. Yet, the Union did not concede defeat after Confederate victories and called for and received thousands of additional troops. As the armies began to further entrench in their positions, southerners began to come to terms with the full scale of the effort required for southern independence. Aldridge himself experienced intense boredom in camp without skirmishes with the Yankees. He again wrote home on December 13: “For several days we have been in camp, and time hangs heavily on me, I have nothing to read, little to do the work being superintended by Lieutenants.” Aldridge, a captain, did not participate in his regiment’s efforts to erect fortifications and argued in his letter to his wife that the impasse between armies was because both sides knew an attack would result in heavy loss.66

When an attack came on January 19, 1862, Aldridge described a defeat the northern papers called, “Bull Run Jr.,” and added, “It was certainly bad enough, bad enough.”67

The report of the battle of Fishing Creek described the 15th Mississippi Infantry as “struggling with the superior force of the enemy” for an hour, finding themselves flanked and forced to leave their position. In addition it was noted by General Crittenden, “The reputation of the Mississippians for heroism was fully sustained by this regiment. Its loss and killed in wounded, which was far

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65 F.M. Aldridge to My dear Wife, December 4, 1861, Millspring near Monticello, Kentucky. Francis Marion Aldridge Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, Item 13, pages 1, 3, and 4. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, MDAH hereafter.
66 F.M. Aldridge to Lizzie, December 13, 1861, Mill Spring, Kentucky., Francis Marion Aldridge Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, Item 14, pages 1 and 2. MDAH.
67 F.M. Aldridge to Lizzie, January 30, 1862, Jamesboro, Tennessee, Francis Marion Aldridge Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 8, Item 2, page 1. MDAH. The Battle of Fishing Creek or Mill Springs (or Logan’s Cross Roads to the Union) was fought in Wayne and Pulaski Counties, Kentucky in January 1862.
greater than any other regiment, tells sufficiently the story of discipline and courage.” The regiment sustained forty-four men killed and 153 men wounded.68 Aldridge’s letter home spoke of the road from Mill Spring to Monticello “strewn with knapsacks and blankets sufficient to have carpeted the road.” He correctly stated his regiment lost more men, though blamed losses on the “great cowardice” of the Tennessee regiments. In the rush of battle, the regimental flag had been lost after three or four color bearers were shot. While many of his fellow soldiers found their belongings lost behind redrawn battle lines, he had kept his personal letters, but noted a trunk containing his wife’s miniature and that of his children had become “Yankee property.”69

Aldridge’s 15th Regiment of the Mississippi Infantry was also home to fellow delegate William Felix Brantley and future Mississippi Senator Edward C. Walthall. Delegate James H. Edwards’s son was also a part of the regiment.70 Brantley and Walthall would both live till the end of the war and beyond. Walthall entered the Confederate Army as a lieutenant and rose to the rank of major general. After the war, he filled the Senate vacancy created by L. Q. C. Lamar’s resignation. Brantley rose to the rank of Brigadier General. Wounded three times in battle, he saw action at Shiloh, Stone’s River, Chickamauga, the Atlanta Campaign, Franklin and Nashville Campaign, and Carolinas Campaign before he surrendered at the end of the war with Johnston in North Carolina. Aldridge’s letter to his wife on January 30, 1862, related that a Yankee lieutenant colonel took Walthall’s great coat and would send him a new one when the war was closed. His news regarding Brantley was more interesting and spoke to the coming

68 Dunbar Rowland, Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898, 228-234.
69 F.M. Aldridge to Lizzie, January 30, 1862, Jamesboro, Tennessee, Francis Marion Aldridge Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, Item 14, page 2. MDAH.
70 His son would be one of the wounded in the Battle of Fishing Creek, returning to his unit for the Battle of Shiloh. He was present at the Battles of Baton Rouge, Port Hudson, Baker’s Creek; the siege of Jackson; and the Georgia Campaign to Atlanta, where he was captured and taken to Camp Chase and exchanged at the war’s end. Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, Volume 1, p. 688.
realities of the war’s consequences in relation to enslaved persons. Aldridge wrote, “Branley’s boy went on and joined the Federals in service of an Indiana Captain, who sent Brantley word that when the war was over he would leave his negro in Kentucky or some other place.”71 It was common for slaveholders to take a personal servant to war with them, which in some cases worked to their favor in helping procure material goods or news from home as they could pass through lines without interference. Whether Brantley’s male slave left on his own accord or was left with the trunks containing personal goods is unclear. Certainly the Yankee officer’s acknowledgement of the ownership of the man and promise to return him at the war’s end speaks to the belief on both sides that an end would be forthcoming and slavery remain untouched.

Almost four months later, F.M. Aldridge arrived in Corinth, Mississippi, in March 1862 as a part of Albert Sidney Johnston’s retreat from Fort Donelson in mid-February 1862. Johnston united the troops under his command and the reinforcements he received as the newly created Army of the Mississippi, which contained eight Mississippi regiments, including the 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 15th, and 22nd Infantry regiments as well as the 3rd Mississippi Infantry Battalion. Such was a reunion of delegates of the Mississippi Secession convention as well as other Mississippi secessionists unseen again in the war. Samuel Benton barely missed fighting at Shiloh with the 9th Mississippi Infantry, transferring to the 37th (later 34th) Mississippi Infantry regiment, of which he became captain. Including Aldridge, Brantley and Walthall, there is significant evidence that they were joined in battle or supported by James R. Chalmers, John B.

71F.M. Aldridge to Lizzie, January 30, 1862, Jamesboro, Tennessee, Francis Marion Aldridge Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, Item 14, page 2. MDAH.
Deason, John B. Herring, Thomas Lewers, Hamilton Mayson, Edward McGehee, Daniel Henderson Parker, John Jones Thornton, Harvey Washington Walter.\footnote{For individual regimental histories during the battle see Rowland, \textit{Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898}. Harvey Washington Walter was a judge advocate for General Braxton Bragg, a corps commander at the Battle of Shiloh. John B. Deason was nearby in Biloxi, Mississippi, guarding the Mississippi coast. Rowland, \textit{Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898}, from Mississippi Confederate Veterans website, last accessed April 2013, http://www.mississippiscv.org/MS_Units/3rd_MS-INF.htm. After the Corinth campaign Thomas Lewers’s regiment was posted along the Mississippi River, in Washington County, guarding the plantations and advising the commander at Vicksburg through a line of couriers, of the Federal movements on the river. Rowland, \textit{Military History of Mississippi, 1803-1898}, 384-388.}

The first wave of Confederate assaults on Grant’s Union troops did not entirely surprise Federal soldiers on the morning of April 6, 1862, but they were driven back almost to the Tennessee River during a day of hard fighting. Hamilton Mayson fought valiantly, according to post-war accounts. Reinforced by Buell’s men who arrived by river that evening, the Union army checked the Confederate advance and drove the Army back toward Corinth. About two thousand men died in the two-day conflict with more than ten thousand men injured.\footnote{McPherson, \textit{Ordeal by Fire}, 228.} Wounded were William Felix Brantly, Edward McGehee, and John Jones Thornton. Among the dead was F.M. Aldridge. Thomas Dudley Isom, a surgeon of the 17th Mississippi Infantry and secession convention delegate from Lafayette County, helped care for the wounded. The oldest and most distinguished practitioner in Mississippi, Isom was the perfect choice to help open a hospital in Mississippi in March 1862. Following the Battle of Shiloh, he received and treated more than 1500 soldiers from both sides. In the fall and winter of the same year, he was posted in Jackson and Columbus. In 1863, the Confederate Army appointed Isom to its medical board, where he served for the rest of the war. In addition to Isom’s tenure as a surgeon, Waddy Thompson also
saw the horrors of the battle and tried to save lives. He was appointed a surgeon in the Provisional Army of the Confederate States of America in September 1862.

The spring of 1862 also claimed the life of Daniel Henderson Parker. A member of Company E of the 7th Mississippi Infantry, Parker survived the battle of Shiloh only to fall victim to disease. Soldiers were two times more likely to die from diseases attributed to contact with other soldiers and unhealthy camp conditions than from combat wounds. Between measles and mumps as well as typhoid, malaria, and dysentery, a soldier stood to fear bacteria more than the enemy. The details surrounding Parker’s demise are sketchy. After surviving Shiloh, Parker received a twenty-day leave on May 4, 1862, and died at home of typhoid fever, a disease born of camp life caused by ingesting food or water contaminated by infected feces. Doctors at the time knew enough of the disease to keep infected men out of the general population once symptoms became clear, but they could offer little in the way of a cure. Seemingly, Parker had enough sense to avoid the camp hospitals, despite the care attempted by fellow delegates like Isom.74

Better than some, Louisiana-native Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard understood the value of Corinth, Mississippi. The small Mississippi town contained a very important crossover track where the lines of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad and the Mobile and Ohio Railroad meet. In particular, the east-west running Memphis and Charleston Railroad line was the region’s lifeline to the southern Atlantic seaboard. In the minds of Beauregard and other Confederate leaders, the loss of Corinth was second only to that of the Confederate capitol, Richmond. After the Battle of Shiloh, the Confederate army found itself in

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74 Brief and general details about camp life and disease can be found in McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, 385-386. Twenty-first century knowledge about typhoid fever can be found at the enter for Disease Control’s website: http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/typhoid_fever/
retreat, clashing with the Union Army on two subsequent occasions: during the Siege of Corinth from April 29-May 30, 1862, Iuka on September 19, 1862 and the Second Battle of Corinth from October 3-4, 1862. While each were hard fought, they resulted in Union victories and assisted the year’s Union push for control of the Mississippi River.

Among the forces in and around Iuka and Corinth during those battles were a number of secessionists. Some were just beginning their military careers, while others transferred to capitalize on leadership opportunities with new regiments. The 37th Mississippi Infantry was one such unit. Delegates William Henry Haywood Tison and Samuel Heidelberg Terral would serve the regiment as colonel and captain then major respectively. Tison saw action earlier in the war when he organized a company for the 19th Mississippi Infantry, the Jake Thompson guards, named for his friend Jacob Thompson. He was known for his gallantry and described as “brave a man as ever drew a sword. . . . his courage was Spartan. . . . always at the front and dared to lead where any dared to follow. His spare slight figure, erect in the saddle, could always be seen where the battle raged fiercest.”75 His transfer to the 37th Mississippi Infantry allowed him to rise in rank as a colonel, and the unit saw action in the prominent battles of Tennessee and Georgia, including Chattanooga and Chickamauga. His bravery in battle came at the cost of two wounds, received at Resaca and Franklin. His fellow delegate Samuel Heidelberg Terral began his military career in the 37th Mississippi Infantry, enlisting in Company C. His men elected him captain, and he was promoted to major. He was with the regiment in the fights of Iuka, Corinth, Vicksburg, the Atlanta Campaign, Franklin, and Nashville.76

Joining Tison and Terral in the northern Mississippi and central Tennessee campaigns were Samuel Benton and Walter Leak Keirn of Holmes County. Benton avoided the fight at

75 Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, Volume II, 914.
76 Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, Volume II, 888.
Shiloh after his initial twelve month enlistment with the 9th Mississippi Infantry ended. In April 1862, the 34th Mississippi Infantry was organized with Benton as its colonel. Benton commanded his men with great distinction until he was struck in the heart by a piece of shell and had a foot amputated at the Battle of Atlanta in 1864. Six days after the injury, Benton died. His colleague Keirn entered military service in May 1862. A wealthy planter with an estate valued at more than $500,000 in the 1860 U.S. Census, Keirn owned more than 200 slaves. Wounded at Corinth the same year, Keirn’s subsequent military exploits go unrecorded, though he is listed as a captain at Corinth and biographers mention his rank as a major and later lieutenant colonel. After Corinth, Keirn’s regiment went on to serve at Vicksburg, Tupelo, Harrisburg, Concord Church, and unnamed skirmishes in Alabama.77

Still another delegate found his way to battle in 1862. David Wiley Hurst of Amite County raised a company of volunteers and was elected its captain. Opposed to secession but pledged to do the will of the people, Hurst was a former Whig “who at all times was ready with poised lance and upturned visor, declining no challenge, but always in the thickest of the contest.” True to what Hurst’s biographers wrote down for posterity, the 33rd Mississippi Infantry participated in all the heavily contested battles of the western theater, including the battles of Corinth and Vicksburg. At Corinth, Hurst’s horse was shot from under him, and during the fall, Hurst managed to get caught beneath another horse. Disabling him from active service, it seems that Hurst was at a loss for work until a vacancy on the Mississippi Supreme Court opened

in July 1863. In an election to fill the vacancy, Hurst won the vote and filled the position until the war’s end.\textsuperscript{78}

Mississippi secessionists could be found in the eastern theater, fighting for their lives in some of the toughest battles of the war. Delegates Cyrus Briscoe Baldwin of Chickasaw County and William Joseph Eckford of Wayne County lost their lives during the Seven Days Battle and Malvern Hill, respectively. The secession convention’s sole delegate from Pike County, James M. Nelson, saw some of the heaviest fighting in the Eastern Theater as first lieutenant of Company E of the 16th Mississippi Infantry. The regiment reported deaths and wounded from the battles of Cross Keys, Gains Mill, Malvern Hill, Sharpsburg, Fredricksburg, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. In 1865, the regiment surrendered with four officers and sixty-eight men. Lieutenant Colonel James M. Nelson was not among them.\textsuperscript{79}

Joining members of the convention in the Eastern Theater of the war was another new recruit of 1862, former Confederate deputy William Sydney Wilson. In the years just before the war, Wilson was a member of the Mississippi legislature. A native of Maryland who received his education at Washington and Jefferson College, Wilson eventually moved to Mississippi and settled in Port Gibson. Elected to the legislature in 1858, he was a member of the committee that drew up the bill that set up the special elections for the Mississippi Secession Convention. The members of that convention elected him as a delegate to the Provisional Congress, which he resigned from in 1861 when the body of men resolved itself into the Confederate Congress.


Wilson decided his time in government had ended and went to war. He recruited a regiment called the Claiborne Volunteers and became its captain. Later the regiment would become Company F of the 2nd Mississippi Battalion, which elected Wilson as a major. Wilson fought in the Battle of Seven Pines and Antietam, where he received a mortal wound and died.  

From 1862-1864, an almost imperceptible change occurred in many thought processes of a number of secessionists and everyday Mississippians. Watching men die while remaining behind desks, leading men in battle, or confronting lists of wounded changed the way people thought about the meaning and consequences of the war they began and their role within it. Some men left the war disillusioned, using their wartime experience to affect change and mitigate the affects of war on the public. The men who joined the fight in this period did so with renewed vigor and became some of its longest-serving soldiers and patriots. William Sydney Wilson’s move from government to military service seems strange given the intensity of fighting, though he was not alone in his desire to serve the Confederacy. The president of the Mississippi Secession Convention joined the war in 1862, perhaps less because of bravery than that he failed to qualify for an exemption. William Taylor Sullivan Barry had a plantation in Sunflower County, but he was more of a lawyer than a planter. He raised the 35th Mississippi Infantry regiment and became its colonel, which seemed to allow him to avoid the life of a private in the ranks. He could not avoid battle. His regiment participated in all the major conflicts against Grant’s Army and in defense of Vicksburg. He marched and fought in the Georgia campaigns, where he was wounded at the Battle of Altoona Pass. He rejoined his regiment in Mobile, where he was captured in the assault on Fort Blakely on April 9, 1865. Reluctant to join,

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his battle experience converted him into a true defender of the South, leaving him quite heartbroken at the war’s end.  

Unlike Barry, Thomas Alexander Marshall never went to war. At the time of the Mississippi Secession Convention, Marshall was forty-eight-years-old. He was an early settler to Mississippi, coming to set up his Vicksburg legal practice in 1836. He was a solid Whig, even when his party collapsed, and was elected to the convention as a Union man. He fought secession to the end, voting against the ordinance. He only signed the document when secession was an accomplished fact and did nothing further to support the Confederate cause. War was inescapable, and there is reason to assume that the Vicksburg native left town for the Siege, which lasted from May 18-July 4, 1863. After the city fell, General Grant invited the Vicksburg man back to the city for a meeting. Grant knew and understood Marshall could use his influence as a respected man in Mississippi to help bring about the war’s end. Appointed postmaster of Vicksburg on March 8, 1864, Marshall spent the remainder of the war in service to the Union he felt reluctant to destroy in 1861.

John Tillman Lamkin of Pike County was not a secessionist, but he became part of the Confederate government late in the war as a result of a change in the mindsets of Mississippi residents. Unlike most of his fellow Confederate Congressmen, he opposed secession from the beginning. When he lost his early war bid for Congress, he promptly went to war because he felt a duty to support his state. He enlisted in the Holmesville Guards in 1862, which became Company E of the 33rd Mississippi Infantry. Elected to the position of captain, he resigned due to health reasons in 1863. By this point in the war, the residents of the Piney Woods area seem to

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81 Lynch, Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 297, and Rowland, Mississippi: comprising sketches of counties towns, events, institutions, and persons, 789.
82 Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi Volume II, 399.
have had enough of war and refused to reelect their incumbent congressman, John Jones McRae. Lamkin won the election and began a personal campaign with the halls of the Confederate government to oppose Davis administration proposals, refusing to give new powers to the executive. He singlehandedly used his seat to soften the impact of war on civilian front, urging military exemptions, payment for property seized, and an end to the destruction of property before enemy seizure. He voted for every peace resolution and finally abandoned his seat before the war’s end. Despite losing much of own fortune in war and surviving it by only five years, Lamkin defined a single man’s quest to fight the war on his own terms, using the system against itself if necessary.\textsuperscript{83}

While Lamkin pointed out the flaws of the Confederate government’s handling of the war effort, the Confederacy had its share of champions who tried everything in their power to make the nation succeed. A number of secessionists served the entire war trying to win independence without sacrificing the fundamental principles, values, and vision for which they believed the Confederacy was created. Benjamin King, Jeremiah Watkins Clapp, J. A. Orr, James Phelan, and Israel Victor Welch served in the Mississippi or Confederate legislatures. Despite the war, politics remained contentious. When Walker Brooke a delegate to the Provisional Congress was not elected to the Confederate Congress in 1862, F. M. Aldridge, in a letter to his wife at home, protested loudly about current political events from the field:

We heard with pain and mortification of the defeat of Brooke by for the Senate. My heart sank within me, Brooke a man of [illegible] patriotism and experience, was slaughtered for a new man, a man whose public duties and age did not keep him at home, and why? Because Brooke had been a Whig but had acted nobly as every man conceded. If ostracism and the corruption of the government exhibits itself even in revolution, what are we to hope for in the future? “Had been a Whig”!! Who in the army have men promptly responded to their country’s necessity? Is friendship and brotherhood not to be created by a war that renders life valuable or desirable? I see many men depressed as

\textsuperscript{83} Warner and Yearns, \textit{Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress}, 145-146.
myself by this event. I have no personal feeling, but Brooke as I know acted nobly and ought not to have been slaughtered. Had I been in the Legislature [Albert G.] Brown and Brooke would have received my ardent and cordial support, and would have felt ashamed of myself had I felt a momentary estrangement to Brown because he was a democrat. Upon this feeling I had as soon war as upon Lincolnism and risk all, when Lincolnism is defeated. But away with this.

In the midst of war, secessionists cared deeply about politics at home. The hope and promise of the new nation depended upon southern men working together, rather through the ostracism and corruption Aldridge noted upon Brooke’s loss. War built friendships and a new brotherhood, broadening existing bonds and giving purpose to the Confederate nation. In short, creating a history with disinterested men willing to put aside their differences to defeat Lincolnism and build a nation.84

Pride did strange things to men who tried to do the right thing in war and government during the war, as James Lusk Alcorn found out first hand. Alcorn, appointed as one of four brigadier generals by the Mississippi secession convention, spent very little of the war in this capacity. Upon his inauguration, Davis promptly and traditionally selected men for his cabinet from within the Democratic Party. As Alcorn and many other Whigs watched with some trepidation realizing that there was no real place for them in the Confederate government despite their support of secession, Alcorn more now than his Democratic compatriots was a ‘man without a country’ in this period85 Alcorn himself expressed a great deal of frustration with political events, but also a feeling of helplessness, with the knowledge of his ability and desire, not only to lead, but also to fight.

Alcorn’s lack of service was not due to lack of trying. The men in Alcorn’s family had served in the Revolutionary War, as well as the War of 1812, and an anxious Alcorn desired to

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84 F.M. Aldridge to Lizzie, December 13, 1861, Mill Spring, Kentucky. Francis Marion Aldridge Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 7, Item 14, pages 6 and 7. MDAH. Emphasis in original.
85 Swift, Unpublished biography of James Lusk Alcorn, Alcorn Family Papers, MDAH, 16.
respond to his country’s call. In the record of Jefferson Davis’s correspondence, Davis never acted on the receipt of two letters detailing Alcorn’s intent and interest to serve the Confederacy. The first was a letter from Alcorn to Davis, dated April 17, 1861. Alcorn offered his service to Davis as a soldier or civilian “in high or low position,” and stated that Davis was aware of his status “in the fossil remains of the [Mexican-American War] Army of the Mississippi and as a businessman.” Davis refusal to grant Alcorn the commission, despite the Secession Convention’s appointment, caused Alcorn great embarrassment. Rather than write a second personal letter, he enlisted the help of a friend.

The second letter, dated August 5, 1861, written to Davis by Thomas J. Wharton, a Democratic and Attorney General of Mississippi, betrayed a seeming impatience on Alcorn’s part. Writing on Alcorn’s behalf, Wharton spoke for the appointment of Alcorn, despite Alcorn’s political stance, praising Alcorn for “his abilities and devotion to the South.” Again, the note reminded Davis of the fact that at the Mississippi secession convention, Alcorn’s political enemies had so trusted his character as to appoint him brigadier general of Mississippi forces.

Despite a silent Davis and refusals of appointments by Mississippi governor Pettus, Alcorn raised a command of five thousand men on the state level and formed the first military camp in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Alcorn’s wartime letters to his wife are some of the most

86 Swift, Unpublished biography of James Lusk Alcorn, MDAH, 3-4.
90 Alcorn and Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 2. MDAH. Hopkinsville was a Confederate training camp and recruiting station, created with the idea that Kentuckians were sympathetic to the Confederate cause. Disease, specifically measles, plagued the camp as well as unsanitary conditions. More than 300 men died at the camp between 1861-1862. Buried in a potter’s field, the men who died at Hopkinsville were exhumed and reburied in a cemetery dedicated to their memory complete with a monument, dedicated in 1887. It is for this monument which Alcorn pens remembrances of the camp mentioned below. In the present day, the Alcorn Camp
frank existing in the Alcorn collection. Amelia and Alcorn’s letters amount to what little evidence that is available as to Alcorn’s war exploits and betray a warm and loving relationship as well as a strong confidence concerning his innermost thoughts and feelings of the secession crisis, the Davis administration, and the war.

On October 5, 1861, Amelia Walton Glover Alcorn received a letter from her husband, affectionately signed “Indian,” expressing Alcorn’s feelings of frustration as well as of details concerning camp life in Hopkinsville. Alcorn’s frustration came from the fact that his state service could not be translated into a national appointment. Concerning his appointment from Davis, Alcorn mentioned to Amelia that he expected to be appointed brigadier general of the Confederate army within two weeks of that time and insisted “I will not accept a position below that, I am now in command of this portion of the state.” Alcorn’s language acknowledged that he was sure of his position in the field and felt that Davis and the administration had little choice but to give him the appointment because he already held command.

It is hard to discern how much of the actual war Alcorn saw during his journey to and time in Kentucky. To his wife he wrote of his hard journey in which they labored over a rough broken country and slept on the ground each night with little to eat. He mentioned to Amelia that two men in his cavalry were killed in a skirmish, and noted that their party killed one man and took two prisoners. All of this, according to his letter, occurred a short distance from him, but that he had not been an actual witness.

Cemetery bears the name of its supervisor. See William Meacham’s article “Confederate Tragedy at Hopkinsville and Missing Graves, last accessed, 10 December 2012, http://freepages.military.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wmeacham/confedtr.htm

91 James Lusk Alcorn Letter, October 5, 1861, to his wife, Z/2116.000: Alcorn (James Lusk) Letter, MDAH.
92 James Lusk Alcorn Letter, October 5, 1861, to his wife, Z/2116.000: Alcorn (James Lusk) Letter, MDAH.
In the October 1861 letter, Alcorn mentioned two episodes in which he discussed war pageantry. Honor and pride seemed to swell from his pen as he detailed to his wife how the eager ladies of Hopkinsville met his and General Simon Bolivar Buckner’s arrival with an ovation in the main streets. Alcorn mentioned that a multitude of men and women cheered and desired to shake his hand, yet he attempted to muffle this activity, trying to voice his displeasure or dislike of the people’s actions stating to his wife that he was detained perhaps an hour by the throngs. A few paragraphs later in the letter, Alcorn wrote of his arduous labors because of officers parading about the streets in their uniforms instead of attending to important camp work. Alcorn’s business-like tone expressed a feeling to the reader, and perhaps to his wife, of being busy working for the cause in which he had allowed himself to be carried into. At the same time, Alcorn seemed to believe that men existed in the movement that were more about posture, much like his own officers, and considered to his wife that, “I sometimes wish they would fall into the hands of the enemy, or would strut themselves to death.”

In September 1861, Grant threatened Paducah and Smithland, but before Alcorn’s men could enter a fray, the camp experienced an outbreak of measles, leaving Alcorn unable to send assistance when General Buckner called on Alcorn to send forces to help defend Fort Donelson and to report on enemy movements. When news came that first President Davis and then Mississippi governor John J. Pettus refused to approve Alcorn’s appointment, a loyal Alcorn then resolved that, “My service as brigadier-general of Mississippi is due that State only, if the

93 Swift, Unpublished biography of James Lusk Alcorn, James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, MDAH, 14.
Confederate Government wished me I would be appointed. This not being done, I am an intruder. My self respect, my own honor, is dearer to me than country or life itself.”

Alcorn’s brigade disbanded in February 1862, and he returned to Mississippi, retired from active duty and returned home to his plantation, Mound Place. Though he remained on the Mississippi Register of Commissions as an officer, Alcorn’s move at once ended his brief and disillusioned brush with war and placed him in prime position to serve himself, not so much his country. Alcorn remembered his time in Hopkinsville with, in his words, a sordid but melancholy pleasure.

Following the war, in a letter to a committee of invitation concerned with the unveiling of the Confederate monument at Hopkinsville, Alcorn wrote a letter to the committee concerning his time there. He reminded the committee that his service in Hopkinsville was part of his early life, distancing himself from his time in the war, but at the same time asserted his patriotism toward his region and to the people. He spoke with warmth about the establishment of the first Confederate camp and the friendships made during his time there. Hopkinsville also held tragic memories for Alcorn, and it was in Hopkinsville where Alcorn said he had learned the lessons of war and the failed cause of the Confederacy in the death of two of his sons. In his letter Alcorn related his personal ties to the city, but also the personal loss experienced because of his actions, and that of his fellow Confederates, in their secession experience. The following words excerpted from his letter express both sorrow as well as tragic patriotism:

It was at Hopkinsville, that my only two boys, with their bright eyes and girlish faces came to join me, stepping from their cradles into the ranks as soldiers, to do their share in

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95 Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn*, 60.
96 Record of Alcorn’s sons’ deaths were mentioned by Alcorn in this quote, but no other historian or book, including Rainwater’s transcription of letters, made note of them.
the struggle that lay before us. Alas! They were doomed sacrificial offerings to the Confederate cause. Their bodies were afterward brought home to me, broken fragments of a cruel war, and now, near by me, side by side, they sleep, in the garden of my dead! Each day I look upon the cold marble that marks their graves, sad memories of Hopkinsville crown my soul.

Already beyond my three score years and ten, my strong and vigorous manhood gone, standing by the graves of my own Confederate dead, how could I be other than in spirit with you, at a place so sacred to me, when there you unveil a monument in the memory of the Confederate dead? Secession was a grave mistake! We lost the cause for which we fought, but we lost not all, for a Government was saved.  

Alcorn’s words for secession and war were as harsh as they were angry. He couched his justification for secession’s futility in the death of his sons. In sharing this intimate moment, Alcorn created a personal definition of his time as a secessionist. His eleventh-hour support for secession proved hollow when he failed to secure a commission. His sons served in his stead and died. In this manner, Alcorn shared with his countryment the experience of death and destruction.

With no ability to assist the South in its political or military endeavors to fight the Union, Alcorn turned to the lucrative trade in black market cotton throughout the rest of the war. In his letters to his wife, one can witness a changed man, one who automatically shifted blame for the war’s turn of events, not so much on the futility of the secessionist cause, but on the men who usurped the ability to assist their region from able men like himself. Alcorn sent Amelia and their younger children to her parent’s home, Rosemount, in Eutaw, Alabama, so as to keep his family safe from harm in Mississippi. Alcorn also used his connection to his wife in Alabama as a safe place to send goods and money earned through his cotton sales and other ventures.

Though his plantation, Mound Place, remained intact though largely uncultivated, Alcorn emerged at the end of the war with sufficient capital to buy and create a new plantation to start

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97 Louisville Courier, newspaper fragment, James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 9, n.d., MDAH.
over—unlike many secessionists and Confederates. Carefully positioning himself as a secessionist without ties to the Davis administration or any substantial military service to fight the Union, Alcorn used his dealings in the black market to restore his war losses and managed to add to his material possessions. By the end of his lifetime, Alcorn owned about 12,000 acres of land in the Mississippi Delta, and built a new home and plantation which he called the Eagle’s Nest.”

He was also able to prevent his father-in-law’s plantation from being sold for taxes in the immediate postwar.

Letters to Amelia helped to chronicle most of Alcorn’s whereabouts and concerns from 1862-1865. Following his attempts to rise to the occasion in the Confederate war effort, Alcorn’s mood shifted to a decisively negative tone on all things concerning the hope for an independent Confederate nation. From 1862-1865, Alcorn concerned himself with the affairs of his black market trade in cotton. This activity distinctively countered his initial statement accompanying his affirmation of secession in terms of lending service to the cause. As Union troops moved into Mississippi, Alcorn continued in his relations to both Confederates and Federals alike. Alcorn showed loyalty to the South, family, land, and the Delta by refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the Union during the war.

Alcorn’s war experience was nothing less than a precarious balancing act between his knowledge, and at times belief, that the South’s cause was lost. As a reluctant secessionist, Alcorn believed that the South’s betrayal of itself, in the form of Davis and his Democratic party, tainted the pure motives of secession in 1860. Though he never stated in his letters that he felt things might have been different if men like himself had been allowed to give counsel or aid to

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the Confederate cause, one cannot help but assume that is the meaning behind many of Alcorn’s frustrations and anger, directed at Davis and Democrats, and put into words to his wife.

His letters in 1862 detailed the very dangerous trade in which he was engaged. Writing to Amelia on November 25, 1862, Alcorn wrote,

I have had quite a time of it since you left. I have hauled my cotton mostly at night, and I suppose I have slept a dozen nights on the banks of the Mississippi River. I have often been reminded of Dick Hatterick in Scott’s Guy Mannering as I awaited the arrival of the smuggler, when I caught the sound of his muffled oar or heard the soft tread of his footsteps as he cautiously approached the appointed place of rendezvous. The smuggling business has now become popular and people are beginning to openly trade.101

In another letter of December 18, 1862, Alcorn wrote that, “I have been very busy hiding & selling my cotton.”102 Alcorn’s black market trade required him to not only sleep out in the open and take caution in his dealings, but he had to secure a precarious balance concerning his appearance—not only to local southerners, but also to Federal troops—both of which patrolled the area looking for contraband trade or assistance to the enemy.

Generally Alcorn kept good relations with the Federal troops he met, and his close friends were men disenchanted with the Confederate war effort. Only in one letter, that of November 25, 1862, did Alcorn relate to Amelia about the “accursed Yankees,” but on the whole, it was Alcorn who understood Federal troops’ position as an army to suppress rebellion, and it seemed a talent of Alcorn’s to persuade Yankees to view his own situation with as much sympathy that could be allowed.103 On one occasion, Alcorn was taken prisoner by Federal troops and then released. Alcorn’s fear, as related to Amelia, was not for his own life, but that of the safety of his cotton, which he secured through an early alarm despite his arrest. His treatment at the hands of Federal troops is bizarre, but expected when one considered Alcorn’s lack of

position in the Confederacy and his apparent use to Federal troops. To Amelia he related that after being force-marched at bayonet tip to Helena:

I had made the acquaintance of the higher officers, and had been introduced to the very pretty and intelligent wife of the surgeon and I had quite a pleasant time of it and was released and my horse returned, and I was treated with marked respect.¹⁰⁴

On another occasion upon meeting Federals, Alcorn remarked to Amelia, “Among the Feds I have made many agreeable acquaintances. I don’t think they will disturb me. All appear to like me, and it is said I have great influence with them; they treat me with respect.”¹⁰⁵ In another letter addressed to Amelia on March 16, 1863, Alcorn wrote to Amelia with warmth concerning the nickname given him and his friend Pettit, “the old Secesh Chief” of Alcorn, and “a sort of Union Man,” of Pettit.¹⁰⁶ Alcorn made these comments in connection with his attempts to salvage what was left of local crops, hogs and cattle, as well as any semblance of everyday life. He mentioned that his friend Pettit “soft talked” the Yankees, and that few Yankees believed Pettit’s Union sentiment and continued to plunder him. While Alcorn mentions that he neither engaged in soft talk nor was on the receiving end of Yankee pillaging when he was in acquaintance with possible plunderers, Alcorn accepted conditions with little complaint. Unlike many hard-liners, Alcorn’s letters to his wife are devoid of anti-Yankee sentiment, only a gracious retelling of events and a hint of Alcorn’s realism can be found. That he had received a nickname from the Yankees suggested his affiliation with them in his cotton dealings, Alcorn convincingly seems to slide into a neutral character and position in his wartime dealings with northerners.¹⁰⁷

Alcorn, as an “old secesh chief,” continued to have interest in his property, not only his physical plantation but also the slaves who worked upon them. As a planter, Alcorn was a pro-slavery advocate, but at the same time, upon mention of their slaves to Amelia, he does not express much surprise, only a hard exacting of the behavior of his and other men’s slaves during the course of the war. Alcorn’s letter to Amelia on November 25, 1862, evidenced a necessary tone of disappointment concerning the behavior of slaves, but Alcorn, in his support for Union, had already admitted to his countrymen that slavery was at more of a risk through war, than through peace. Of his plantation and slaves in the way of a Yankee flanking move Alcorn wrote:

I fear for poor Mound Place when the time comes. I am now preparing to return to my camp . . . . I will remain at home with the negroes and try to keep them from denuding my place. . . . I have seen most of the negroes since you left. Our friend Abe I don’t think is doing as well heretofore. Several expressed a wish to return home, but I did not urge it. I could have induced many to return had I promised not to move them to Alabama. This I would not promise. I will not lie to my slaves. I knew if I kept them or attempted to keep them here they would do me some mischief. Old man Warren’s negroes have served him as mine served me. All have returned to the Yankees who had previously left him . . . . The negroes in the county are thoroughly demoralized and are no longer of any practical value to this vicinity.108

By December 18, 1862, Alcorn reported that Yankees stole their slaves and that many homes and plantations, including his own, had been burned and destroyed.109 In a diary entry from 1863, Alcorn wrote about his slave Hadley who ran away, remarking that if he were in a similar position, he would have done the same thing.110

Alcorn’s remarks about his slaves portray him as a seemingly concerned master—writing to his wife about his slaves’ well-being and whereabouts. His statements concerning the use of slaves in the vicinity spoke to the confusion of the period between 1862-1863, as northern troops

110 Alcorn journal entry for 1863, James Lusk Alcorn and Family Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Journals, MDAH.
moved into the region and southern slaves defected from plantations in droves. Whether Alcorn was familiar with the war orders coming from Washington concerning the seizure of slaves as contraband of war, it is obvious that by 1862 Alcorn himself either had other ways of securing his cotton, or he was just realistic enough to understand the political and social climate.

Besides Alcorn’s acknowledgement that slavery in Mississippi began crumbling in 1862, his letters also betray an extremely pessimistic stance concerning the Confederate cause. As early as 1862, Alcorn wrote home to Amelia that,

As to the cause of the South, it is lost, and it only remains to be seen how long the South will hold out, and to what a condition of suffering they will be brought. We will hope for the best, but let us prepare for the worst.  

Preparing for the worst meant investing in greenbacks. Alcorn’s letters revealed that he placed a great deal of faith in the fact that the North would win simply by his sale of cotton for Union currency.

On at least two occasions in 1862, Alcorn alluded to the devalued Confederate currency. In his letter to Amelia on November 25, 1862, Alcorn wrote that along with sundry food items, he sent more than a thousand dollars in Federal money, two thousand dollars in gold, and one thousand dollars in Confederate money. Though he stated that, “I send the larger note in Federal money for the reason that I have more of it than I wish,” Alcorn suggested that the Confederate money be used for change. Alcorn, in a rather humorous or at least kind gesture to his wife, sent her fifty cent and twenty-five cent pieces so that he could show her the “Lincoln postoffice money.”

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113 Postoffice money was legal tender, issued as fractional currency during the Civil War because of a shortage of coins. It was called postage currency because it had printed reproductions of current stamps, and the notes had perforated edges like stamps. For more about fractional
In the same letter, Alcorn alluded to the fact that he sold his cotton for greenbacks, which he used to buy Confederate money by the sacks full at from thirty to forty cents in the dollar. The only reason that Alcorn might have made this switch from greenbacks to Confederate money might have been to continue to make legitimate transactions between himself and other southerners, in the hopes of distracting men from the actual source of his income or give hints to his black market dealing. With this money, Alcorn stated, “I have thought about buying ten or fifteen thousand dollars worth and investing in a good piece of land in Green (Alabama).”\(^{114}\) Asking his wife if she felt this purchase of land would pay for their endeavors, Alcorn related that he knew paper money was bound to depreciate. In such a case, Alcorn hoped to smuggle out three to four thousand dollars in gold, so as to keep him going throughout the war.

By 1863, Alcorn continued his pessimistic mood concerning the war effort. Alcorn’s letter dated on March 16 of that year, spoke openly about his thoughts on the war claiming, “I sought to avoid this terrible war, but the wild mania had seized upon the passions of the southern people. When I would point them to coming danger, they would laugh in derision . . . . Now the Yankees are here, and the Confederates make but feeble and it appears to me cowardly resistance.”\(^{115}\) Alcorn felt that his form of resistance, smuggling cotton before the North could burn it, was at least helping himself and others like him. The tone in his words suggested that Mississippians and southerners in general might have had other options if they had just listened to himself or others like him. Alcorn saw his counsel and aid to the Confederate cause rebuffed, and thereby believed that the South was not fighting with anything close to its full potential because valuable resources had been discounted due to Davis’s petty politics.

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\(^{115}\) Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn*, 57.
Alcorn, like many southerners, cherished a hope that the war only had to go on long enough to incite a northern backlash. At the time of his letter, the Union had experienced some of the worst losses of the war, but the North had also emancipated the South’s slaves and allowed black men to enlist and fight in the Union Army. To Amelia, he confided that his hope had vanished. Though Alcorn did not state specific as to why his hope changed, the northern army’s threat to capture Vicksburg probably weighed heavily upon his mind. It would have been about this time, and a bit beyond, that Sherman laid waste to Alcorn’s beloved levees, in the hope of flooding the area to assist in a nautical capture of Vicksburg. To his wife he wrote of his fears that the North was only “more united and determined on our destruction.”

The blame for the South’s failure, according to Alcorn, belonged squarely on the shoulders of Jefferson Davis. Alcorn’s letter of March 16, 1863, as mentioned above, was a particularly dismal letter. His words read like a lament, as if one can actually imagine Alcorn uttering them in some sort of half hysterical moment. Recalling his prediction of the war’s cause, Alcorn seemed nothing short of depressed as he confided to Amelia his belief that “the South is doomed unless some miracle in the way of military achievement is wrought on our behalf.” Eager to see her because he has not heard a word from her for some time, and with the knowledge that she probably thinks he is dead, Alcorn tried to calm her worries and concerns for the future by adding:

I am seeing to place you in means to weather the storm. I have succeeded somewhat and still seek to make matters better. Still, where our future lies I know not. I think of Canada at the present; we must go where we can educate our children. Our negroes will soon be ashes in our hands, our lands valueless without them.”

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Alcorn’s fears were premature as major battles of the war still remained to be fought in March 1863, but his fears support recent recenterings of military and social history that place more attention on how the war in the west and emancipation helped precipitate the Confederacy’s fall. Gettysburg and Vicksburg had yet to occur, and he was already making plans to move to Canada.

The March 16 letter seemed to be Alcorn’s sudden epiphany concerning the horror-filled world he lived in. Besides the vanishing hope of unpopular public opinion swaying northerners to discontinue their war efforts, Alcorn focused all of his anger on who was, in his opinion, the major cause of the South’s troubles: Jefferson Davis and his Democratic-run administration and government. Blaming the Democratic party for the ruin caused him, Alcorn told Amelia that he hoped that the solace to his poverty would be his ability to witness Democratic tears of lamentation. For Davis, Alcorn saved the greatest amount of his anger, stating:

They [Democrats] doubtless boast where you are yet but they will smell sulfur before another year rolls by, then they can sing paens of praise to their demigod Jeff Davis— the miserable, stupid, one-eyed, dyspeptic, arrogant tyrant who now occupies his cushioned seat at Richmond, draws his twenty-five thousand a year, and boasts of the future grandeur of the country he has ruined, the soil which he has made wet with the tears of widows & orphans and the land which he has bathed in the blood of a people once free, but now enslaved. Oh, let me live to see him damned! And sunk into the lowest hell.\(^{118}\)

Once unleashed, Alcorn’s tirades grew as the war moved forward. Obviously Alcorn was not alone in his thoughts, and his choice of personal insults leave for posterity little question about his animosity toward Davis. Alcorn suggested that if others had been in charge, things might have been different, but because Democrats dominated the independence movement, any hope of southern unity, and thereby victory, were rightly described by Alcorn to be futile.

Beginning in 1863, Alcorn manipulated war disenchantment into political gain as Whigs began returning to office in Mississippi, even before the war was over. The people of Mississippi

\(^{118}\) Rainwater, *Letters of James Lusk Alcorn*, 204.
began turning to the only other viable option to the Democratic Party, the remaining Whigs. In 1863, Mississippians chose Charles Clark, an ex-Confederate general and secessionist Whig, for the governor’s chair. Reelected to the state legislature by the people of Coahoma County, Alcorn arrived in Columbia for the convention of the year’s legislative session. Though he failed in his attempt to become speaker of the Mississippi house, Alcorn found a place on the Ways and Means Committee as a platform to express his views on Davis and the prosecution of the war. Alcorn’s views were not unpopular, and on numerous occasions he was asked to speak before the legislature.

Alcorn began a series of statements in 1863 concerning secession that he continued to build upon as the progress of the war and the success of Union forces gave him greater confidence. When Abraham Lincoln issued the Proclamation of Amnesty in 1863, secession changed for many southerners from being a matter of principle at the beginning of the war, to a matter of life or death.\(^\text{119}\) While many Mississippians, including Judge William L. Sharkey, took the initial oath of allegiance in 1863 to avoid recriminations as well as receive the right of passage to Memphis, Alcorn refused the oath in April 1863.

With his refusal to swear an oath of allegiance, Alcorn shifted his definition of secession. Stating that the South had placed its cause on the “false ground” of slavery, Alcorn insisted it was not slavery exclusively that the South was fighting for but the higher purpose of states rights.\(^\text{120}\) True to his pro-slavery leanings and in the aftermath of the Emancipation Proclamation, Alcorn desired to have the slavery question put forth to a foreign nation in an attempt to postpone emancipation for twenty years. If the world was against slavery, then the South would have to decide to take on not only the North, but also the whole world.

A mass of confusion, Alcorn even signed on as a private in the home guard for thirty days in an attempt to prevent the escape of deserters and slaves from Coahoma, Bolivar, and Washington counties. This service contradicted his letters to his wife concerning his disillusion with the Confederate cause, but it also ran parallel to his fears concerning his property and the threat of southern soldiers. To his wife he expressed the concerns for southern citizens at the hands of Confederate deserters and soldiers:

Besides the Yankee, the poor citizen has another enemy to contend with who is less ostentatious but not less to be feared on their path. This is the southern soldier. He is likely to be compounded with his officer, and has procured permission to come to the bottom, to put a check to this demoralizing cotton trade. He has with him ten or twenty men... whose features are sharpened by hunger, whose eye glares with murder, and whose dress clasped with belt and pistol would establish him as a brigand. The poor citizen cuts new roads for his team and makes his journey to and from the river in the night time, but the gaunt brigand pounces upon the wagon—either with cotton going or goods returning—reads his orders—(pistol in hand)—to confiscate the property and make the victim a prisoner. The poor trembling citizen knows well what this means. He offers an appeal for sympathy. The soldier compresses his thin lips, points to his rags, his jaded animal, his long service & suffering, his lack of pay, then speaks of his own wife and little ones; whose faces have not been seen for months & years; and bids the citizen know his heart is now steeled against tears, and closed against compassion. But he rejoins, “I am not here to confiscate; I am here for myself; I wish clothes & money—one or both—the tenth of what you convey; I claim some pay up I cannot delay; by my good pistol I extort my dues; for four years I have been taught to live this way.” The language is plain, the adjustment is made, the soldiers bids goodbye, and citizen turns to the right or left, and plunges deep into wood and cane, to avoid some comrade brigand.121

Whether the episode was one that Alcorn experienced personally during his cotton trade activity, the story he related to his wife spoke of a demoralization of all southerners—soldier and citizen—forced by conditions to live in desperate circumstances, and deprived of their morals and values by the ravages of war. One should note that no mention of Yankees was made during the episode, all blame seemed to rest on the South and the conditions which secession and independence created.

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Alcorn made one final move of sheer desperation to help his besieged land, and one has to wonder that even though the opportunity came at the eleventh hour, Alcorn was willing to lend his help if just to say that he had answered when the Confederacy finally sought his council. Alcorn obviously tried to assist his flailing Confederate cause by appealing to the state legislature in an appearance before that body in March 1865. Alcorn suggested that Mississippi accept the inevitable end to the institution of slavery. He conceded now, two years after his suggestion of an appeal to the world on the subject of slavery, that the world now stood against slavery and that, if Mississippi’s legislature should declare slaves free after twenty years, they might receive some sympathy from abroad. In yet another last minute appeal, he advocated, like Robert E. Lee and Judah P. Benjamin, that Mississippi should recruit black men into the military.

By 1865, the government of the Confederacy embraced a number of desperate efforts, not the least of these was allowing black men to fight in the Confederate army. Alcorn’s final letter to his wife on May 16, 1865, came on the heels of Lee’s April 9 surrender at Appomattox and Abraham Lincoln’s assassination on April 14. Alcorn recounted for Amelia that a Confederate officer delivered a letter to Alcorn asking for counsel. Alcorn seemed to have laughed at the very idea that his views had finally gained popularity in the last hour of the Confederacy’s lifespan. It was at this moment that Alcorn returned to the idea of secession stating:

We seceded, said we had the right; Yankees denied this; said we were still in the Union and there we should remain, on this we fought; they whipped; we yield; and ever have been in the Union; secession was a nullity. We will now take the oath to support the Constitution and laws of the United States; elect our senators and representatives; claim that we have our slaves until slavery is abolished and upon the question of amending the Constitution for its prohibition Mississippi has a vote. . . . See the storm subside; the bow of promise rests upon its bosom! Oh how the heart rises and swells as I contemplate the beacon of peace.  

From this passage, one would be hard pressed not to wonder what the United States would have been had reconstruction gone according to Alcorn’s vision. Alcorn’s view that the South, despite secession, possessed in losing the fight, the ability to negotiate or have a say in slavery’s continuance—despite the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment, or perhaps in ignorance of it—says that Alcorn was nothing but greatly optimistic in the good and forgiving nature of the Union.

That Alcorn was not a fan of secession was known, but his actions during the Civil War revealed a man who obviously never fully converted to secession or the idea of a Southern Confederacy. While some thirty men did not participate in war, government or the bench during the war, it is not an entirely safe bet that they all did so maliciously or with self-preservation in mind. William Denson was a Baptist minister and considered himself a planter, despite only owning seven slaves in the 1860 U.S. Census. Denson founded Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church and served as pastor there until 1860. It seems he took his exemption as a member of clergy rather than fight, as he served as pastor for various churches throughout the war including Pisgah, Brandon, Madisonville, Canton, Fannin, Jerusalem and Sharon.123 A number of men were too old for service, choosing to outfit companies or assist materially in whatever way they could. Such men included Joel H.H. Berry, Arthur B. Bullard, Malachai Crawford Cummings, Miles Hill McGehee, F.C. Semmes, and Caleb White Taylor. Orlando Davis did not choose his lot in the war. War arrived on his front porch—often. His family faced great loss when Union troops stayed on his land, destroyed his fences, took his hogs and cattle, even his blankets during the 61 times Federals stopped through Ripley.124 When material goods good not be found, some

123 Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church (Rankin Miss.) Records, Z 2047.000, finding aid. MDAH. http://mdah.state.ms.us/manuscripts/z2047.html
124 Rowland, Mississippi, 206.
secessionists sent their sons, including Wright Walker Bonds, James H. Edwards, and Jacob S. Yerger. Yerger alone sent four sons to battle, but only three returned.

Despite the worst, hope remained until the bitter end. No one wants to be the last man killed in any war—losing or winning. Such deaths caused even their contemporaries to pause and notice the ironies that seem to occur more at the end of struggles, especially in memories of the Civil War. In the fighting at Bentonville, North Carolina, on March 19-21, 1865, Wallace Bruce Colbert was killed in battle. He was a mere twenty-six years of age when he served as the Leake County delegate to the Mississippi Secession Convention. War brought him and his generation an opportunity to fight for a cause he believed in, for which he helped usher into being. He served throughout the war, beginning as a colonel in the 27 Mississippi Infantry, the first regiment of the Confederate Army. How much Colbert must have seen, experienced, and learned about the war in those years. Hardened by combat, loss of his comrades, and lack of sufficient provisions and reinforcements, he either reenlisted or was transferred by the war’s end to the 40th Mississippi Infantry. After the Battle of Franklin, Colbert resolved to stand by the Confederacy to the last. Placed in command of Loring’s division, he crossed the country in an effort to join Johnston’s Army. Of the many secessionists from Mississippi’s secession convention, he was one of the longest served soldiers and one of its youngest members. He fell in battle on that fated day in March with a signed and approved furlough in his pocket.125

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CHAPTER SIX:

SHAKING DOWN THEIR CONVICTIONS LIKE APPLES FROM A TREE

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865.

In the midst of “a rebellion” of states guilty of treason, Abraham Lincoln offered a glimpse of the terms by which peace would be sought. On December 8, 1863, Lincoln presented the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. The proclamation provided individuals from rebellious states a way to resume their relationship to the United States and to set up loyal State governments. ¹ Lincoln announced that a full pardon would be granted to individuals, along with the restoration of their rights to property, except slaves, if men took and subscribed an oath to “support, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States, and the union of the States thereunder.” ² The oath underwent a transmutation, thanks to the Radical Republicans in Congress in the form of the Wade-Davis Bill of 1864, which earned it the nickname the “ironclad oath,” but to southern conservatives in the Union-occupied South from 1864-1865, it

was known as the “damnesty oath” because of its provision that individuals had to swear that they “ardently desired the suppression of the present rebellion” and would assist in that goal.³

Lincoln aimed the proclamation at southern moderates, who he believed had been swept up in disunion and constituted the majority of white southern society. Excluded from the amnesty proclamation’s provisions were civil or diplomatic officers or agents of the Confederate government, all men who left judicial positions of the United States to aid in the rebellion, military officers above the rank of colonel in the army and lieutenant in the navy, men who left seats in Congress to aid in the rebellion, men who resigned military commissions to serve in the Confederate army, and anyone engaged in treating prisoners of war, white or black, unlawfully. The logic behind the amnesty provision was that its parameters would keep out of political office the men responsible for the rebellion and would allow leaders from the loyal majority to rise up and reconstruct the South and lead it toward a viable future.⁴

The proclamation emphasized how Lincoln, his administration, and much of the North saw the war: as the rebellion of a few. When “a number of persons, not less than one tenth in number of the votes cast in such state at the presidential election” of 1860, “each having taken the oath,” and being qualified voters by election laws created prior to the Civil War, a state’s government could be reestablished and would receive the benefits guaranteed to all states in the Union. Lincoln envisioned a less painful process of southern states’ return to the Union, which was at odds with terms envisioned by members of his own party and Congressional Republicans.

⁴ Heather Cox Richardson’s Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 15-16, mentions Lincoln’s hope in moderate southern support for Union in relation to that of Johnson’s plan, which targeted wealthy white planters and members of the upper class because of Johnson’s own prejudices. Lincoln chose Johnson as a running mate, over radical Hannibal Hamlin, in the 1865 election as a means to develop his plan and win moderate outhern support for Union.
While Lincoln’s terms were hard for southerners and radical Republicans in 1863, they changed little up to the end of the war.⁵

Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865 offered roughly seven hundred words to summarize what the nation experienced since his First Inaugural Address in 1861 and reinforced his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. He reflected on the causes of the Civil War, arguing neither party in the present war expected a conflict of such magnitude or duration. The Confederate cause to uphold slavery had died before the war had ended. Lincoln conceded both sides benefitted from more than two hundred and fifty years of slavery, and both sides suffered for their part in an institution Providence saw fit to end. In offering an explanation for the war’s violence and duration, he acknowledged the great personal and economic loss the war caused. No greater understatement could be made when considering the thousands of men who died in the war and the southern white elite’s loss of property, including hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children held in bondage since the nation’s inception. To do the Lord’s will to end the offensive institution, such losses were necessary. Emancipation and the end of fighting were only the beginning. The end of his work and that of the American people was not the last battle, but the binding up of the nation’s wounds: caring for its soldiers, widows, and orphans as well as finding peace.⁶

Peace on Lincoln’s terms proved impossible. On April 15, 1865, just days after General Robert E. Lee surrendered his forces, Confederate nationalist John Wilkes Booth murdered Abraham Lincoln. A singled shot ended the South’s chances for Lincoln’s generous terms for a return to the nation. From 1865-1872, North and South would struggle to honor the wishes of the

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late President Lincoln to peacefully end the war without malice. The tumultuous era saw endless negotiations over the war’s meaning and its consequences complicated by ascending President Andrew Johnson’s prejudices, the South’s defiance, and Congressional Radicals’ commitment to black emancipation and freedom. Lincoln, his administration and northerners as well as southern Unionists could agree on one issue. They laid the blame for the war at the feet of secessionists. The terms for pardon excluded them specifically, almost to a man. In terms of who would hold political power, a singular cry went out “Union men only.” Now that secessionists had had their day and the Union cause was triumphant, “let us have ours.”

As of October 24, 1865, the New York Times included in its pages a list of the names of applicants for pardons on file in the Attorney General’s Office. While the article’s bold headlines drew attention to rebel leaders vain attempts to gain pardon and the methods by which they were thwarted, the list served to assign blame for the war. Few would receive pardon in the near future and most were high military and civil leaders of the Confederacy. The list specifically mentions former members of the United States Congress and former officers of the United States Army who resigned seats or commissions to aid in the rebellion. Many of the men listed were additionally exempt from receiving a pardon because they fell under the “twenty thousand clause.” A number of Mississippi secessionists joined their compatriots awaiting pardon, including Jefferson Davis, Israel Welch, Albert G. Brown, Walker Brooke, Jeremiah W. Clapp, J. A. P Campbell, Reuben Davis, Wiley P. Harris, L. Q. C. Lamar, John T. Lamkin, Ethelbert Barksdale, John J. McRae, James R. Chalmers, Samuel R. Gholson, and William F. Brantley. Jefferson Davis’s inclusion on the list represents a plea on his behalf for pardon by the South Carolina Convention and the Ladies of Lynchburg. The remainder consisted of men who

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accepted the war’s conclusion and desired citizenship. At least one, L. Q. C. Lamar, made an honest pardon application to the president as early as July 19, 1965, complete with a copy of his loyalty oath, and another, Albert Gallatin Brown, would use all means in his power to end the embarrassment of being a man without a nation. Few if any of the applications would be acted upon, the article noted, as applications had been suspended, at least until the next meeting of Congress or if the President took responsibility for pardoning one of the classes.⁸

President Johnson’s Reconstruction Plan tried to take advantage of Congress’s lengthy adjournment from April to December 1865. Johnson believed he could restore the Union on his own terms, without the help of a Republican-led Congress. Unfortunately for Johnson, white southerners took advantage of Johnson’s leniency and tried to reconstruct antebellum society.⁹ The fall of 1865 saw southern conventions assembled to reconstruct their governments, including the election of local, state, and national officials. Unrepentantly, southern voters elected the vice president of the Confederacy, four Confederate generals, five Confederate colonels, six Confederate cabinet officers, and fifty-eight Confederate Congressmen—none of whom could take the Ironclad oath of allegiance—as their representatives and senators.¹⁰ Mississippi alone selected for their reconstruction convention, political offices, and judiciary a number of secessionists, including James L. Alcorn, Alexander M. Clayton, Henry Thomas Ellett, Alexander H. Handy, William L. Harris, John T. Harrison, David W. Hurst, Thomas A. Marshall, Arthur Exum Reynolds, William L. Sharkey, Marcus D.L. Stephens, Thomas Woods,

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⁹ Richardson, The Death of Reconstruction, 15-16, for Johnson’s efforts in 1865.
¹⁰ Richardson, The Death of Reconstruction, 229.
and Jacob S. Yerger. The newly elected Mississippi legislature of 1865 enacted legislation known as Black Codes, which created social restrictions in an attempt to control black Mississippians’ labor. Infractions against these laws forced black Mississippians into a form of legalized slavery. In addition, the state refused to repudiate Confederate debt and failed to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. While the Federal government wished to capitalize on the Union sentiment strongly believed to exist in the South, the actions of Mississippi and other southern states illustrated the still-strong influence of Johnson’s hated small group of men responsible for secession. Congress refused to seat the southern congressional delegations elected in 1865. Over the course of 1865-1867, Congressional Republicans began work on a much larger scheme for the reincorporation of former Confederates and their states back into the Union.

Judge Osborne O. Lochrane of Macon, Georgia, best explained southern actions in the post-war environment: “it was difficult for men to shake down their convictions like apples from a tree.”\textsuperscript{11} The convictions at stake were more than just a lost southern bid for a separate nation and generations of its youth lost to the war. Slavery embedded itself so deeply into the core of the American nation, particularly the South, that men found it impossible to conceptualize a world without it. Without a class of racially, socially, and economically inferior people, their society and identity as Americans, white men of the South had no focus against which to distinguish or rank. The emancipation of the nation’s slaves dramatically reduced or destroyed the wealth of southern white elites. The transformation of their primary system of labor from slave to free altered their relationship to their former slaves socially and economically. In addition, emancipation would force the South to modernize its agricultural methods and transportation systems and begin delayed industrial investment and production. The revolution

\textsuperscript{11} Richardson, \textit{The Death of Reconstruction}, 275.
against the North had been fought to preserve their world, but the war had turned their world upside down.

The upheaval in white southern society, particularly white Mississippi society, from roughly 1865-1870 is the focus of this chapter. The periodization breaks from the typical Reconstruction model from 1865-1877 because circumstances and events dictate a closer examination of what can only be termed as a hiatus of the Democratic Party and southern white elite power structure. While Reconstruction historically ends with the Tilden-Hayes presidential controversy, it began to wane in Mississippi with the election of James Lusk Alcorn as governor in 1870. The chapter begins with a discussion on the economic cost of war and post-war way of life for secessionists. As the elite white men most responsible for the war and active in its propagation, secessionists keenly felt the ravages of war and the terms of Reconstruction. An analysis of their economic situation helps us to understand the means by which some were able to continue with their political careers as well as the reasons many chose retirement.

Following an examination of the economic cost of war, the chapter begins to examine the post-war lives of secessionists. The first portraits consist of a number of secessionists who remained “Confederates,” refusing to submit to Union victory and the loss of the Confederate nation. Such men chose two paths of bitterness. Both types of men were vocal in their retirement from politics, but one group favored the pen and the other the sword of the Ku Klux Klan. The second set of portraits consist men who chose difficult paths in Reconstruction. Of the hundred or so men who supported secession, at least one man changed the course of his life to champion black civil rights. A larger number of men went along with Reconstruction amendments and administration in the hopes of returning the state to home rule. Some, while choosing to retire from public life, lent their influence and assistance to the Federal government and its programs.
of rehabilitation and reconstruction. Other men determined to lead returned to public office. Among the later is James Lusk Alcorn, the perfect candidate for political office in the Federal government’s Reconstruction program. Federal officials wanted to preserve their post-war political power and guide reconstruction by utilizing loyal southern leaders in key government positions. Former Confederates and secessionists were barred from office by Reconstruction provisions and by association. Only those men who proved their purity could enter the political arena. Loyal classes consisted of the “truly loyal,” draft dodgers or deserters, or stay at homes. Of particular interest were Original Unionists, men who joined secessionists at the eleventh hour. In the minds of the Federal government, Original Unionists, white southern moderates, and African American men commanded the majority of voters in most southern states. Die-hard secessionists and loyalists were weak minorities. If Republicans could reconstruct and convert to the Republican Party a large number of Original Unionists, Reconstruction could be successful.\(^\text{12}\) Alcorn served as an important component in this scheme because he could prove his reluctance to vote for secession and lack of leadership or participation in the Confederate war cause. Realizing an opportunity to fulfill a life-long desire to become a national leader, Alcorn immediately declared his loyalty to the Federal government and joined the Republican Party; however, Alcorn’s rise to power would not result in the same future for the state, or for the nation, as envisioned by Reconstruction’s proponents.

Secession and war nearly cost Albert Gallatin Brown everything he valued. War seems to have cured him of further political ambitions and took much of his fortune. Applying for and receiving official pardon and amnesty for his part in the American Civil War was not an easy

task and, at first, it was the least of his concerns. To return to what he considered a normal life as an American citizen—a mere farmer by 1870—he endured a time of great personal trial. In his time of need, he wrote for the support of his brother-in-law, Philip R. Fendall, in Alexandria, Virginia. The “events of the late terrible war,” Brown wrote, had left him unsure of “who to [view] among my friends,” and he related that it was “pleasant therefore to have occasional manifestations of a still surviving remembrance of former friendship.”

Their friendship was familial and political. The longtime Whigs knew each other during Brown’s service in Washington as a member of the House of Representatives from 1839-1840 and 1847-1852 and as a Senator from 1853-1860. Fendall, an active member of the Whig Party and a lifelong friend of Henry Clay, served over the course of his career as clerk of the State Department and District Attorney in a non-consecutive term under President John Tyler and again under Presidents James K. Polk and Millard Fillmore, until his resignation under President Franklin Pierce. Fendall was married to Mary Elizabeth Young, the eldest sister of Brown’s second wife, Roberta Eugenia Young. When the Civil War began, Fendall’s loyalties between nation and family were tested. Two of his cousins, Robert E. Lee and Richard Bland Lee joined the Confederacy. One son, James Robert Young Fendall fought for the Confederacy, while Philip Richard Fendall III and Clarence Fendall joined the Union Army. Fendall remained with the

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Union and began in 1860 to edit the papers of President James Madison under the auspices of the Library of Congress while maintaining a private practice.\textsuperscript{15}

Brown’s friendship with Fendall proved to be as cathartic as it was providential. Their correspondence stretches back to the 1840s, which proves the bond between them was not sudden or established late for selfish purposes. He addressed Fendall by a familiar nickname rather than “Philip.” Their letters, largely Brown’s to Fendall, illustrate Brown’s troubled transition from war to peace and Fendall’s role in helping his brother-in-law to secure pardon and amnesty.

According to the pair’s post-war correspondence, Fendall contacted Brown first—as did many other members of Fendall’s family—and their warm tone must have been a balm for Brown’s condition and would have encouraged him to enter a plea for assistance. Brown wrote, “As you manifest an interest in our present welfare and as several kind notes from other members of [your] family indicate the same. . . . I conclude you will be glad to know when and in what condition the storm of war has left us.” Brown’s assessment of his condition was not devoid of hope. Like a soldier’s solemn soliloquy after an unsuccessful battle, he declared himself to be “whipped badly considerably demoralized, but not shattered.” Brown’s language is brave, and even in defeat his words evince pride at remaining at home with his family since the surrender. Unlike a number of his Confederate peers, Brown would not leave the country, hide from his circumstances, or fight Union victory. He argued, “I had done nothing that my

conscience did not approve and I resolved not to abide any fortune that might await me consequently. I have not gone from home nor will I do so voluntarily.\textsuperscript{16}

Home for Brown was a farm in Terry, Mississippi, of about sixteen hundred acres. In the 1860 census, Brown’s real estate was valued at more than $25,000 with more than $85,000 in personal estate, including at least twenty-three slaves. The war changed Brown’s fortunes, though his outlook was vastly different than one would expect of such a committed secessionist and Confederate. In his letter on July 8, 1865, Brown told Fendall,

If we have lost in fortune. . . . vigorous health and clear conscience are still left to me. . . . at all events none of us are disposed to sit down and [repine] at them [. . .] Our Motto is “progress” and by sticking to it and following up we shall I hope get as far ahead as if nothing had delayed our march.

Brown’s spirits seemed buoyed by the fact that his former slaves remained on the plantation. Proud that his labor force had not only remained but had managed to grow corn crop, he worried whether they would continue to do so and if he had the means to pay them. By 1866, his attitude changed little. Explaining to Fendall in a letter on November 5 that “in the past few years we have passed through many trials,” Brown argued the loss of property was “painful” only because “it was a [depravation] to those I loved more than I love myself.” His efforts on behalf of himself, his family, and his laborers seemed to have allowed him to retain some of his wealth. By 1870, he was listed as a farmer with $7,000 of real estate and $4,000 of personal estate, though his dependents decreased from a family of five to three, with only his wife Roberta and son Joseph, a lawyer, in residence with him.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Brown to Fendall, July 8, 1865, Albert Gallatin Brown Correspondence, Philip Richard Fendall Papers, LOC.

Brown’s personal immediate post-war concern was to be rid of the embarrassment of being an alien in his own country. The war, however, compounded with the death of his youngest son, threatened to claim his hope. In his November 5, 1866, letter to Fendell, Brown explained:

The loss of my country was almost insupportable. When I found myself an alien in the land of my birth I thought my cup of affliction was full, but when to all this is added the loss of my noble son I am utterly crushed. I know not in this hour of sorrow what [direction] to look for consolation but to the God of our salvation! . . .the Lord gave and the Lord hathe taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.

Brown’s anxiety was great as was his knowledge that in order to sustain his family’s needs, he needed stable work. Part of his problem was that in order to work primarily in his chosen legal profession, he would need pardon and amnesty, something he wrote to Fendall about initially as a means to relate his troubles, and later, to assist him in his efforts.

Men like Fendall were very useful to both southerners and President Andrew Johnson between 1865-1866. Under Johnson’s Reconstruction plan, most Confederates qualified for amnesty. Johnson reserved fourteen classes of men for presidential pardon that he believed bore the greater guilt for the war: officeholders, military officers, and men with estates exceeding $20,000 in 1860. Most former Confederates accepted emancipation, and the war proved in Jefferson Davis’s words that “secession has been demonstrated once for all to be impracticable.” Former Confederates believed that the danger of Reconstruction was that at one point “northern delegates would expect them to glory in the defeat of the Confederate cause and praise the blue jacketed soldiers who left a trail of fire and blood through the South or curse the

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18 Ibid. The 1860 Census lists an R. Brown and J. Brown, ages 6 and 10. R. Brown does not appear in the 1870 Census, confirming he died between 1860-1870. Brown’s grief without mention of death in battle coupled with the boy’s age suggests he died at home, not in the war.
memories of our dead soldiers or confess that we were rebels traitors, and murderers.”

Brown seemed to have different concerns. While Brown noted that he felt he had done nothing that weighted heavily on his conscience, he doubted he would be granted pardon. He was anxious to move on from what he termed an “embarrassment,” and stated his petition amounted to little more than a frank statement throwing himself “on the generosity of the President.” His fear in being granted a pardon rested not in his relationship with the President, from whom he felt assured would give his application the consideration it deserved. Rather, he feared the application would be lost in the thousands of other applications sent to the White House for a similar purpose. Should the application land before someone who knew less of him than the President, he believed he would be denied amnesty. To speed his application through the process, he wrote to Fendall and requested him to “interest himself in getting my case fairly before the President.”

Brown drew out the pardon application process. He insisted on conducting the business by mail through proxies, which was arduous even for the day. It is unknown whether he did so because of his embarrassment of his actions, which he claimed to not feel guilty about, or whether his family needed him at home in Mississippi. While Fendall ultimately succeeded in helping Brown receive a pardon, the process took almost a year. In a November 5, 1866 letter, Brown wrote to Fendall explaining how he had been granted a pardon, but he was having difficulty accepting the pardon on the conditions proposed. The Secretary of State denied his first pardon through the mail. Brown explained to Fendall that enclosed with his letter was a second acceptance. He hoped Fendall would personally convey the letter to the appropriate persons and

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20 Carter, *When the War Was Over*, 230.

21 Brown to Fendall, July 8, 1865, Albert Gallatin Brown Correspondence, Philip R. Fendall Papers, LOC.
department. Fendall took the time to make personal notes on the reverse side of Brown’s letter, explaining that the trouble Brown experienced was a result of officials not believing the pardon and application to be an original. Fendall must have worked quickly, a letter of thanks from Brown to Fendall arrived two weeks later stating, “I cannot thank you too earnestly for your prompt courtesy in attending to the Amnesty papers. The Secretary of State’s letter notifying me . . . came some days ago. I suppose the matter closed up finally.”

With amnesty granted, Brown retired. He had tried to retire from public service since the end of the 32nd Congress in 1853, but he found no way to do so without abandoning the people whose charge he repeatedly accepted. When asked the secret of his successful political career, Brown answered, “I never forgot that I was one of the people.” A post-war biography argued that Brown had argued for Mississippians best interests, and they in turn, had done what was right, including support secession and Civil War. Brown admitted to a clear conscience regarding his actions, but in his retirement, he acknowledged the weight of those decisions on his private life. His desire for peace of mind after the conflict led him to become a farmer. He accepted the end of the war and advised others to follow in his stead. His advice extended to the belief that if the South did not accept the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, the Federal government would and could do worse. When Congress proposed the Fifteenth Amendment, he neither agreed with nor was surprised by its conditions. When asked by his son if he had his life to live over, he stated that he would not seek or accept public office. He warned younger generations about the “glitter of office” in his later career, arguing, “it is all vanity and vexation of spirit.” His greatest regret was that he ever made a political speech or held an office, and “when my head is

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22 Brown to Fendall November 5, 1866, and Albert Gallatin Brown to Philip R. Fendall, from Terry, Hinds of Mississippi, November 22, 1866, Albert Gallatin Brown Correspondence, Philip R. Fendall Papers, LOC.
blossoming for the grave: I feel that it would have been better for me if I had followed the occupation of my father and been a farmer.” And so he was, when he died in 1880, with many years to think on what he termed to be his “fascination of the serpent” which coaxed him on to “inevitable ruin.”

Ruin may not be the best term to use when discussing the economic cost of rebellion and war to secessionists. While a number of secessionists did not live much beyond the war to appear in the United States Census of 1870, those who did allow us a window into the changes they experienced as a result of their actions. For some men, their presence in the census is the only evidence of their existence beyond the secession convention or military service. Albert G. Brown’s retirement to his farm was a common response to the end of the war. In many cases, the Mississippi Secession Convention was the first and last public position of a number of delegates. Secessionists who pursued post-bellum political careers were extraordinary, given the status of their economic situation as well as the political climate. With few exceptions, most

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23 Goodspeed Brothers. *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, embracing an authentic and comprehensive account of the chief events in the history of the state and a record of the lives of many of the most worthy and illustrious families and individuals.* (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1891), Volume 1, 432-433, and James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi* (New York: 1881), 281.

24 The following list is probably not complete or entirely accurate, but it represents the best approximation of individuals based on biographical, military, and census records. These men include: Warren P. Anderson, William Taylor Sullivan Barry (1868), William Bolling, Wright Walker Bonds, William Felix Brantley (killed 1870), Walter Brooke (1869), Arthur Benjamin Bullard (1867), George R. Clayton (1867), William J. Douglas, David Chalmers Glenn (1869), William Littleton Harris (1868?), Albert P. Hill (1868), Miles H. McGehee (1865), Andrew Miller (1864), James M. Nelson (1864/5?), F.C. Semmes (1867), William B. Smart (1865?), William A. Sumner, Waddy Thompson (1866), Henry Vaughn (1870), Israel Victor Welch (1869), George B. Wilkinson, Josiah W. Winchester, Sr.,

secessionists held onto their antebellum property. Between the 1860 and 1870 censuses, most men recorded no change to the value of their real estate. The most obvious economic change to all men’s estates between 1860 and 1870 is the loss of slave property, signified in the value of personal property. Significant numbers of slaves held in bondage often indicates plantations of significant size and yield and a man’s vested interest and investment in agriculture over other interests like law or medical practices. The number of African American men and women held in bondage at the time of the Civil War by the one hundred men of the secession convention is daunting. One hundred men claimed ownership to no less than thirty-two hundred men, women, and children. Representing persons of different ages and skills, these individuals on various plantations across the State of Mississippi accounted for roughly half of each man’s estimated personal estate, though many secessionists valued their personal estate well above their real estate.

To say that men who lost more slaves lost more in the war would not give proper consideration to the fact that no matter the number of slaves held by any individual slaveholder, their value based on market property and in relation to their entire estate made any loss severe for each man. Alexander King Farrar, Walter Leake Keirn, Miles Hill McGehee, and Henry Vaughan each owned more than two hundred slaves and immense estates. McGehee died in 1865 without really experiencing loss beyond that which he felt during war. The rest lost considerable portions of their estate as well as their slaves. Vaughan held the highest number of slaves of any man at the convention, totaling 293 people valued at more than $230,000. He valued his real estate less, with $115,000 in value. Arguably Farrar and Keirn owned the largest total estates: $900,000 and $740,000 combined real and property estates. While Keirn’s 1870 estate does not contain a real or personal estate value, his prewar real and personal estate totaled to more than
$500,000 and more than $200,000 respectively. In 1860, Farrar valued his real estate at $600,000 and his personal estate at $300,000. By 1870, he claimed an estate valued at $100,000, which signaled substantial property and personal estate losses.26

Similarly, men who owned roughly a quarter of the amount of slaves as McGehee and Vaughn fared much the same, though in some cases, worse. James Lusk Alcorn, Samuel Jameson Gholson, and Albert Creath Gibson owned roughly the same amounts of real and personal estate. Alcorn owned a little more than fifty slaves according to the 1860 United States Census with real and personal estate values totaling $140,000 and $110,000 respectively. By 1870, Alcorn owned $250,000 in real estate and $50,000 in personal estate, owing to his minimal war involvement, black market cotton smuggling, and healthy political career during Reconstruction.27 In 1860, Gholson is missing from the U.S. Census except for his ownership of sixty-seven slaves in the slave schedules for his county. By 1870, he owned real estate valued at


27 For Alcorn: J. L. Alcorn, p. 740, line 13, Schedule 1 – Free Inhabitants, County of Coahoma, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 580) and James L. Alcorn, p. 724, line 21, Schedule 1. Inhabitants, Jackson, County of Hinds, State of Mississippi; 1870 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, Roll 730)
Albert Creath Gibson owned sixty-seven slaves in 1860 with real estate valued at $123,000 and personal estate of $123,100. By 1870, Gibson owned only $4,000 worth of real estate. Albert C. Gibson, p. 865, line 25, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants, County of Issaquena, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 582) and Albert C. Gibson, p. 303B, line 8, Schedule 1. Inhabitants, County of Issaquena, State of Mississippi; 1870 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, Roll 731).

Roughly fifty-eight secessionists owned less than twenty-five slaves, and at least five owned none. Men in this category felt the impact of war more severely than that of their more wealthy peers. For example, in 1860, David Murray Backstrom owned more than $12,000 in real estate and $33,000 in personal estate, including fifteen slaves. By 1870, he had lost more than $32,000 of his antebellum estate, retaining much of his property but none of his personal estate.

Orlando Davis’s 1860 estate included land and home valued at $20,000 and $30,000 worth of personal estate, including thirteen slaves. Over the sixty-one times Federal forces stopped through Ripley, Davis’s estate suffered greatly. By 1870, he had no estate of any value according to the census. Lastly, Caleb White Taylor of Scott County owned nine slaves, including real


29 For Gibson: Albert C. Gibson, p. 865, line 25, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants, County of Issaquena, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 582) and Albert C. Gibson, p. 303B, line 8, Schedule 1. Inhabitants, County of Issaquena, State of Mississippi; 1870 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, Roll 731).

30 For Backstrom: David M. Backstrom, p. 613, line 10, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants, Township 11 Range 11, County of Neshoba, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 588) and David M. Backstrom, p. 298B, line 3, Schedule 1. Inhabitants, Beat 1, County of Neshoba, State of Mississippi; 1870 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, Roll 741).

31 For Orlando Davis: Orlando Davis, p. 638, line 36, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants, Ripley, County of Tippah, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 592) and Orlando Davis, p. 153B, line 6, Schedule 1. Inhabitants, Ripley, County of Tippah, State of Mississippi; 1870 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, Roll 750).
estate and personal estate valued at $16,000 and $18,000 in the 1860 Census. By 1870, Taylor owned only $3800 in real estate and $3500 in personal estate.\(^{32}\)

Caleb White Taylor’s diminished economic circumstances and a war-related injury forced him to reconsider his occupation. Taylor’s military service to the Confederacy left him in a debilitated state from which he never recovered. As a result, he gave up farming and became a dry-goods merchant. Taylor’s occupational transition was part of a small but noticeable trend among secessionists between 1860 and 1870, which reflected how secessionists lost wealth and their means of making a living. While the majority of secessionists remained classified as farmers, a few men moved into or out of a political office or chose a post-war occupation commensurate with their need to support their families by their own labor. Prior to the war, a number of men may have had more than one means of making a living, but the rules of the census dictated only the primary means be listed. As a result, changes in occupation signify individuals’ actions based on post-war economic realities.

According to the 1860 Federal Census, Robert Watkins Flournoy was a farmer with considerable property and personal wealth, including fifty-six slaves. By 1870, he was a lawyer. Flournoy retained his real estate, but his loss of fifty-six slaves as well as personal estate amounting to more than $60,000 pushed him to pursue another means by which to make a living.\(^{33}\) Flournoy’s situation was hardly unique. Oswald Y. Neely, Alexander Patterson, Caleb

\(^{32}\) For Taylor: Caleb W. Taylor, p. 95, line 27, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants, District 3, County of Scott, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 591) and Caleb W. Taylor, p. 226B, line 14, Schedule 1. Inhabitants, Beat 3, County of Scott, State of Mississippi; 1870 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, Roll 748).

\(^{33}\) For Flournoy: Robert W. Flournoy, p. 849, line 38, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants, County of Pontotoc, State of Mississippi; 1860 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 590) and Robt. Flournoy, p. 189B, line 33, Schedule 1. Inhabitants,
White Taylor, and William H. Witty transitioned from farmers into merchants. William Henry Haywood Tison went from being a saddler to a merchant, before retiring as a farmer from 1860-1870. Thomas P. Young left farming to become a hotel proprietor after losing nearly every bit of his wealth after the war.

One of the more interesting changes from the 1860 to 1870 census occupation listings was the transition of planters to farmers and farmers to planters. For planters Albert Creath Gibson and James Steptoe, their transition from planter to farmer reflected a severe loss of property and wealth. Thomas C. Bookter, Alexander King Farrar, Walter Leake Keirn, and Elijah Saunders require a slight explanation. Farrar and Keirn considered themselves farmers after truly being planters in 1860. Keirn was listed in the 1860 census as a planter, but the others were not. Thomas C. Bookter’s claim of being a planter after the war is less genuine. Prior to the war, he owned nineteen slaves and $5,000 worth of real estate. After the war, he increased his real estate holdings by $2,000 but lost the majority of his $30,000 personal estate. Saunders similarly lost most of his personal estate in war, retaining just five hundred dollars by 1870. He also lost more than $30,000 in property, which suggests that he either sold or lost land and/or used it to help with post-war expenses.

A smaller subset of secessionists engaged in medical practices. After the war, a number of men who might have earned more money before the war as planters now found most of their wealth came from their profession as doctors. Included in this category were James Bartlett Ramsey, Willis Monroe Lea, Marcus D.L. Stephens, and John Jones Thornton. John Jones

Pontotoc, County of Pontotoc, State of Mississippi; 1870 United States Federal Census (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, Roll 746).

34 The 1860 census did not instruct census takers to use the term “planter,” and only in the 1870 census did census takers utilize the term widely. See method note in the Introduction for more details.
Thornton’s practice of medicine led him on two occasions to own and operate a drug store both before and after the war. Immediately after the war, Thornton took advantage of the numerous railroad contracts and became a railroad agent. By 1880, he would again be a druggist.35 Finally, Stephens’s case is particularly interesting. His wartime exploits earned him two severe wounds to his right leg. His injury made riding a horse difficult, which left him without a convenient means of transport after the war. He left medicine and opened a store in Water Valley, which prospered until 1878. While he eventually became a Chancery Clerk, the 1880 Census listed him as a physician, though it is unclear whether he was ever able to return to medicine.36

Emancipation and the economic realities of the post-war forced many secessionists to reevaluate their situation and change course or retire from public life. However, some secessionists embraced defeat, choosing either to succumb to ruin or celebrate their willful refusal to capitulate or accept change. William Taylor Sullivan Barry is an example of the former. Barry presided over the Mississippi Secession Convention in 1861. It was he who announced with his “faltering voice and tearful eye” the secession of Mississippi from the Union. He could not cope with defeat, and his inability to regain his composure and place in Mississippi society or life after the war is odd. His decision to secede was not based on a rabid desire for disunion, but was consistent with the means by which a man and people retained manhood and honor. According to popular memory, Barry set aside the pen with which he signed the Ordinance of Secession. He bequeathed the pen with its “half-delivered ink” to his only son, William S. Barry, with instructions for its preservation as a family heirloom. After serving an

initial term in the Confederate Congress, Barry went to war. Sharing in numerous campaigns, including the surrender of Vicksburg, Barry withstood wounds and continued to fight until his capture in the assault on Fort Blakely.

When considering the war, most historians do not pause long over men like Barry. Such men are lumped into a broad category of men who failed to accept the end of the South’s bid for nationhood and labeled proud, stubborn, racist, or unredeemed. Few linger over why specific men failed to transition. Barry was not particularly pro-secession in the antebellum period, but his continued presence and participation in southern politics slowly converted him. While such men could arguably be considered unable to accept emancipation and Union victory, their actions and words betray something more distinct. In the case of William Taylor Sullivan Barry, regret played a large role in his post-war crisis. He claimed, “My thinking in the past, has not been profitable—my hopes for my country have all been blasted, and as far as I can, I will quit thinking and for a while lead a negative experience.” In his Yale biographical report, he is a self-described “originally a Democrat, then a States Rights man, during the war a conscientious rebel (so called)” and by the time of the report “a pardoned, reconstructed ‘Johnson man’ trying to gather from the wreck which the war made of all our fortunes whatever may be left, and to make a support for my family by my profession.” Barry’s remarks about himself after the Civil War says much the mental gymnastics of identity required for his generation.

Barry fulfilled his desire to live a negative existence. After the war, he practiced law as a primary means of making a living for the first time in his existence. In 1860, he had been a planter with seven slaves and a modest plantation, and just five years later, he was set adrift. Ever romantic, nineteenth century biographers said of Barry:

It has been said that all great passions are born in solitude that they are tamed and degraded by the common intercourse of society, and utterly lost and extinguished in
public companies, crowds, and assemblies; but here we have a brilliant light, kindled in
the blaze of the forum, in the halls of legislation, and in the smoke of battle, waning away
and extinguishing itself in the damp of seclusion—the noblest passions that ever swayed
the heart of mortal mouldering in the rust of inaction and the canker of despondency.\(^{37}\)

His early death in 1868 was attributed not to old age—he was forty-seven-years-old—but to a
broken heart.

Like Barry, Jefferson Davis struggled with defeat, but he did not die of a broken heart. Despite the surrender of the war-worn army of General Robert E. Lee, Davis and his cabinet members stayed at large. As James McPherson detailed in his account of the Civil War *Ordeal by Fire*, Davis and his remaining cabinet members moved southward as fast as the dilapidated railroads could take them. As they went, Davis exhorted southerners to fight on in the form of guerrilla warfare in areas where the Union army was too far spread out to maintain effective control.\(^{38}\) On May 10, 1865, Union cavalry finally captured Jefferson Davis in Georgia, thus ending Davis’s brief career as Confederate president on the run.

Imprisoned for two years without a trial as a state prisoner, Jefferson Davis’s life at Fortress Monroe in Virginia is something of a novelty in American history. Public opinion and speculation surrounding the events of Davis’s run, capture, and imprisonment, are best illustrated, literally, in a group of caricatures of Jefferson Davis published by artist Frank Bellow sometime after the end of the war. Bellow created a series of six caricatures, each showing a different scene—the first of Davis the war president and the rest at various stages of flight, and imprisonment. Depicting Davis dressing as a woman to evade Union troops, Bellow creatively

\(^{37}\) Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 299.

suggested that it was Davis’s boots underneath his petticoats that tipped off a leeringly short soldier to Davis’s disguise.\textsuperscript{39}

*Jeff Petticoats* illustrated what many people, North or South, might have assumed would happen to Davis. The crime of treason in American history carried with it a death sentence, and Bellow’s caricature pictured a hooded and hanged Jefferson Davis, still in his petticoat. The portrait depicted what, at least in New York publishing circles, many people believed of Davis, that as a secessionist, he was guilty of treason. His portrayal as a woman was both accurate in terms of the disguise he chose as well as an attempt to emasculate the fallen leader.

Jefferson Davis was not ignorant of the crimes that the American nation thought he had committed. Writing from his jail cell to his wife Varina in January 1866, Davis related to his wife that “my powers and duties rested on the organization made by the Southern States, and that it would have been treasonous to destroy the organization by the exercise of functions given to maintain it.”\textsuperscript{40} He declared to her that,

To all the trials, mental and physical, to which I am subjected, I will oppose all the moral power I possess that my life may be prolonged as far as such drains will permit, and my power to meet any future ordeal be as great as possible to me.\textsuperscript{41}

Davis meant to fight his imprisonment, as well as any charge of treason. And indeed, in 1866, investigating committees and officials attempted to tie Davis to a secessionist conspiracy or to John Wilkes Booth’s murder of President Abraham Lincoln.

In spite of calling Davis a traitor, men in the South and even the North who had known him prior to the war, did not think it fair to place all of the blame for secession and war on the shoulders of one man. Writing in defense of Jefferson Davis in March 1865, Williamson S.

\textsuperscript{39} Frank Bellow, *Jeff Petticoats* (New York, Intagliotype & graphotype co., 1866), 2.
\textsuperscript{40} Dunbar Rowland, *Jefferson Davis: Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches* (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Company, 1923), Volume VII, 64.
Oldham, a one-time critic of Davis who wrote for a Democratic paper, insisted that Davis should not be blamed for secession. Calling upon those who would listen, Oldham listed as proof Davis’s hesitation during the secession crisis, not only to leave his post as Senator, but in his concession to the secession movement, as a one-time failure on that front in 1850. Davis’s attempts to define himself as an eleventh-hour secessionist seem successful in light of Oldham’s defense, and it is men like Oldham, who after the war, helped shape Davis into the ultimate Confederate—the man who never asked for pardon because he believed, until death, in the virtue and verity of the secessionist cause.

Northern and southern papers demonstrate the efforts of contemporaries to craft Davis’s identity as the last-standing Confederate, and capture Mississippian’s ideas about Davis’s culpability and ultimate fate. Prior to his capture on May 10, 1865, newspapers speculated widely as to his whereabouts. One northern paper even speculated Davis lit out on his own “with all the specie within reach and swiftly making for Mexico.” Reading Davis’s indictment, published in the Weekly Standard on May 26, 1866, one can see the extent to which prosecutors believed, or wanted to believe, Davis was guilty. Stating with evangelical fervor:

. . . not having the fear of God before his eyes, not weighing the duty of his said allegiance, but being moved by the instigation of the devil, and wickedly desiring and intending to interrupt the peace and tranquility of the United States of America, to subject and to stir men to incite insurrection, rebellion, and war against the United States of America. . . with force and arms unlawfully, falsely, maliciously, and traitorously did compass, imagine and entice to raise, levy, and carry on war, insurrection and rebellion against said United States of America. . .

43 The Natchez Daily Courier, 6 May 1865, p 1., reprint from the New York Herald.
44 Port Gibson (Mississippi) Weekly Standard, 26 May 1866, p. 4.
The charges could have been levied against any Mississippi secessionist. Hundreds of men in the South were guilty of imagining themselves as a separate nation and working to accomplish secession. Davis alone was not responsible, but he alone would be accused.

Though one historian argued that southern papers’ opinions toward Davis in the immediate aftermath of the war were less than friendly and that northern newspapers helped rehabilitate public opinion for Davis, Mississippians supported their former leader and closely followed developments in his case.\(^{45}\) After the surrender Mississippi presses went out of their way to publish material which sympathized with the plight of a man who “as the leader of the rebellion, committing no greater legal crime than thousands who have received pardon at the hands of the National Executive.”\(^{46}\) In addition, as early as October 1865, the *Natchez Democrat* reprinted an article, which appeared in the *New Orleans Crescent*, defending Davis from personal attacks by former Confederates. Berating the attackers for being “ungenerous to assail a gentleman who is confined within prison walls, deprived of the privilege of reply or justification,” the article’s author went on to praise Davis as “a true patriot, a brave soldier, and a wise statesman.”\(^ {47}\)

While northerners saw Davis as the ringleader of secession and believed that the majority of southerners had been led unwillingly into secession and Civil War, Mississippians told a different story. Secession had indeed led to war, but it was not the consequence of a single man’s actions or ideas. In viewing four Mississippi newspapers between 1865 and 1866, two major themes recurred in the public discourse. The first, that the trial of Jefferson Davis was important because it would decide once and for all the legality of secession, as well as make clearer the

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\(^{46}\) *The Natchez Daily Courier*, 20 December 1865, p. 3.

\(^{47}\) *The Natchez Democrat*, 19 October 1865, p. 2.
status of the former Confederate States in terms of Reconstruction. Second, that ordinary southerners, through the presentation of memorials on behalf of Jefferson Davis pleading for leniency and release from prison did not heap the blame of secession at the feet of Davis nor secession leaders. Mississippians, male and female, considered secession to be an act of the people, a cause in which they had entered into on their own volition and continued to see as honorable and just, despite the war’s outcome. They viewed Davis as an eleventh-hour secessionist, entering into the compact of secession only when last-minute efforts at peace failed. In the early months of 1865 and 1866, the portrait of Davis as the ultimate Confederate national character who believed, until death, in the virtue and verity of the secessionist cause developed. Later helped along later by Davis’s own The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, these portraits would coalesce into the popular post-war memory of Davis carried over into the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.

Concerning the first theme, President Andrew Johnson himself made the issue clear in his message to Congress on December 4, 1865, which the Port Gibson Weekly Standard published in its entirety for its readers. Johnson stated clearly:

. . . [T]reason has been committed. Persons who are charged with its commission should have fair and impartial trials in high and civil tribunals of the country, in order that the Constitution and the laws may be fully vindicated, the truth clearly established and affirmed that treason is a crime, that traitors should be punished, and the offense made infamous, and at the same time that the question may be judicially settled finally and forever that no State of its own will has the right to renounce its place in the Union.  

It was apparent from the articles in newspapers how southerners were actively engaged in the debate over whether secession had been a legal reality, especially in relation to the North’s plans to reconstruct the South. Evidence of this type of thinking was found buried in a short clipping which the Standard printed under the heading “No Such Thing as Reconstruction,” which read,

“The Union in the estimation of the war party was never broken—the secession ordinances were a nullity, and the Southern States never for one day were out of the Union.” The editorial comment attached to the clipping read, “We need to think differently, but we are willing to take it that way now.” The *Natchez Democrat* echoed this frustration in December 1865, seemingly already tired of Reconstruction, stating:

> We are told that we have never been out of the Union—that all acts of secession were null and void, from the beginning and yet, when we ask for the privileges of the Union and seek for our guidance in the light of the Constitution, our representatives are excluded from the Halls of Congress, and we are told that the cup of our bitterness is not yet full and the measure of our degradation is not yet meted out.

The South hoped that the Federal government would rule of secession as treason. If the states had never left the Union, southerners could argue that the North had no legal right to enforce Reconstruction legislation or conditions without the South’s consent or vote. Such an advantageous interpretation of the debate regarding secession’s reality was part of a larger national conversation, which included competing northern theories.

Back in 1863, Abraham Lincoln based his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction on the theory of an indissoluble Union. States entered willingly into a Union from which they could not legally secede. Throughout the war, the Union position was that the Confederate States were still part of the Union, and Lincoln’s proclamation served as the means by which loyal citizens could assert their fidelity to the Union and eventually regain control of their states and their governments. Lincoln’s plan was not popular with the more radical elements of his own Republican Party, which wished to ensure the freedom and rights of black citizens. Republicans could not agree among themselves whether the South had seceded. Even then, their reluctance for harsh treatment against the South and desire to ensure reentry would not endanger abolition

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tempered their Reconstruction plans. Thaddeus Stevens, among others, believed the South seceded and Reconstruction a requirement of reentry to the Union. Charles Sumner believed the South, by seceding, forfeited their status as states, and should be treated as territories who had to meet conditions set by Congress to reenter the Union. Still other moderates justified Reconstruction with a complicated argument that secession and slavery violated the conditions for the republican form of government, ensured by Article IV, Section 4, of the United States Constitution.51

When John Wilkes Booth murdered President Lincoln in 1865, he indirectly put into power Andrew Johnson, who famously declared to an Indiana delegation in April 1865:

Treason must be made odious, and the traitors must be punished and impoverished, their great plantations seized. . . . the day for protecting the lands and negroes of these authors of rebellion is past. It is high time it was.52

Radical Republicans shared Johnson’s belief that landed upper-class southern men were responsible for slavery and the war and should be held to account. Both believed Lincoln’s plan would leave former secessionists and rebels in control of politics, which would ultimately undermine emancipation and any hope of enfranchisement. Moderate Republicans hoped to construct a plan between the extremes of Lincoln and later Johnson’s view of self-reconstruction and Radical Republicans desire to revolutionize southern society through disenfranchisement and confiscation of property.53

Southerners’ focus on the meaning of secession initially pertained to Davis, but as time went on and the threat of Radical Reconstruction loomed, writers used the opportunity to define

secession to avert the larger ramifications the region faced. Evidence of this strategy can be seen in the Weekly Standard’s reprint of an article from the October 27, 1865 edition of the Cincinnati Gazette. The Gazette explained that the purpose of Davis’s trial was not merely to punish Davis, but, as the article continued:

[T]o define the nature of treason, fits its punishment, reveal the cruelties of which it has been the fruitful sources, and establish a legal precedent for the future which will be a terror to traitors hereafter, and forever disgrace the treason which for a time was respectable by reason of its power and formidable proportions.54

A supposed foreign correspondent weighed in on the issue in the Weekly Standard on November 25, 1865, with an article entitled, “The Trial of Jeff. Davis-An Able English View of it: How the World Regards It.” The depth to which this article went into the issue of secession makes the reader wonder if the editor of the Standard, James S. Mason, used the guise of a foreign reporter to enable him to discuss the “real” opinions of the paper in a more frank manner. Either way, as printed, it was one of the more thorough arguments for the southern perspective of secession made in any of the papers examined concerning Jefferson Davis.

The article asserted the difficult task facing the trial of Jefferson Davis was not so much Davis’s treason, but the right of a sovereign state to withdraw from its union with the others. In addition, the author insisted, “This right (that of secession) must be considered an ingredient in the original composition of the general government, which though not expressed, was mutually understood.”55 If asserting the right of secession was inherent in the formulation of the Union with the writing of the Constitution was not enough of a bold statement for the author, he went further in his argument stating if the South had seceded, then Davis and the Confederacy committed acts of war. Yet, if the South were still in the Union, then Davis and the Confederacy

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54 Port Gibson (Mississippi) Weekly Standard, 9 November 1865, 3.
had committed an act of treason. Traitors, he argued, took up arms to overthrow the government while the South had made strong efforts to enter into amicable relations with the Federal government. Accordingly, he argued, the Federal government recognized how a state of war existed between it and the South by entering into formal prisoner exchanges as well as the level of government presence—Abraham Lincoln himself and Secretary of State William H. Seward—at late-war negotiations with the Confederate commissioners appointed by Davis. Citizens of the Confederate states, according to the author, should really be absolved of any wrong doing, as they acted in accordance to the law of the land, and arguing that the law of the State absolved the citizen who had no choice but to obey the law, regardless of its verity.  

In the same issue containing “An English View” of Davis and his trial, the Standard devoted numerous columns to commentary on the inaugural address of Mississippi governor, Benjamin G. Humphreys. The Standard’s editor noted how the governor’s address lacked humility and that he spoke as the Governor of the State should speak to his fellow citizens. In other words, Mason believed Humphreys held little back. Considered a safe choice by the Federal government for Mississippi’s immediate Reconstruction government, Humphreys thoroughly addressed the issue of secession, despite the governor’s stated view was that the question had been “ably settled” by the war and how “Southern states have accepted the issue of war as binding them to the Union.” Humphreys claim of acceptance and his hope that the lessons taught by the rebellion not be lost to South or North—“sectional aggression will meet with sectional resistance”—revealed how even a “safe” gubernatorial candidate in Mississippi was still a southerner with rather strong feelings. Humphreys harshly criticized the Federal government in terms of Davis’ impending trial and the issue of secession. He believed the

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government should use “wise discretion” to set aside that trial and allow Davis to go free. His reasoning for this displayed an interesting definition of “secession” as well as the feeling that all had not been “ably settled.” Humphreys asserted:

A government which was initially comprised of “secession of thirteen colonies which placed rebels and traitors in authority” ought to be very cautious about reviving old issues, and especially should it avoid a denial of the principles which have always been regarded by the people as constituting the rules and dogmas of their political fate. Humphreys was in line with claims made by post-war southerners in defense of the legality of secession. To remove the right of a state to secede as a response to justifiable grievances and complaints, Humphreys and others argued, would be to deny the right of Revolution, something no one would ever consider doing to the men of ’76 who too labored under trial and grievance. Post-war satirists joined with their political contemporaries in attempting to connect secession, and thereby Jefferson Davis’s fate, with that of early Americans. The *Weekly Standard* carried the occasional satirical works by a man who wrote under the pen name “Bill Arp.” Utilizing colloquial speech patterns to mimic poor white speech, Arp claimed to his fictional correspondence as well as to his audience, “It’s only my opinion, that’s all. I may be a tarnal fool, and I sometimes feel like I am a fool about everything and don’t know nothing. I’m trying my best, however to take things just as I find em. . .” While protesting his innocence, Arp put forth his findings which seemed to echo sentiments voiced by men like Humphreys. At the same time Arp’s speeches, to the modern reader, strike one as emboldened and at times brash in their support of seemingly “traitorous” opinions at a time where the southern presses were

monitored. For example, in a discussion concerning secession and whether or not southern states were “suvreen” before the war, Arp concluded the war “ain’t settled nor unsettled any great principles.” Secession, he believed, had been debated since the beginning of the American nation, relating to his audience:

From the time of Hamilton and Jefferson down to 1861, the right of a state to dissolve her own partnership hav been argued by powerfully minded men, and there have been more for it than agin it—more presidents, more senators, more statesmen, more judges, more people. Massachusetts and Connecticut were for it a wun time, and bellered and pawed dirt amazin to get out.

An interesting facet in Arp’s argument was his assertion that secession was something the South went into unwillingly, yet in his estimation, by the final break, the “Union” had been a “disunion for twenty years.” According to Arp, the southern response to this environment of “disunion,” in which eleven great “suvreen states. . . met in convention and in the light of day dissolved a Union they had created,” hardly constituted the crime of treason, the charge leveled by the Federal government. Arp saw the government’s charge of treason as “devilish infernal human hate.” At this point in his rant, Arp solemnly asked, “What do they keep Mr. Davis in jail for? . . . Ain’t Mr. Davis a great and good man?” Arp had nothing but praise for Davis, and unabashedly compared him to reviled northern leaders who supported Reconstruction measures, stating: If

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60 Port Gibson (Mississippi) Weekly Standard, 6 January 1866, p. 2. Quote: “It is singular that the “seditious” chaps at the North are not arrested, while editors in the South are snatched up for less offenses. Sedition is as bad as secession, but each is of different virulence in different systems and sections.”


Mr. Davis’ honor, and integrity, and patriotism, and true courage, were weighed in a balance against Sumner’s and Stevens’ and all of his enemies, wouldn’t he outweigh em all?”

Also in 1865, newspapers began printing arguments, tributes, and memorials calling for the release of Jefferson Davis. P.J. Mead, the editor of the *Natchez Democrat*, was probably the least cautious in his call for Davis’s release, insinuating that his incarceration was absurd. Declaring that he had “fervently hoped, that the land of Washington might be spared the disgrace of crushing a man who has so large a hold on the affections of the people,” Mead questioned, “was Mr. Davis more zealous in the cause of the South than General Lee?” Answering himself, he declared, “Certainly Not. Then why restore General Lee to all the rights of citizenship and keep Mr. Davis confined a prisoner of the state?” In a later article, Mead told readers how he believed a precedent of pardon existed. Davis, in his eyes, was “not more guilty than the least of that people [Confederates already pardoned].” Sparing no extremes of speech, Mead asserted, “the nation’s honor demands his release; magnanimity urges it, consistency requires it, and we hope providence decrees it.”

Outside of editorials, supporters of Davis also put their feelings into verse. Davis’s incarceration and possible death sentence caused many poets to wax emotional on the love and devotion felt by southerners for their former chief. The author “Mispah” in a piece called “Midnight Musings” published in the *Weekly Standard* believed should any harm come to Davis, he would quickly attain martyrdom. Mispah’s line proclaimed, “should a stern and relentless foe sacrifice Davis, his tomb will be the Mecca to every Southern heart.” Generations would learn of Davis’s noble sacrifice and place him high among the pantheon of worshiped men, even deities,

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64 *The Natchez Democrat*, 28 October 1865, p. 2.
65 *The Natchez Democrat*, 9 November 1865, p. 3.
as mothers “will teach their lisping cherubs to whisper the name of Davis next to that of their God.” Months later another poet, Rosetta, regretted Davis’s position and tied it to the fate of the vanquished nation, stating, “He lingers a prison our heart’s honored Chief. . . as thought sadly whispers –we struggled in vain.” Loyalty to Davis ran deep and knew no bounds as Rosetta wrote:

Ah! Well do I know that the noble and brave,  
To save him, with life-blood would purchase a grave;  
Would swell into thousands and snatch him away,  
From the prison that shamefully holds him to-day.  

No sentiments seem as extreme as those Rosetta claimed the southern people were willing to go for Davis. Most believed enough blood had been shed, and that Davis should be let go in peace, though no others expressed the desire to die for Davis’s cause.

Less poetic, but no less insistent upon their devotion to Davis and their desire to see him released, were the diverse memorials directed to President Andrew Johnson on behalf of Jefferson Davis. While many post-war accounts of southerners insist upon the discord of southern opinion concerning everything from secession, the conduct of the war, the purposes of the Confederacy, and Reconstruction, men of disparate opinions took the time and effort to plead on behalf of their former commander in chief. In addition, women—who rarely graced the pages of any newspaper—found their voices in their own memorials, speaking both for their own devotion to the lost Confederate Cause, providing another example of historian LeeAnn Whites

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67 Port Gibson (Mississippi) Weekly Standard, 3 February 1866, p. 3.
argument of how southern women devoted themselves to the reconstruction of southern white men and the memory of those who died for the Cause.68

Both men and women’s memorials contained similar elements. All expressed the sincere desire that Davis be released as soon as possible, many citing examples of other Confederates just as guilty as Davis who had already received pardon. In their own way, each claimed that enough blood had been shed in the recent conflict, and that the death of Davis would do little to ease the strained relations or move the nation toward peace. Each memorial tried to testify to Davis’s motives in joining the secession movement—most identifying him as an eleventh-hour secessionist who tried first for peace, then honorably followed his state’s choice to secede. In addition, memorialists attempted to justify and explain the secession movement, defining it as a movement of patriotism and self-defense. Just as interesting were memorialists’ claims how secession had been a movement or choice of the people—not just the ravings of a few fire-eaters. Men as well as women claimed secession for themselves and expressed how if Davis was guilty, so too were they.

Male memorialists were not all party-loyal. Giles M. Hillyer, a known opponent of Davis, expressed “kind feelings” toward Davis. The Weekly Standard praised the memorialist for his good head and good heart. Hillyer argued, “His [Davis’s] sin, if it be a sin, was our sin,” which declared the attempted revolution to be the work of the people, not that of a single man. He portrayed Davis as a man merely following the mandate of his state and nation:

It was no lawless spirit of mere revolt that prompted the people of Mississippi to their course during the late contest. They contended not “for power, or plunder, or extended rule,” but as they honestly believed, “for their hearths, their altars, and their homes. . .

68 LeeAnn Whites, Gender Matters Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Chapter 5, “‘Stand By Your Man’: The Ladies Memorial Association and the Reconstruction of Southern White Manhood.”
The attempted revolution was the people’s work, and Jeff Davis was their chosen instrument.69

In his plea to President Johnson, Hillyer simply stated how Davis’s death could not “increase the glory of the United States, nor promote the safety and stability of the general government. . . nor can it harmonize and unite our people. . . .” Echoing the verse of the poet Mispah, Hillyer believed that Davis’s prison, place of exile, or grave “is to be re-visited every hour in thought, and every year in fact, by thousands of men who hold allegiance to the National Government, it would be in that case a Mecca.”70

In November 1865, the Natchez Democrat printed the Mississippi Legislature’s memorial to President Andrew Johnson on behalf of Jefferson Davis. Almost word for word, the legislature repeated Hillyer’s memorial. The law-making body claimed that “it was no lawless spirit of mere revolt that prompted the people of Mississippi to their course during the late contest,” and it contended Mississippians had acted “as they honestly believed for their hearths, their altars, and their homes.”71 The legislature went a step further than Hillyer’s claim that revolution had been the work of the people and that Davis was their chosen instrument, stating “. . . he was but the representative of the people of the revolted States. His failure, which want of success has made a crime, was our crime.”72 In addition to sharing in the crimes of Davis, the legislature felt the need to assert Davis’s honor and character rendered him harmless, no threat to the United States. Their statement read:

His arm is powerless for injury; his intellect too great and noble to inspire him with a single thought of renewed contest; his heart too much in sympathy with our people, not to compel him to live with us as loyal citizens henceforth.73

69 Port Gibson (Mississippi) Weekly Standard, 9 November 1865, p. 4.
70 Port Gibson (Mississippi) Weekly Standard, 9 November 1865, p. 4.
71 The Natchez Democrat, 2 November 1865, p. 3.
72 The Natchez Democrat, 2 November 1865, p. 3.
73 The Natchez Democrat, 2 November 1865, p. 3.
About the same time the Federal government discerned the fate of Jefferson Davis, Henry Wirz, commandant of the Confederate prisoner of war camp at Andersonville, had been convicted of war crimes and hung.\textsuperscript{74} Seemingly speaking to the fear of his being connected with these crimes, the legislature of Mississippi added how it was “morally impossible that his name can be justly chargeable with assassination, with cruelty, or with crime.”\textsuperscript{75}

Unlike their coverage of men’s memorials on behalf of Davis, Mississippi newspapers commented extensively on women’s efforts to memorialize Davis in addition to printing their memorial in their pages. \textit{The Natchez Democrat} published a reprint of the response of the \textit{Metropolitan Record}, which was so moved by their reading of the appeal of Mississippi women, they proclaimed that Davis, “the elected President of eight million Americans,” was made sacred in the eyes of southerners because of his sufferings.\textsuperscript{76} Of southerners, they proclaimed “they are not the people to desert their leaders, or turn their backs upon their principles, to betray a man or cause.”\textsuperscript{77} Of the four thousand women who appealed to the State Legislature on behalf of Davis, the paper had nothing but praise, stating it was an “eloquent, fervid, patriotic document,” showing “frank and fearless devotion to a lost cause and defeated leaders. . .”.\textsuperscript{78} Despite this praise, the newspaper did not reprint the entirety of the women’s memorial, but what did appear

\textsuperscript{74} McPherson, \textit{Ordeal By Fire}, 450.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{The Natchez Democrat}, 2 November 1865, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{The Natchez Democrat}, 21 October 1865, p. 2. The population statistic provided by the memorial oddly seems to include slaves. According to the United States Census of 1860, the southern states had a combined free and enslaved population of more than nine million people. See the Population of the United States in 1860, Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eight Census. Last accessed December 2012, http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1860.html
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{The Natchez Democrat}, 21 October 1865, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{The Natchez Democrat}, 21 October 1865, p. 2.
illustrated how women of the South clearly aligned themselves with the Confederate cause, claiming it as their own. The memorial stated:

   Whatever the guilt or crime there be in Jefferson Davis and Charles Clark, the women of the South confess their participation, for those of us who did not at the outset justify the act which precipitated the bloody drama, learned to sympathize with a cause for which so much heroic blood has been shed.\footnote{The \textit{Natchez Democrat}, 21 October 1865, p. 2.}

   As LeeAnn Whites articulated, southern women, including those involved in Ladies Memorial Associations, rose to the occasion in the post-war, serving their communities in making sure Confederate dead received a decent burial, that the memory of the Confederate dead would be honored at least once a year on Confederate Memorial Day, and that their story was emblazoned on monuments to the Confederate soldier found in southern towns.\footnote{Whites, \textit{Gender Matters}, 86.} The motives of the Mississippi women who wrote the memorial on behalf of Davis had same understanding. Their efforts may not have fall on deaf ears. Their plea could have circulated in newspapers around the country, and women close to Washington took direct action. The \textit{Weekly Standard} noted how a group of women from Baltimore gained an audience with President Johnson and presented him with a petition for Davis’s release. Interestingly Johnson related to the women that “if it were between man and man he would release him but because it was a national question “now is not the time to take such a step. . . When the proper time comes for the exercise of magnamity, I trust that I shall not be found wanting.” According to the \textit{Standard}, Johnson was “courtly” in his deference to the women and gentle in his refusal.” Unfortunately no other instances of women’s petitions or audiences were related, but even the existence of these two examples, outside of traditional poetry written and published in newspapers during the era, not
only shows women’s support for Davis and the Confederate Cause—including secession, but provided an example of women entering male-dominated public spheres of communication.

Though many talked, Congress never put much energy into preparing to put Jefferson Davis on trial. Fellow Mississippians from the Mississippi Bar at one point had asked James T. Harrison to represent Davis, offering to defray his cost of service and expenses with full confidences in his ability as a special pleader, should Davis’s case come to trial. Harrison predicted the Davis’s trial would never occur.81 By 1867, Republicans placed more energy in harassing the sitting president, Andrew Johnson, for what Radical Republicans considered to be a weak reconstruction effort in the South. The Federal government determined it was not necessary to debate whether secession was legal or that the South had ever been anything more than a rebellious group of men who hijacked state governments in a quest to fulfill their pro-slavery agenda. Jefferson Davis greatly anticipated the prospect of having to go before a court of his peers to explain his actions during the secession crisis and ensuing war, but he never had that opportunity. Prominent northern and southern citizens raised $100,000 to cover Davis’s bond, and in December 1868, Davis was set free to live a quiet life and write his memoirs. In February 1869, the Federal government dropped his case.

Davis had no interest in pardon, though the public urged him to apply. Believing that asking for pardon would be something akin to admitting that his interpretation of state’s rights was in error, Davis, to his friends and enemies alike, offered little but the knowledge that, “I have no claim to pardon, not having in any wise repented.” Even in 1884, Davis was adamant in refusing to apply for a pardon stating,

“It has been said that I should apply to the United States for a pardon. But repentance must precede the right of pardon, and I have not repented. Remembering, as I must, all

81 Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Mississippi, 385 and Goodspeed, Memoirs of Mississippi, 884.
which has been suffered, all which has been lost—disappointed hopes and crushed aspirations—yet I deliberately say, if it were all to do over again, I would again do just as I did in 1861.”

In refusing to seek a pardon, Davis encompassed in his person, unpardoned, the deaths of thousands of southern men for the cause. Davis felt personally responsible for these men, and by refusing a pardon, felt that he was doing justice to the memory of that sacrifice. A pardon, for Davis, would negate southern boys’ and men’s lives, beliefs, and values.

After his imprisonment, Davis retired from public life, though this time, unlike the period following the 1850 secession crisis, it less a matter of choice than the glaring reality that President Johnson and most of the North considered him persona non grata. Davis exerted his passion and conviction throughout the rest of his life on defending himself, the right of secession, and his own duty to the Confederate cause. His writings and speeches after the war evidence a man obsessed with explaining himself and how history would remember him. He settled on a tone that was part defensive and part unrepentant, and he hoped against hope that if not his contemporaries, then posterity, would understand him and the Confederacy’s cause.

Davis’s work, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, seems more of a psychological exercise than a memoir at points. Working with men who had studied the military aspects of various battles, Davis came to new conclusions about events that during the war, he had acted upon with such vigor. One such example was that of the campaign of Brice’s Crossroads, of which Davis remarked, “That campaign was not understood at Richmond. The impression made upon those in authority was that Forrest had made another successful raid, but I

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saw it all after it was too late.”

Obsessed with uncovering the truth, Davis closely followed the development of the Southern Historical Society Papers. Davis believed in the merit of the projects as one that would allow future historians “to do justice to our cause and conduct.” The errors he found distressed him, because he believed wholeheartedly that the Papers were the “depository of authentic facts in regard to the Confederate States of America.

Understanding the Southern Historical Society Papers and other works of the era made historical judgments, Davis used his writings as a means to correct the errors he found and to continue to fight the Civil War. His wife Varina believed Davis’s project to be a “weary recital of the weary war.” In a letter to one of the Davis’s daughters, Varina described that the book was

to be compiled in a splendid but heartbreaking record of cherished hopes now blasted, brave warriors bleeding and dying, and noble men living, yet dead in that they are hopeless—this tremendous record is being given to the world, and the while as he writes the graves give up the dead, and they stalk before us all gory and downcast, but for all that, a gallant, proud army, ready, if they could again put on their fleshly shield to do battle for their rights.

Varina Davis’s account of Davis’s writing processes, as a sort of experience with the dead as living, says much for her opinion of Davis’s passion in the process. The book was not merely an account or a memoir, but a reliving of the past. The cause, according to Varina’s testimony, was a fight for their rights, and in Davis’s words, that meant the right to secede.

On causation, secession, Davis was at his most lucid, stating that secession, though defeated, was in its purest form still a right held by states. At this point in his career, Davis

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83 Attributed to Jefferson Davis, but at the time of the defense, could not be located in Davis’s The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1881) and could only be found in John Allan Wyeth, The Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest (New York: Harper & Bros., 1899), 634.
85 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 619.
86 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 619-620.
tempered statements concerning secession with the recognition that the cause was lost, and he took care to assure his audience that he had no plans to resurrect the Confederacy. He explained:

In asserting the right of secession, it has not been my wish to incite to its exercise: I recognize the fact that the war showed it to be impracticable, but this did not prove it to be wrong. And now that it may not be again attempted, and that the Union may promote the general welfare, it is needful that the truth, the whole truth, should be known, so that crimination and recrimination may forever cease, and then, on the basis of fraternity and faithful regard for the rights of the States, there be written on the arch of the Union, *Esto perpetua*.87

In this statement, Davis suggested that reunion could be achieved if the North would just admit that the South had not been wrong in the action of secession. Davis created a competing version by which many people in the United States would use to claim state's rights theories of causation.

Toward the end of his life, Davis spoke at a number of engagements that memorialized soldiers of the southern cause. At one such memorial service Davis said:

In referring therefore to the days of the past and the glorious cause you have served . . . . I seek but to revive a memory which should be dear to you and to your children, a memory which teaches the highest lessons of manhood, of truth and adherence to duty—duty to your State, duty to your principles, duty to your buried parents, and duty to your coming children.”88

In this speech, as in many others, Davis asked his audiences to remember the war dearly, as a lesson in which to indoctrinate one’s children and future generations. Davis, in his late career, wished to determine the way in which future generations would remember the war. For Davis, it was imperative for generations of future southerners to respect the ideas of secession as issues of manhood and call to duty that their fathers and grandfathers so imperatively and passionately gave their lives.

88 Jefferson Davis speech erection of Stonewall Jackson statue by the Louisiana Division Army of Northern Virginia,” 6 December 1878, located in John William Jones, *The Davis Memorial Volume; Or Our Dead President, Jefferson Davis, and the World’s Tribute to His Memory* (New York: N. D. McDonald & Company, 1890), 446-447.
Despite Davis’s heavy-handed lectures to future generations, his last public speech took a different tone. In 1888, Davis addressed the crowd with a message that suggested a man tired of fighting, and ready to rest his cause. Davis intoned,

The past is dead; let it bury its dead, its hopes and aspirations. Before you lies the future . . . a future of national glory . . . Let me beseech you to lay aside all rancor, all bitter sectional feeling, and to take your places in the ranks of those who will bring about a consummation devoutly to be wished—a reunited country.89

Davis’s words seem strange, considering his post-war writing and speaking career, on behalf of what he perceived to be his mission to the Confederate dead, as well as his constitutional theories of secession. His words suggest others had entered the political sphere who would lead a new generation of Americans with a Davis-approved view of the South and the Civil War.

A reunited nation was not something all secessionists could bear, and more than a few wanted nothing to do with the nation. Jacob Thompson understood Jefferson Davis’s initial fear of being held responsible for his part in coordinating secession and the Civil War. Like Davis, he ran. Unlike Davis, he was never caught. Jacob Thompson experienced high drama in the post-war. The Jacob Thompson for whom Duncan McCollum and his schoolmates waited for at the train station and described as a man invested with the fiery spirit of secession in 1860. By 1865, Thompson had lost his Confederate nation and recovering his identity would prove difficult. A man of means in the antebellum period, Thompson owned 2500 acres of land, valued at $50,000 and capable of producing five thousand bushels of corn and almost four hundred bales of cotton. Thompson also owned farm implements worth $2,700 and 100,000 shares of Bell Telephone Company stock.90 Federal troops burned Thompson’s home in Oxford, Mississippi, as payment

for his role in secession and Civil War. Along with his home, Thompson lost all of his personal papers, which would in time prove to be a hasty decision on the part of the Federal army and a boon to Thompson. Little surprise that with little home to return to, he fled to Europe to avoid being taken into custody by the Federal government.

While in Europe from 1866-1869, Thompson met with other “banished” leaders and toured France, Switzerland, Italy, Africa, Palestine, Austria, Germany and Belgium. His exile was largely self-imposed, though at one point an indictment connected with the Lincoln assassination included his name. In a letter to Captain William Delay, Thompson lamented that he was a “cast out an exile without home or country, and apparently without friends.” While his wife returned to the United States barely a year into his self-imposed exile, Thompson stressed that his refusal to return home came not from fear of penalties of offending law and trials but because no constitution or law in the South could protect his rights. He wrote:

For I assure you, that with all her faults, I love my country... when life’s fitful fever is over; my body shall be buried beneath the soil which has been fattened with the blood of my ancestors in the struggle for its independence... I shall never return to the state until I can come invested with all the rights of a freeman.

Like many high-ranking members of the Confederate government, Thompson feared for his rights, but also of returning to “communities run by negroes.”

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91 During the trial, Lewis F. Bates, in his testimony for the prosecution on 30 May 1865, implicated Jefferson Davis in the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln. See Benn Pitman, The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators (Clark, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2006 reprint), 46-47.

92 Jefferson Davis to Captain William Delay, 11 August 1866, written from Dublin, Ireland, located in Jacob Thompson, Letters to and from Jacob Thompson. Edited by Percy Lee Rainwater, 105.

93 Jefferson Davis to Captain William Delay, 11 August 1866, Letters to and from Jacob Thompson. Edited by Percy Lee Rainwater, 106.

94 Letter to James M. Howry of Virginia from Halifax, Nova Scotia, October 8, 1867, located in Jacob Thompson, Letters to and from Jacob Thompson. Edited by Percy Lee Rainwater, 107.
On May 12, 1869, the Weekly Delta conveyed the news that Jacob Thompson “who, through fear or disgust, left the country at the time of surrender, has returned to his home at Oxford.” Of secession and the Confederacy he remarked:

We went to sea in a hastily constructed boat . . . for four years [the boat] bore the buffeting and beatings of the winds and waves, and finally went down amid the breakers, attracting the admiration of the world.

Thompson, like many of his Confederate colleagues, recognized the speed to which the nation succumbed to secession, and though he recognized its ultimate failure, his language suggested a sense of pride that the Confederacy lasted as long as it did. Thompson did not to feel at home in the ‘new United States, where he was “permitted to live and breathe,” but “not allowed any lot or employment in sailing the new ship.” At the same time Thompson lamented, “it is probably best that they [secessionists] cannot vote or hold office,” so that “purier and better and wiser citizens relieved you of these anxieties and perplexities.” Thompson in 1869 sounded tired, perhaps a bit wounded that he and his fellow secessionists failed at their quest to make their antebellum dreams of a better country a reality, but he also sensed that the country’s future required new blood, perhaps that which was not bitter or disappointed.

The nature of what the new generation would stand for and who would lead was in question between 1865-1872. While Barry mouldered away in relative seclusion and Thompson eventually stopped running from his past, men rose up against the forces of Union victory or the changes wrought by Reconstruction and used methods much more potent than apologetics.

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95 “From the Weekly Delta,” 12 May 1869, located in Jacob Thompson, Letters to and from Jacob Thompson. Edited by Percy Lee Rainwater, 110. His home being destroyed, it is unknown where he actually stayed.
96 From the Weekly Delta,” Letters to and from Jacob Thompson. Edited by Percy Lee Rainwater, 110
97 From the Weekly Delta,” Letters to and from Jacob Thompson. Edited by Percy Lee Rainwater, 111.
Biographers noted how George Rootes Clayton, the Lowndes County delegate to the secession convention, defended the right of secession to his death. His passion for secession caused his fifty-seven-year-old heart to give out before his spirit did in 1867. To actively participate in the Ku Klux Klan. Charles de la Boulay Fontaine had been a strong advocate of secession prior to the war, and he lost most of his personal estate during the war. After the war, he and many other unreconstructed men channeled their energies into the creation of secret societies, including the Klan. Fontaine’s interest was such that he helped establish the organization in Pontotoc. His fellow secession convention delegate Edward F. McGehee seems to have joined him in membership, motivated perhaps by bitterness after Federals burned his

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home in 1864 and loss of almost $40,000 in real estate and $79,000 in personal estate in the war.\footnote{Year: 1860; Census Place: , Panola, Mississippi; Roll: M653_589; Page: 268; Line 32. Year: 1870; Census Place: Township 6 Range 8, Panola, Mississippi; Roll: M593_747; Page: 198B; line 3.}

While others worked against Reconstruction, at least one man completely changed his attitudes toward his former slaves and the Federal government. Still others toed the line and accepted Reconstruction’s conditions if only to return the State to a government officiated of, by, and for white Mississippians. Robert Watkins Flournoy lost about $60,000 in personal estate during the war. He had been a slaveholder with a plantation of fifty-six slaves. After the war, Flournoy became a favored target of the Ku Klux Klan. A staunch Democrat prior to the war, Flournoy transferred his allegiance to the Republican or Radical Party and fought to keep white supremacy from gaining legitimacy or power. Flournoy’s understanding of the realities of the war’s end and the new circumstances it wrought not only for himself and his family and people, but that also of newly freed Mississippi African Americans is unique. In the face of many of his fellowmen’s ignorance or inability to face or accede to changes, Flournoy comes across as a man not only redeemed but well ahead of his time.

In November 1865, Flournoy addressed a letter to none other than Thaddeus Stevens. While Stevens’s life end by 1868, the Pennsylvanian was one of the most powerful men of the House of Representatives in his day and a force with which to be reckoned during Reconstruction. His harsh treatment and consideration of the South after the war is legendary, so for Flournoy to write to the Republican as a former enemy, secessionist, and Democrat, is worth considering. Having written to Henry Wilson and Charles Sumner and seemingly having received no sincere reply or seen any movement toward change, Flournoy wrote to Stevens
because “I believe there is not person to whom I can communicate who is more disposed to see justice extended to that unfortunate people [freedmen] than yourself.”¹⁰¹

The language of Flournoy’s letter suggests urgency, anxiety, and frustration. For such emotions to come from a man who once voted for secession, Flournoy’s letter is as surprising as it is hopeful. At least one southern man knew the result of war, its impact on the least of the southern population, and strove to right a wrong. He was in the smallest of minorities as he noted:

I in common with a few men here am anxious to see the negro have all the rights of a citizen, and I wish to see him possessed of and protected in those rights, and as the end to the securing [of] those privileges and rights, I wish to see continued in the ascendancy that party who has been instrumental in giving him freedom and to whom he can alone look or hope for protection.

Flournoy argued that to leave freedmen to the devices of the majority of his people and their prejudices would be “barbarous.” Stevens should not count on the goodwill and best wishes of Mississippians, whom he argued had only intensified their hatred toward freedmen as a result of reconstruction. The danger was far from over Flournoy argued. Real southern feelings for the Union were little known and to remove the military districts from the southern states would be to risk suicide. Flournoy knew the cost of Reconstruction to a Union that had just finished fighting an expensive, four-year-long Civil War, but cost should not be put before the fate of African American lives.¹⁰²

Hatred against the Union was “deep rooted,” and the fact that the Federal government failed to keep men who Flournoy termed as “traitors,” from office. He accurately described the complicated state of affairs:

¹⁰¹ Robert W. Flournoy to Thaddeus Stevens, 20 November 1865, New Albany, Mississippi, Box 2, General Correspondence, Thaddeus Stevens Papers, LOC.
¹⁰² Robert W. Flournoy to Thaddeus Stevens, 20 November 1865, New Albany, Mississippi, Box 2, General Correspondence, Thaddeus Stevens Papers, LOC.
We had hoped when the government had succeeded in crushing out the rebellion treason would if not punished at least by the government been held dishonorable. But instead of that traitors are elevated to offices of honor and will be soon knocking at the doors of Congress claiming seats, elected by traitors as a reward for efforts in attempting to destroy the very government they are now asking to take a part in government. To admit such men many of whom have defeated union men upon no other grounds but that they were union men will be rewarding treason. And so their objects to renew in the halls of congress those disgraceful scenes so supercilious and overbearing characteristic of southern men for the last twenty years. Those men will expect you to repeal all disabilities against them because they were active in their overt treason against the government.

Flournoy’s letter presciently describes what would happen less than ten years later. His writing to Stevens was in hope that he would rile the man’s characteristic anger as well as provide him with a more realistic portrait of the actual events as they transpired in Mississippi. He predicted that men would swear loyalty but act counter to that oath given time. He appeals to Stevens’ professed duty to the “hopes and expectations [of freedom] you are called upon to cherish and foster” among newly freed African Americans. Should he fail, he proposed his compatriots desired little more than to reestablish slavery.  

Though once a member of those ranks, Flournoy professed a frustration and an anger that suggests a clean break. In labeling his fellow Mississippians as “partricidal” and “disgraceful,” he exhibits a clear distaste for their character and wishes to be considered at quite a distance from them. In case Stevens had any doubt as to how this hatred could manifest itself in Mississippi society, he recounted recent horrors:

But the other day a negro woman was killed by a white man, and not three miles from where I write a negro man was accused of stealing cotton. There was no proof to convict him; at the dead hour of the night he was taken out of his bed from his wife, and this morning I hear his body has been found suspended by the neck to a tree; the murder occurred three or four nights ago. This would not have taken place had a company of troops stationed at Pontotoc remained. There will be no attempts made to investigate this

103 Robert W. Flournoy to Thaddeus Stevens, 20 November 1865, New Albany, Mississippi, Box 2, General Correspondence, Thaddeus Stevens Papers, LOC.
horrible act by the authorities or people here. It would cost any man his life to attempt to do so.

Flournoy’s descriptions of violence against African American men and women in the form of murder and lynching are some of the first of the postwar, but they did not represent even a fraction of what occurred each day in the entire South. His final line in his letter to Stevens stood as a challenge from a reconstructed secessionist to the Union’s champion of black rights, “Is this to be the end of all that has been done to accomplish the freedom of the negro, is he to be left in the hands of his bitterest foes, who will seek their disappointed vengeance upon him, for the acts of others?” Flournoy correctly assigns the motive for white violence against black men and women to revenge for the failure of the southern bid for nation, and in many respects, for all that Congressional Republicans would attempt during Radical Reconstruction. Flournoy is chillingly correct in his assessment that this was the fate of freedmen and women.104

Flournoy’s conversion is supported in his post-war activities. Feeling as he did, he supported Blanch K. Bruce’s successful bid to become the first non-white Senator of the United States to serve a full term. Flournoy served as Bruce’s campaign manager and published a newspaper *Equal Rights* complete with a motto of “Hue to the line and let the chips fall where they will.” When running later against L.Q.C. Lamar for a seat in the House (check this), Lamar argued that African American interests used Flournoy for their purposes and discarded him. Flournoy became a well-respected man in his community, heading the equivalent of the Freedman’s Bureau in Pontotoc County, where his fellow convention member, Fontaine had set up the Ku Klux Klan. Men who had once been united in secession, came to blows over the equality and treatment of African Americans during Reconstruction. When the Klan threatened

104 Robert W. Flournoy to Thaddeus Stevens, 20 November 1865, New Albany, Mississippi, Box 2, General Correspondence, Thaddeus Stevens Papers, LOC.
Flournoy with whipping or hanging as well as destroying his newspaper press, he filed legal charges. While the courts dropped the cases, the Klan members and not Flournoy paid the legal expenses.\\(^{105}\)

Most of the men who chose to assist Union victors with their Reconstruction program were not Democrats like Flournoy, but a few managed to remain in judicial positions to which they had been appointed in 1865 until Radical Reconstruction forced them out. In this category were Henry Thomas Ellett, Alexander H. Handy, and William Littleton Harris.\\(^{106}\) James A. Orr was a special case. He would not cooperate with or participate in the Democratic Party in Mississippi immediately after the war from 1865-1870, and he took no part in either the 1868 or 1872 Democratic conventions. Orr believed that the best way to deal with Reconstruction was to go along with Federal directives. In his mind, as long as white men appeared at the polls in sufficient quantities, the African American vote of the state could be controlled. In 1870, Orr became a judge on the Sixth Judicial District, largely composed of blacks. Orr proceeded to do his best to undo all that his predecessor, a man committed to black equality, had done in office.\\(^{107}\)

Most post-war positions entrusted to Mississippians were former Whigs or men without a Democratic political affiliation prior to the war. Former Whig from Tippah County Orlando Davis found work in the immediate post-war as a circuit judge. Henry Stewart Foote, excluded from the secession convention because of his Unionist stance in the 1850s, went on to embrace

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\\(^{106}\) Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 343 and 508, for Handy and Harris. Ellett’s service dates match this period 1865-1867.
secession, move to Tennessee and became a member of Tennessee’s delegation to the
Confederate Congress. When Union forces took the state, Foote capitulated and immediately
accepted terms offered by Lincoln’s Amnesty plan. His early pardon assured him of a plum
position as superintendent of the United States Mint during President U.S. Grant’s
administration, a position that he held until his death in 1880.\textsuperscript{108} Similarly William L. Sharkey
suffered in the antebellum period as a Whig in a progressively growing Democratic district. A
representative and judge before the war, Sharkey was shut out of the secession convention
because he was an admitted pro-Union man. After the war, he “threw himself into the breach of
reconstruction and became a faithful pilot and Phythias of his generation,” first as Provisional
Governor of the State of Mississippi and later as a proposed but unseated Senator during Radical
Reconstruction. This final discouragement sent him back to his law practice until his death in
1873.\textsuperscript{109}

For ex-Confederates with political aspirations, loyalty oaths and the slow process of
appeals for presidential pardons left men waiting many years to reenter politics. In June 1868,
Congress relieved 1,431 individuals of their restrictions under the Reconstruction Acts and the
14th Amendment. Many of these men had been elected, appointed, or considered for public
office and had become affiliated with the Republican Party. Amnesty Bills between 1868-1872
would eventual pardon all but a few hundred high-ranking former Confederates.\textsuperscript{110}

In Mississippi, like many Deep South states, the Republican Party was not popular before
1876 with the Tilden-Hayes election, which essentially ended Radical Republican

\textsuperscript{108} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 287.
\textsuperscript{109} Lynch, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Mississippi}, 194-195.
\textsuperscript{110} Baggett, \textit{Scalawags}, 236.
In the 1860s, Republicans were aware that some southerners would view Party membership as a possible route to power, so they were wary of removing states like Mississippi from under the eye of military rule and executive power too soon. Most Mississippi scalawags were Old Whigs or Democratic opponents before the war. Though scalawags were often seen as taking advantage of post-war circumstances once they converted to the Republican Party, most of the men were involved with slavery before the war and were well respected.

The Federal government’s decision to parole Jefferson Davis without trial in May 1867 effectively ended the hope that secession’s legality might be debated and resolved in a courtroom. Yet the closing of this chapter did not preclude politicians from continuing to revisit secession, especially as more and more former Confederates received pardon, regained their citizenship rights, and entered into Reconstruction’s political contests. Candidates’ position on the secession issue, their Civil War service, and their views on Reconstruction became political cannon fodder in hotly contested elections. The 1869 election was the first popular election since the Civil War of most major state executive and legislative offices. In addition, Mississippians faced a vote on the new state constitution.

The constitution was a sore subject among Mississippi voters. The product of the 1868 Constitutional Convention, the proposed constitution increased proscriptive measures, broadened the franchise to include blacks, included a provision for racially integrated schools, and expanded the state’s expenses to administer the government under the new constitution. James W. Garner noted in his work *Reconstruction in Mississippi* that the new constitution greatly increased the appointive powers of the governor’s office, allowing state’s executive to operate as

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111 Baggett, *Scalawags*, 177.
a “veritable autocrat.” The governor now had the power to appoint all judges, supreme and circuit, all chancellors, all militia officers, and all country, district, and precinct officers.\footnote{James W. Garner, \textit{Reconstruction in Mississippi} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 212.}

When put to the vote of Mississippian in July 1868, the constitution failed to pass. Several representatives of pro-constitution groups, including Radical Republican elements in the state and the soon-to-be-infamous Committee of Sixteen, which included Flournoy and Alcorn, proceeded to Washington to gain audience with Congress to lobby for the readmission of the state, despite the vote on the constitution, hoping Congress would accept the constitution over the negative vote of Mississippian and readmit the state.\footnote{The committee of sixteen included six men from the state at large and two from each of the five Mississippi congressional districts, including: Robert Watkins Flournoy, Jonathan Tarball, A. Alderson, Alston Mygatt, E. Stafford, F. Hodges. First district, U. Ozanne, J.L. Alcorn, Second District: W.W. Bell, J.G. Lyons; Third District: George F. Brown, G.W. Van Hook; Fourth District: T.W. Stringer, H.W. Barry; Fifth District: E.J. Castello, W.H. Gibbs. See Garner, \textit{Reconstruction in Mississippi}, 220.}

\footnote{Garner, \textit{Reconstruction in Mississippi}, 227.} After going back and forth between appeals to Congress as well as President U. S. Grant, Congress finally resolved to authorize the President to submit the constitution to the voters, while separately submitting the clauses voters found obnoxious so that they would not interfere with the general passing of the constitution.\footnote{Garner, \textit{Reconstruction in Mississippi}, 237.}

President Grant issued a proclamation in July 1868, designating November 30, 1869, as the day on which the constitution would be resubmitted to the Mississippi electorate.\footnote{Garner, \textit{Reconstruction in Mississippi}, 237.} The date would also serve as election day for the state’s executive and legislative offices.

This environment created a rather heated election, especially the race for the governor’s seat. The winner would inherit an extremely powerful position, newly invested with never-before-tested powers. The canvass pitted Republican candidate Alcorn against National Union Republican candidate Judge Louis Dent. Though the Democratic Party was effectively defunct at
the time of the election, it is interesting to note on more than one occasion *The Tri-Weekly Clarion* asserted that Alcorn and his party continued to address Dent’s party as the Democratic Party. Knowing there was no love lost between Alcorn and the Democratic Party, one might venture a guess that the National Union Republicans masked their Democratic Party loyalty due to the political climate. Party nomenclature aside, both men found themselves defending themselves against charges of disloyalty to Mississippians.

Democrats chose Dent as their candidate, according to Garner, because he was the brother-in-law of President Grant. The party hoped to get the support of the national administration, but President Grant put an end to those aspirations with a private letter to Dent in August 1869. True to his party, Grant related to Dent, “Personally I wish you well, and would do all in my power proper to be done to secure your success, but in public matters personal feelings will not influence me.”

In addition to accusations of nepotism, Dent spent a lot of his campaign fighting charges of being a carpetbagger. Arriving in Mississippi in the later years of the war, Dent was a lessee of “abandoned” land in Coahoma County and managed to become a resident of that county by the time of Grant’s election.

In comparison to Dent, Alcorn was a native Mississippian and experienced politician. A former Old-Line Whig who defected to the Republicans, Alcorn was a political chameleon, suiting his politics to survive in and fit the social and cultural realities of Mississippi. Republican campaigners put forth in the *Brandon Republican* a summation of Alcorn’s journey in antebellum and post-war politics to date, explaining: “General Alcorn was a Whig up to ’59, a union man in ’60, a secessionist in ’61, a fire-eater in ’62, a peace-man in ’63, a growler in ’64, a rebel in ’65, a reconstructionist in ’66, a scalawag in ’67, a radical in ’68, and a bitter-end in

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To hear Alcorn speak of his involvement in the secession crisis is to witness the epitome of the conflicts that occurred in southerners who chose disunion in 1861—men torn between their honor to their fellow Mississippians and their country—and in the post-war decided to continue their political careers.

Alcorn’s famous words as he voted for secession, “The die is cast—the Rubicon is crossed—and I enlist myself with the army that marches on Rome; I vote for the ordinance,” came back to haunt him in 1869. Entering the secession convention in 1861 pledged as a Unionist, many of his peers would label him a cooperationist or eleventh-hour secessionist. His vote for secession helped bring most of the convention’s reluctant delegates around to voting for secession. Despite Alcorn’s connections to the Secession Convention, he saw very little action during the Civil War thanks to the Davis administration’s insistence on Democratic Party solidarity in terms of political or military appointments. The early years of the war found him without an appointment, so he sold cotton in the black market, which allowed him to emerge from the war as one of the wealthiest Mississippians. In the last year of the war, Alcorn tried a last-ditch effort to help save the Confederate cause, but he was at home again before the end of the war. His lack of war experience in either the political or military realms of the Confederacy put him in line to make an early bid to regain full citizenship rights in 1865. Spending much of his time between the end of the war and 1869 delivering speeches and printing pamphlets aimed

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118 Reprint appeared in Jackson (Mississippi) Tri-Weekly Clarion, 28 October 1869, p. 2. Also printed in a speech by Amos Randall Johnston, Speech of Hon. Amos R. Johnston at Sardis, Mississippi, on the 13th day of October, A. D., 1869 [including] Alcorn’s record, etc. (n.p.,1869).
mainly at old Whigs and voters without political affiliation, Alcorn worked with the hope that Mississippi would avert a white party or black party controlled by northerners.  

Alcorn affiliated himself with the Republican Party in 1867, after attempting to distance himself from his secessionist past. He also wished to stay far away from the Democratic Party, which he publicly blamed for secession and war. Alcorn declared secession was not possible under the Constitution, buying into the idea that the South never left the Union, and by this argument, once Mississippi nullified secession, her states’ rights would be returned intact with little dispute or requirement. One has to question the logic of Alcorn’s argument. Declaring secession as a criminal act would have negated Alcorn’s ability to lead by virtue of his compliance with other ordinance signers, who committed, according to a criminal definition of secession, treason by creating a government external to that of the United States. At the same time he recognized that restoration could only occur through cooperation with the Republican Party. Alcorn’s affiliation with the Party was conservative in nature, and Radical Republicans never quite got over having a secessionist in their midst.

From the very beginning of the canvass for the gubernatorial seat, Alcorn’s views on secession and his precarious political loyalties played a central role in Democratic attacks on his character. The Tri-Weekly Clarion focused its efforts on making sure readers knew that Alcorn had been among the men he was now chastising for leading the South on the road to secession and war in 1861. From September through December 1869, editors emphasized Alcorn’s involvement in the secession crisis in order to then ask readers to compare these actions to his condemnation of secession in the post-war as well as his involvement with the Committee of

120 Pereyra, James Lusk Alcorn, Chapter 6.
Sixteen. Ideally, the *Clarion* desired to show readers Alcorn’s lack of devotion to Mississippians, whether it be to the memory of the Cause or for the ongoing sufferings of Mississippians during Reconstruction. At the same time, it is extremely telling that a Democratic paper flouted Alcorn’s secession record with such detail, given many of their own number’s participation in and devotion to secession and the Confederate cause. Alcorn’s moment of solidarity to bring together Mississippians to secede in 1861 became a tool of division among former secessionists re-entrenching in 1869.

Between his comments that placed blame of secession on Democrats, affiliation with the Republican Party, and his role in the Committee of Sixteen, Alcorn’s antics cost him quite a few of his political friends. The *Tri-Weekly Clarion* in Jackson brought this fact front and center in a short reprint and commentary from the *Water Valley Eagle*. An unnamed newspaper source claiming to be a former “warm personal friend and admirer” of Alcorn, stated, “Since reading Gen. Alcorn’s late speeches and letter, I could not support or vote for him for any office under heaven; or in any way act even temporarily with any party he affiliates with.”121 The *Tri-Weekly Clarion* added that they believed all of Alcorn’s old personal friends among the conservatives of North Mississippi shared the sentiment.

Beginning on September 9, 1869, *The Tri-Weekly Clarion* began its assault on Alcorn’s secessionist views. The goal was to exploit Alcorn’s political record to show how through his inconsistencies, Alcorn’s candidacy should be unpalatable to all parties involved, not just Democratic supporters. *The Try-Weekly Clarion* reprinted their editorial “J. L. Alcorn’s Secession Record!” on October 23, 1869. Adding full excerpts from the Secession Convention proceedings, the article was the first in a series of pieces printed over the course of the canvass

121 *Jackson (Mississippi) Tri-Weekly Clarion*, 7 September 1869, p. 2.
designed to paint a portrait of James Lusk Alcorn as an ultra-secessionist. Attacking Alcorn’s claim he was a Unionist delegate, the *Clarion* asserted:

[H]e was elected a delegate of Coahoma to the convention not as a Unionist, but as a co-operationist, that is to say, he was pledged to carry Mississippi out of the Union in the event a certain number of Southern States would go with her. His Unionism amounted to that and nothing more.\textsuperscript{122}

The *Clarion* believed a Unionist would have voted with a bit more hesitancy, been a little less involved, and showed less enthusiasm for secession. While Alcorn initially supported Mississippi’s secession only in concert with Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana, the *Clarion* editor believed this was Alcorn’s only attempt at forestalling secession’s wave. Once Alcorn announced he would enlist himself in the army that goes to Rome, according to the *Clarion*, Alcorn acted little different than the staunchest of fire-eaters. Particularly damning were Alcorn’s votes against William Yerger’s peace proposition and any future reconstruction of the Union, calling the idea “impracticable and unadvisable,” as well as his lack of support for two motions favoring democratic participation in the secession process. The first motion would have allowed “the people under the influence of sober second thought to review their action and correct any error into which precipitation may have plunged them,” and the second motion would have allowed the Constitution created by the commission to be submitted to the people to ratify or reject.\textsuperscript{123} According to the *Clarion*, Alcorn’s record spoke for itself—he was a proper representative of secession by proxy of the votes he cast and strong declarations made in the secession convention.

The Republican response to the *Clarion*’s first and subsequent forays into Alcorn’s secession record illustrated that Democrats had hit a nerve. The editorial on Alcorn’s secession record caught the attention of the Republican publication *The Mississippi Pilot*. The *Pilot* argued

\textsuperscript{122} Jackson (Mississippi) *Tri-Weekly Clarion*, 9 September 1869, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{123} Jackson (Mississippi) *Tri-Weekly Clarion*, 9 September 1869, p. 2.
the *Clarion* devoted three columns to Alcorn’s record in order to show that “he is not the proper man to become our governor.” At the same time, on September 14, 1869, the *Clarion* refuted the *Pilot*’s claim, stating that their motive was not to show that Alcorn was not fit for the governor’s office, but that Alcorn lacked consistency as well as a proper respect for the people of the state. Alcorn’s secession record needed to be illuminated, an exasperated writer explained, because the man who:

fired the Southern heart with utterances more incendiary and war-like than fell from the lips of any other member of the convention of 1861 . . . should not have been the person to advocate the scheme of disenfranchisement, embraced in the plan of the Committee of Sixteen of which he was a member. Nor he who could, with any show of consistency or respect for the people of the State, lead in the pending campaign, the ravenous crew of carpet-baggers and spoilsmen who are howling for their blood.  

A little more than a week later, the *Clarion* responded again to Republican complaints of Democrats’ continued assault on Alcorn’s record. This time, in response to the *Vicksburg Republican*, the *Clarion* argued Alcorn’s secessionist past was important in the overall portrait of Alcorn as a representative man of the Republican Party. The *Clarion* understood the difficulty with which Republicans had accepted former secessionists in their midst. In addition, the *Clarion* recognized the difficulty Mississippians had in seeing one of their own defect to the Republican Party.

The *Clarion* exploited this disconnect at every opportunity—knowing full well the bad taste Alcorn’s presence in politics created. Duty driven, the *Clarion* responded to the *Vicksburg Republican*’s complaint of undue attention to their candidate:

But whether he is nominated or not, so long as he continues to be the agent of Malignant Radicals for the proscription of the Southern people, Union men as well as original secessionists, on account of the very secession for which he voted and spoke—into which

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he said he would go “as far as he who went farthest”—and so long as he strives to organize the blacks as a class, against the whites, in consideration of the very institution of slavery whose responsibilities he shared to the extent of owning probably five hundred “chattels” in the Mississippi bottom—we shall feel bound to devote to him at least an occasional paragraph.\textsuperscript{126}

In many ways, the \textit{Clarion} meant not only to challenge Alcorn’s loyalty to southerners, but the added dig concerning slavery and raising blacks against whites were designed to plant seeds of doubt in two different constituencies’ minds. The \textit{Clarion} desired to point out to black Mississippians who had an inkling of voting Republican to understand that they would be voting for a secessionist who had in 1861 vowed to go to ultimate ends in preservation of the institution of slavery.\textsuperscript{127} In addition, the \textit{Clarion} wished to impress upon any white southerners considering the Republican ticket that the Republican Party’s goals included placing black men in positions of power.

The \textit{Clarion}’s coverage of the gubernatorial canvass illustrated their desire to remind readers of Alcorn’s secession record as well as to show firsthand how public audiences responded when confronted with his record. On September 11, 1869, the \textit{Clarion} published “The Canvass” Letter from Louis Dent to General J. Turbell—an open letter to be published in newspapers throughout Mississippi. The letter contained a schedule of Dent’s speaking dates between September and November 1869, and it also announced to the public that Dent and his

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Jackson} (Mississippi) \textit{The Tri-Weekly Clarion}, 23 September 1869, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{127} The \textit{Clarion}’s efforts to expose the hypocrisy of Alcorn’s 1869 positions concerning blacks came in three forms—both highlighting Alcorn’s status as a former slaveholder, and as such, a supporter of the perpetuation of the institution. The first were scattered accounts of Alcorn’s treatment of his own slaves. Examples of this can be found in the \textit{Clarion} editions for September 9, 1869, p. 1; September 16, 1869, p. 2; October 2, 1869, p. 1; and October 16, 1869, p. 2. On September 18, 1869, the \textit{Clarion} highlighted Alcorn’s wartime support for the plan to agree to an end to slavery in twenty years in return for recognition from England and France. The paper went on to say that the idea was for the South to gain independence and then break off the deal keeping slavery intact. As late as November 25, 1869, the \textit{Clarion} waxed philosophically on Alcorn’s membership in the “insolent oligarchy” that tyrannized over the “working whites.”
fellow National Union Republican nominees would be willing to meet Alcorn and his fellow Republican nominees in open debate at any of the listed locations. Judging from the newspaper’s reportage of Dent’s speaking engagements, it seems Alcorn refused to allow Dent to dictate terms of engagement. Despite James W. Garner’s assertion in *Reconstruction in Mississippi* that “Alcorn’s readiness as a stump orator gave him a decided advantage over his adversary, who was unaccustomed to this style of campaigning,” the two men seem to have only met once, on October 2, 1869.¹²⁸

The *Clarion* declared the meeting of the candidates a National Union Republican victory.¹²⁹ Yet surprisingly little of its reporting focused on the actual debate between the two men. Garner suggested that Alcorn’s experience trumped any victories perceived to have been won by Dent’s attacks on Alcorn’s record, and Garner also related that Dent devoted much of his time to defending his status as a citizen of Mississippi.¹³⁰ In contrast to Garner, Alcorn’s contemporaries writing for the *Clarion* reported the public airing of Alcorn’s record produced a visible change in the audience’s reception of Alcorn, which was not positive. The *Clarion* wrote:

> . . . opposition (of whites) to Alcorn “intensified” when his record was recited showing how he had gone as far as he who went the furthest for secession, and then consented, for shame! After the war when they were suffering the direst of calamities, to become the agent of their humiliation, punishment, and proscription.¹³¹

White audience members were not the only attendees who were in for a shock. Specifically, and interestingly, the *Clarion* noted the reaction of blacks in the audience who were “amazed when

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¹²⁸ Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, 244.
¹³⁰ Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, 244. One must note that Garner’s sources on the debate were both the *Clarion* and *The Aberdeen Examiner*, which he quoted from in his text, and neither seem to support his claim of Alcorn’s superior speaking abilities beyond Garner’s own opinion.
¹³¹ Jackson (Mississippi) *The Tri-Weekly Clarion*, 5 October 1869, p. 2.
they were informed that the same reckless adventurers who last year urged them to vote for a Union general [Grant], now ask their support for a man who voted for disunion in order to keep them in slavery.” In closing their coverage of the Dent v. Alcorn meeting, the *Clarion* asserted that “as he [Alcorn] had been true to neither race, so neither will trust him,” a comment that expressed their hopes in terms of the effectiveness of their campaign to air Alcorn’s record.

The *Clarion*’s campaign was an unqualified success. With a little more than a month left in the canvass, Alcorn and Republicans allowed themselves to be drawn into direct discussion of Alcorn’s record—playing directly into their opponents hands. On October 21, 1869, Alcorn issued a challenge to the National Union Republican Party of the State of Mississippi, which proposed that his record be discussed and then circulated so that “all questions of my record be closed by the debate.” Alcorn’s words were fierce and direct. His “Challenge” read:

> I am still ready to maintain my record before all the world. Waving the verdicts that I might plead in bar of discussion, I hereby defy all the intellect of your party to prove those verdicts wrong! While determined to hold my opponents in the pending canvass sternly, to the real questions before the people, I show to all men, that I shrink not from the attempts made to open up my record, by flinging down my gauntlet to your party to be picked up by any champion of yours ready to meet me in debate upon the subject, in Jackson, or any day he sees proper to name within the next three weeks.

While Alcorn’s challenge was not met, that he had been publicly forced to defend himself illustrated the pressure that organs like the *Clarion* applied successfully. The *Clarion* laughed at the idea that Alcorn’s proposed debate would settle the issue of his record, noting “but alas the ghost will rise.”

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before the people. Alcorn’s correspondence, as well as this public admission of incredulity at secession being an issue in the election, show that Alcorn desired to put secession and his record in the past. Unfortunately for Alcorn, it was not up to him whether Mississippians shared his belief that secession, and one’s actions during the crisis, needed to stay in the past. The *Clarion* and National Union Republican Party candidates and members believed that one’s stances concerning secession should have said something about a candidate’s loyalties and politics in the post-war—ideally, the support of the white southern people and their ideals and institutions. In 1869, this belief meant that former secessionists should act in the post-war with the same ideas of loyalty and patriotism that drove them to secede from the Union in 1861. They should also support an end to Radical Republican Reconstruction and carpetbagger intrusions. Alcorn could not live up to that ideal, and he did not understand why his fellow Mississippians had such expectations for him.

Late in October, the *Clarion* published the daring speech of an Old Whig who represented an entirely different opinion on Alcorn’s record. The Honorable Amos R. Johnston spoke to an assembled audience in Sardis on October 13, 1869, concerning the Republican ticket. His argument began along the lines of editorials for the *Clarion* comparing and contrasting Alcorn’s secessionist past with his Republican present. Johnston pushed the argument past the identification of Alcorn’s contradictions, boldly proclaiming Alcorn was not “entitled to the support of any Mississippians.” Labeling Alcorn a Whig who became a “furious secessionist,” Johnston asserted Alcorn had drawn his sword and fought for the continuance of slavery. In spite of this loyalty, Johnston told his audience, Alcorn was in favor of the “abominable constitution,” and after its defeat, he worked to “force the rejected constitution on us, by which some 30,000 of his white-fellow citizens were disenfranchised, and placed subordinate to the black race.”
Alcorn’s membership in the Republican Party, and his subsequent sanctioning of the Ames Radical Platform showed that Alcorn approved of “the terrible oppressions of the military despot.”

Johnston’s speech took a marked turn when he announced the cause of Alcorn’s change of heart in the post-war—ambition. Calling Alcorn the “representative of the Extremists,” Johnston asserted:

[Alcorn] has, therefore, no claim to the support of even his dearest Mississippi friend. He has forsaken his poor downtrodden friends and countrymen, in the hour of need. His ambition has o’erleaped itself. His ambition has destroyed him.

Ambition for Alcorn not only meant selling his soul to Republicans in order to gain political office, but doing so at the expense of his fellow Mississippians. Johnston also argued that Alcorn would not be content with the governor’s chair, and that the politician would use that position as a step-stone to his ultimate desire—a seat in the United States Senate. In his closing remarks, Johnston seemed to take a swipe at Alcorn’s idea of honor and loyalty, stating, “. . . he has left us, and gone where Mississippians can never follow.” Nothing similar to Judge Amos R. Johnston’s words appeared prior to or after the speech’s publication, so it is hard to gauge public reaction to his incendiary comments. Yet Johnston’s speech seemingly has affected scholarly interpretations of Alcorn and the motivation behind his changes in loyalties and parties, as many chalk up Alcorn’s behavior to sheer ambition, leaving little room for other interpretation.

What was the larger Republican response to the Clarion’s campaign and how did Republicans go about urging voters to come out in support of Alcorn in 1869? Besides the few

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135 Jackson (Mississippi) *The Tri-Weekly Clarion*, 26 October 1869, p. 2.
136 Jackson (Mississippi) *The Tri-Weekly Clarion*, 26 October 1869, p. 2.
137 Johnston had no way of knowing that Alcorn follow through with just such a plan, aspiring toward and winning a seat in the Senate in 1871.
138 Jackson (Mississippi) *The Tri-Weekly Clarion*, 26 October 1869, p. 2.
reprints of terse defenses of the *Mississippi Pilot* in the *Tri-Weekly Clarion*, time has not been as kind to Republican newspapers in terms of survival for researchers to examine both sides of what was obviously a heated and contested canvass. Prior to an examination of this campaign in terms of print resources, Alcorn’s historians paid little attention to his return to politics in 1869. Though it would be interesting to see what a Republican newspaper would have made of the National Union Republican Party’s harping on Alcorn’s secession record, only a few scant issues of the Jackson *Weekly Mississippi Pilot* published during the canvass existed in the newspaper collections examined. The existing editions of November 27, 1869, and December 18, 1869, obviously represent the last minute exhortations of the paper for Alcorn’s election, but they provide readers with context as to the climate of the election as well as a glimpse at the way Republicans dealt with Alcorn’s past and his subsequent membership in their ranks.

The *Weekly Mississippi Pilot*’s editor, H. T. Fisher, heralded Alcorn’s efforts in the canvass on November 27, 1869, in evangelical tones stating, “the success he has achieved in making converts to Republicanism is almost miraculous.”

Praising Alcorn for his tenacity in the face of his opponents, Fisher declared that the candidate was “making a most gallant fight against the fleeing hosts of the opposition.” While Alcorn’s performance on the stump seemed assured, the editor of the *Pilot* seemed to have some concern that Alcorn’s supporters would shy away from the polls at the election in the face of local intimidation or threats of violence. The article entitled “Peace” reassured potential voters and tried to calm any fears or worries about voting for the Republican ticket, stating:

> Be not afraid to vote. You are citizens, and that man who dares to intimidate you, violates the law. The strong arm of the government will protect you. Go peaceably to the polls.

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Remember that if you do not get a fair show in any of the precincts the vote will be taken over again. Be peaceable and quiet, but firm and decided.\textsuperscript{140}

The \textit{Pilot} article hinted at violence and opposition during the canvass that was largely absent from the pages of the \textit{Clarion}. While the \textit{Pilot} does not specifically address black readers, one can make the assumption that the newspaper’s assertion that “You are citizens,” is more aimed at the newfound black electorate than white voters.

As the canvass heated up in the final weeks, the \textit{Pilot} published letters from G. S. McMillen and Dr. W. M. Compton in support of Alcorn’s candidacy. One can read the self-proclaimed “patriotic” letters of McMillen and Compton as standard Republican election propaganda—the remarks of a former Democrat and a concerned citizen respectively who saw the light in the message of the Republican Party and the candidacy of Alcorn. McMillen and Compton’s tortured arguments for Alcorn illustrated the internal struggles within Mississippians to come to terms with Alcorn’s candidacy, perhaps better than even the \textit{Clarion}’s compare and contrast campaign to expose the contradictions in Alcorn’s record and his present residence in the Republican fold. While secession is not openly mentioned, the letter-writers intimated their knowledge of Alcorn’s past. Despite this admission, both authors argued that at the end of the day, expediency in terms of bringing about an end to Reconstruction had to be the primary consideration in the minds of voters.

McMillen’s letters were hardly a ringing endorsement of Alcorn. Touted as an Old-Line Democrat who abandoned the Dent Party to declare for the Republican ticket, G.S. McMillen couched his argument for Alcorn in language of expediency—a vote for Alcorn was the shortest way out of Mississippi’s Reconstruction difficulties. Faced with post-war proscription, McMillen’s support for Alcorn’s candidacy stemmed largely from his desire to remove political

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Jackson} (Mississippi) \textit{The Weekly Mississippi Pilot}, 27 November 1869, p. 2.
disabilities, remove the military government, and restore peace, prosperity, law and order to the country. In order to achieve these goals, McMillen believed “it the duty of every man to lay aside all passion and prejudice, and support that party which is most likely to accomplish these objects.” For McMillen this meant abandoning the Democratic Party and its platforms. Interestingly, he believed that the platforms of the Republican and Radical Conservative Parties (Dent) were “not essentially different from the other.” Justifying his choice of the Republican Party as being up to the task, he noted, “I believed its success, under the circumstances, would be for the best interest of all our people.” In addition, part of the appeal of the Republican ticket was its position as the “only party receiving the least encouragement from the President and the Republican Party of the North,” which McMillen saw as essential to Mississippi ever achieving autonomy.

McMillen openly acknowledged his ability to choose attributes of Alcorn’s character and record that appealed to his decision to support the Republicans. Clearly, McMillen’s desire to see the strictures of Reconstruction lifted led him to urgently ask of his fellow Mississippians, “Turning our backs on the unpleasant past, the important inquiry is, what shall we do now?” In one short sentence, McMillen effectively silenced the opposition’s argument that voters needed to consider contradictions in Alcorn’s record. Mississippians’ priority should be dealing with the present. At the same time, not all of Alcorn’s record need be discounted. In his first letter in the Pilot, McMillen explained his belief in Alcorn as a candidate stemmed from Alcorn’s status as one of the largest landowners in the state, which made him deeply interested in the question of taxation. McMillen’s second epistle described Alcorn as “an old Mississippian of great ability.

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141 Jackson (Mississippi) The Weekly Mississippi Pilot, 27 November 1869, p. 2.
142 Jackson (Mississippi) The Weekly Mississippi Pilot, 18 December 1869, p. 2.
143 Jackson (Mississippi) The Weekly Mississippi Pilot, 27 November 1869, p. 2.
144 Jackson (Mississippi) The Weekly Mississippi Pilot, 27 November 1869, p. 2.
and tried patriotism, a large land-owner and former slaveholder.”¹⁴⁵ In both instances, McMillen saw Alcorn as a politically responsible, well-qualified politician, including his allusions to Alcorn’s role in secession and the war—defined simply as “tried patriotism.”

Dr. W.M. Compton also addressed Alcorn’s record as he couched his support for Alcorn in terms of expediency, seeing Alcorn’s election as governor as “the shortest way out of our difficulties.” Again of interest was the intimation by a letter writer that the opposing parties differed little. Compton claimed that “Alcorn’s record was no worse than Dent’s,” which like McMillen’s statements, can hardly qualify as a ringing endorsement of Alcorn. In addition, Compton told his readers, “I have never attempted to defend the record of Col. Alcorn except to show that I sacrificed no loyalty to Southern interests by supporting him against Dent.” Compton argued that one need not consider Alcorn’s record before 1865, rather voters should focus on Alcorn’s efforts since that time as well as Mississippian’s endorsement of his efforts. The Mississippi legislature, he argued, obviously had confidence in his leadership abilities, electing Alcorn to a Senate seat in 1865 even as they were “fresh from Confederate battlefields.” While the National Union Republicans saw Alcorn’s chastisement of Mississippian for rejecting the Fourteenth Amendment as evidence of Alcorn’s disloyalty, Compton presented Alcorn as “wise” for predicting worse things would come to pass if Mississippi failed to pass the amendment and its timidity in ratifying the Constitution. Even Alcorn’s support and membership in the Committee of Sixteen was seen as Alcorn’s attempts to guide Mississippi along the shortest road to the end of Reconstruction.¹⁴⁶

McMillen and Compton’s qualified support of Alcorn should give the reader pause. Neither man wholeheartedly supported Alcorn in terms of issues Alcorn supported or the

¹⁴⁵ Jackson (Mississippi) The Weekly Mississippi Pilot, 18 December 1869, p. 2.
¹⁴⁶ Jackson (Mississippi) The Weekly Mississippi Pilot, 27 November 1869, p. 2.
Republican platform. Alcorn had clearly won these men over to the Republican Party with the belief that somehow a Mississippi Republican, who was also a former slaveholder, secessionist, and Confederate, could effectively turn the tide of Reconstruction, bringing about an end to proscription and the post-war struggles of everyday Mississippians. Support of Alcorn continued to be voiced in the terms of McMillen and Compton as Alcorn continued along his political career even after 1869. An almost identical endorsement of Alcorn in the 1872 Senatorial elections by L.Q.C. Lamar appeared in Lamar’s correspondence with his law partner, E.D. Clark. Lamar wrote:

I am for Alcorn and am warmly enlisted in his favor now. . . [he] claims to be consistent in principle and changed as to personal measures. True patriotism and statesmanship only require consistency as to aim and end. It allows and requires changes of means. . . [the purpose of the election] is to secure for our people restored and harmonious relations with the Federal Government . . . deliverance of the State from Military thralldom and to its investiture with civil authority and Federal rights. All nominations and platforms should be made with a view to these goals.147

Lamar’s language his almost identical to that of McMillen and Compton, and again the idea of expediency in terms of an end to Reconstruction is foremost in the writer’s thoughts. Alcorn was too complex of a politician in the post-war for him to fit comfortably in the folds of either the Republican or Democratic camps, namely because of his decisions in the post-war to deal with the legacy of secession in his own career and his definition of secession in relation to his efforts to gain political power.

On December 2, 1869, the Tri-Weekly Clarion published the results of the 1869 canvass. An editorial explained, “The returns published to-day ensure the success of the Radical State ticket by a decided majority.”148 The contest was over. Alcorn won. The Clarion lamented:

147 Lamar Photocopy Collection, ALS from L.Q.C. Lamar to E.D. Clark, October 19, 1872, Small Manuscripts Collection 76-7. UMASP
148 Jackson (Mississippi) The Tri-Weekly Clarion, 2 December 1869, p. 2.
Reason, justice, and truth could not prevail against the expedients of prejudice, falsehood, and corruption, backed by the bayonet. ... However there is one gratifying reflection. The right of the people to hold their elections henceforth free from outside interference is secured. It is the last military election.\textsuperscript{149}

The \textit{Clarion}'s ability to see a silver lining amid Alcorn's election was telling. Though Alcorn had been a Republican, he was also a Mississippian, a former slaveholder, a former secessionist, and a former Confederate. No matter how hard Alcorn tried to shake his past, his past and his ability to be elected in spite of his past as well as accepted by the Republican Party, amounted to nothing less than a crack in the façade of Reconstruction.

In March 1870, James Lusk Alcorn became Mississippi’s first popularly elected governor after the Civil War. With the changes made by the constitutional convention in 1867, Alcorn inherited an extremely powerful position, newly invested with never-before-tested powers. To make matters worse, Alcorn’s election scared Radical Republicans, including military governor Adelbert Ames, enough to attempt to make Alcorn a provisional leader, without full powers. Alcorn himself perceived himself to have the backing not only of the people of Mississippi, but when Ames’s attempt failed, the direct support of men in Washington. Self-styling himself as the head of the Republican Party in Mississippi, Alcorn set about attempting to put into practice many of his newly minted strong governmental powers, something which he felt Davis had lacked in the Confederacy.

Alcorn’s inaugural speech revisited his participation in the secession crisis, as if addressing his participation and couching it in conciliatory language would overlook the fact that he had assisted the state of Mississippi to secede from the Union and fight in the Civil War. Alcorn began his speech with a formal ending to secession which he called a passionate chapter, stating:

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Jackson} (Mississippi) \textit{The Tri-Weekly Clarion}, 2 December 1869, p. 2.
The Muse of History closes today a chapter of passion, bloodshed, and social revolution; and proceeds to write down the fact of this inauguration as the first event of a new chapter—a chapter which, with her pencil of light she heads by halcyon words of Peace and Hope.  

One must wonder whether Alcorn felt that as a participant in the secession convention, that the act of signing the ordinance of secession was his singular political mistake. Alcorn seemed filled with the idea that he would be the savior of Mississippi, especially while mentioning that a new chapter had begun for Mississippi.

Naming secession as “a fatal fallacy,” Alcorn claimed that he had had no choice but to “cast his lot with his people.” Alcorn reminisced back to conceptions of youth and honor, much like the words of conviction in which both Davis and Lee used to justify their participation, because of their state’s conviction, to go to war. He reminisced:

The palmy days of my life belong to Mississippi. The friendships of twenty-five years tie me to her in love. A sacrifice of conviction made me wrestle with the madness plunged her into ruin, has bound my soul to her’s in a common lot of suffering, and sorrow, and humiliation.

Explaining his actions again as a passionate sacrifice, Alcorn placed secession into his past, when he was young and less knowledgeable or changed. The experience of war and now reconstruction enabled him to see things in a mature light. One cannot ignore the imagery of Alcorn’s words, expressed in classical and heady language. The statement also harked back to Alcorn’s words following the secession convention, which spoke of honor among men. To have not gone along with secession in 1861 would have brought upon himself and his family, not only embarrassment, but also dishonor. By siding with the Confederates, according to Alcorn, was a means to justify his responsibilities to his family but also to the people by whom he had been chosen to lead.

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150 James Lusk Alcorn Family Papers, Folder 3. Inaugural speech of March 10, 1870. DAH.  
151 James Lusk Alcorn Family Papers, Folder 3. Inaugural speech of March 10, 1870. DAH.
Alcorn considered himself, in the language of his speech, to be guilty for being a rebel, but stated that the Federal government had been merciful. Rebellion could not be justified without hope of success or provocation, and Alcorn believed the Confederacy had neither in its possession in 1861. By calling his position in the secession unjustifiable, Alcorn again avoided calling his actions criminal or illegal, which would have themselves nullified his ability to hold office, let alone be elected Mississippi governor.

The Alcorn administration faced opposition at every turn. Alcorn’s administration with its high amount of debt thanks to an increase in public offices and programs, none of these necessary functions of government existed prior to Alcorn’s administration and were meant to stymie public suffering and restore public confidence in State government. Alcorn, as a southerner as well as a Republican, northerners and southerners often saw him as the right hand man of the devil himself, especially concerning his interest in programs and expenditures on blacks as well as whites.

On the issue of civil rights, Alcorn supported radical Republican efforts to enact laws that prevented discrimination against blacks. Alcorn focused on three main parts of society in which to attack discrimination: transportation, education, and the convict leasing system. Of the last issue, Alcorn argued that the system of using convicts for outside work, mostly on plantations, was “repugnant to public virtue,” and found that when prisoners, most of whom were black, found the occasion to work outside the prison and away from those with authority over them, black convicts were on the receiving end of an exorbitant amount of abuse. Thanks to

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152 Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn*, 104-120.
the attention paid to the practice, the mortality rate dropped as opposed to life in prison, and was seen as the lesser of two evils.\textsuperscript{153}

Besides a reform of the penal system, Alcorn favored state investment in railroad transportation for goods and citizens. Alcorn’s experience with levees in Mississippi made him leery of financing public works projects through bonds. Alcorn believed in the good of the railroad, but like many others in the period, knew that giving railroad companies too much power could ultimately have an adverse affect on the right to property through eminent domain. In terms of civil rights in regard to discrimination-free transportation for all people, black leaders desired to see an end to all discriminatory practice. Alcorn favored separate but equal facilities, believing that equal facilities could not be created without bloodshed. Though the Mississippi legislature passed an anti-discrimination law concerning public transportation, the law was ignored in practice.

Between the Alcorn administration’s attempt to deal with discrimination in transportation facilities and that of education, Alcorn’s gubernatorial career was less than appreciated by both Democrats and Radical Republicans. Alcorn believed educational reform was the key to reconstruction. Education was one of those few subjects on which Alcorn was passionate, as noted by his letter to his wife in March 1863, “we must go where we can educate our children.”\textsuperscript{154} The constitution of 1868 provided for education for all Mississippians, though the funds from Indian treaties and Federal sources had gone to private schools for white children or had been lost through scandal and mismanagement. To fill this void in education, the work of the Freedmen’s Bureau aided children of both races, and the bureau raised its funds for its work through local taxes, poll taxes, fines, and liquor licenses. Alcorn himself believed that public

\textsuperscript{153} Pereyra, \textit{James Lusk Alcorn}, 116.
\textsuperscript{154} Rainwater, \textit{Letters of James Lusk Alcorn}, 204.
education was the heart of political, economic and social life of the state, but Alcorn’s focus on the subject brought race relations and the topic of segregation to the fore.

One of Alcorn’s first actions on behalf of his views was to provide educational institutions so as to equal black opportunity to access public education. If Alcorn could educate black men and women with the same rigor and excellence as whites, he believed that the whole population would benefit, but he also felt that white might be more willing to accept black citizenship.

Since the state already had white teaching schools, Alcorn decided to purchase Oakland College for black students. Renamed Alcorn College, the school had the honor of having Hiram R. Revels, the first black Mississippi senator, as its first president. Alcorn’s messages on education continued to promise to keep schools economical, in light of protests that state funds should not financially support education; to make schools separate but equal, probably because Alcorn truly believed blood would be shed; and placed focus on agricultural and technical schools for blacks.

In objection to Alcorn’s choice of men for the board of trustees at the University of Mississippi, L.Q.C. Lamar resigned upon hearing a rumor that the trustees favored the idea of accepting a black student. Stating that he wanted to keep education, “the subject of honorable tradition to my race,” Alcorn objected to Lamar’s resignation, though at the same time linked Lamar’s and other professors’ reactions to the influence of the Democratic Party. Alcorn threatened the school with desegregation if they kept up their behavior and inflammatory language. Alcorn’s actual plan was to make Shaw University an institution to equal the University of Mississippi.

155 Pereyra, James Lusk Alcorn, 123.
Alcorn’s attempt to stop discrimination was met with a great deal of resentment and violence. Radical Republicans and Democrats saw his attempts to compromise as being too ambiguous. Alcorn’s focus on education as well as other measures to minimize discrimination against blacks in Mississippi angered whites, especially poor whites who felt themselves threatened by an educated black population. Violence in the form of the Ku Klux Klan threatened to usurp and destroy any sort of order that Alcorn and the Federal Government wished to instill in post-war Mississippi. Military governor Adelbert Ames and Governor Alcorn clashed over their ideas as to how Klan violence in Mississippi was to be handled.

Wanting to forestall Federal government interference in the state, Alcorn tried to deny the presence of an organized Klan movement. Claiming the violence was a local problem, he still pushed for the Ku Klux Klan act which made it illegal to wear masks or disguises in public, ensured penalties for entering homes and committing acts of violence in masks, and established a Secret Service department in Mississippi. Ames supported presidential power to suspend habeas corpus and to use Federal troops to suppress Klan acts.\(^\text{156}\)

The Ames vs. Alcorn political crisis continued on until Ames was deposed in 1874. Alcorn fought against Ames first as governor and then when the two made up the Mississippi senatorial delegation from 1871-1873. Alcorn resigned as governor to become Senator in 1871, fulfilling a life-long ambition. Yet the pull between the two men exhibited itself in 1874, when the two battled each other to see who would become Governor. While Ames won the seat and Alcorn returned to the Senate, it would be each man’s last held public office. One of the main reasons Alcorn’s administration was seen as being ineffectual was because he battled both Ames on the Republican front, who was a transplanted abolitionist Union soldier from Maine, and

\(^{156}\) Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn*, 136-137.
unreconstructed Democrats and ex-Confederates who could not hold public office or exercise the franchise due to post-war reconstruction restrictions. Alcorn wishing to fill the gap between both sets of radicals was pulled in one direction by his trustworthy, traditional Whig values, but in the other as a southerner concerned about northern domination and the destruction of what many whites viewed to be their traditional, naturally discriminating to ex-slaves and distrustful of strangers trying to tell them what to do, culture. Such straddling was insupportable in the long term, and the rise of newly enfranchised Democratic men illustrated how much Alcorn’s value as a political leader would diminish over the 1870s, and with it, his and Reconstruction officials vision of the future of his state and society.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
PECULIARLY APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME

Buried on the second page, on the far right hand column of the August 1, 1872, Jackson Weekly Clarion is a letter to the editors from the pen of “North Mississippi.” Under a headline announcing “For Congress, First District – L. Q. C. Lamar,” the letter boldly opened:

Among men of all shades of former political thinking, there is a strong and widespread feeling in favor of returning Col. L. Q. C. Lamar . . . His experience in political life, his penetrating sagacity and [his] profound philosophy of his statesmanship and above all his thorough understanding of the wants and needs of our suffering [section], all combine to make his nomination and election peculiarly appropriate at this time.¹

The letter was a herald in an otherwise seemingly ordinary beginning to the election season. July editions of the Clarion, a Democratic-Conservative Party organ, announced the names of the State Executive Committee, whose duty it was to appoint an electoral ticket for the Party as well as organize and prepare for the canvass. “North Mississippi’s” letter to the editor is direct in its assertion of Lamar’s qualifications as a candidate. Yet the letter included a catch, in terms of Lamar’s fitness in the election—the glaring reality that Lamar continued to labor under post-war exclusion from office as well as the franchise. No matter! At least not to “North Mississippi” who argued:

¹ Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, 1 August 1872, p. 2. Note: Poor microfilming led to the inability of the author to make out some of the words because of the article’s location along the curling right edge of the paper, hence the brackets around words that may or may not be correct reproductions.
proscription [does] not now mean what it did two years [ago, or] one year ago. The dominant party [has at] last realized the fact that the political proscription of prominent Southerners [did] not accomplish the end contemplated by [its] authors.²

Two ideas can be gleaned from “North Mississippi’s” language. First, “North Mississippi” suggested to the editors as well as the Clarion’s readership that a sea change of sorts had occurred in terms of Republican or northern views on proscribed southerners. Once a gaping and still bloody political scar, having had a role in secession or the Confederate cause was now seen as more of an annoying hindrance, but not a roadblock to elective office. Second, “North Mississippi” attributed Lamar’s unfortunate political status, laboring under proscription, as being a symptom of “prominent southerners” cleverly insinuating at the same moment that to be a former secessionist carried with it a sense of prestige and social standing, something respected not reviled.

A little less than one month prior to “North Mississippi’s” bold declaration of support, Lucius Q. C. Lamar revealed in a private letter his knowledge of men and women who supported his return to national politics. At the same time his private correspondence revealed an altogether different set of concerns. From the quiet of his post-war retirement in Oxford, Mississippi, Lamar addressed his concerns to Charles Reemelin, a German man Lamar admired for his writing.³ Unlike “North Mississippi”, Lamar had misgivings about northern reception of former

² Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, 1 August 1872, p. 2.
³ Charles Reemelin began his correspondence with Lamar as early as 1870, encouraging him to return to politics in 1872. Reemelin was a writer for the Cincinnati Commercial, and in 1872, commenced upon a tour through the South, when “the incidents of the Civil War were fresh in everybody’s mind.” During his journey South, Reemelin met and made the acquaintance of a number of secessionists, including [Alexander?] Stevens, Forsyth, Robert Toombs, Tramholm, [Raphael?] Semmes, [L. Q. C.] Lamar, and Jefferson Davis. Prior to the Civil War, he held a number of roles in Ohio’s Democratic Party and served in the state’s legislature, constitutional Convention (1850-1851), and directed Ohio’s Reform School. During the war he helped plan the state’s defense against Confederate attack and a never-used plan to draft Ohioans for a home guard and held various state offices in Ohio. Found in Charles Reemelin, Life of Charles
secessionists and Confederates returning to national politics. He did not question his qualification for office, but questioned whether the time was ripe. On July 15, 1872, Lamar wrote to Reemelin:

There is a strong movement in my district to send me to Washington. I give it no encouragement. My aversion to reentering public life increases. At this particular juncture it is especially great. I have been accustomed to regard my political principles with profound and even awful respect. While they are down and under the ban, I feel it to be a misfortune and a snare to accept promotion. I would much prefer to bide my time and wait for more auspicious days . . . when the right will raise its honors from the deep and make the true and the brave sharers of its triumph.4

Lamar’s letter also cited a reluctance to end his lucrative law practice, though his language suggested that his desire for freedom of political expression was the major concern. He acknowledged his proscription status, which he believed would prevent him from taking office, even if elected, which could turn into an embarrassing fiasco should northerners and Republicans reject such a foolish attempt.

Lamar justified his absence from the political scene to Reemelin in the same July 15, 1872, letter by noting, “As for national politics, it has seemed to me that wisdom, as well as self-respect should restrain those of us who aspired to statesmanship before the southern over-throw, from obtruding our counsels and views upon a crisis which we failed to control by arms.”5 Though not saying so directly, this statement was Lamar’s way of saying that the men who led and failed in their attempt at southern independence and nation-building should step aside and let others lead in the post-war period.

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5 Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 182.
Despite this position, as well as his earlier statement in the same letter portraying the 1872 elections as being unfertile grounds for a return to politics, there is a silence in Lamar’s letter that must be brought to light. He had no doubt or question about his ability to be elected by Mississippians. His secessionist ties and political past were moot points to his prospective constituents, and he expressed no concerns about the political canvass in which he would have to participate in order to be elected. Lamar’s vision extended past these issues to larger concerns:

But will the North listen to a Southern man with patience and respect? Is it possible for a secessionist from the South to convince a Northern audience that there is a common ground on which the two sections can stand and live in harmony? You know what would be the demands of such an audience when seeing a secessionist before them. Could such a man, with his mind pervaded by a deep sense of the importance, sanctity, and authority of his principles, which are under the ban of that audience, speak manfully and candidly, however kindly, and receive patient and considerate attention?6

Picturing himself before Congress—election behind him, serving as the representative of the people of Mississippi who elected him, Lamar’s questions to Reemelin were very important. He wondered if twelve years had been enough time to allow North and South to occupy the same legislative space and work together for the good of the entire nation. He desired to be heard and considered seriously as a man of integrity, and believed standing before a northern audience as a secessionist might impair their ability to take him seriously and restrict his ability to speak and participate as his principles dictated.

L. Q. C. Lamar’s candidacy for and election to the House of Representatives served to open wide the door of political service to secessionists, both in Mississippi and the nation. Eleven years after secession and seven years after the end of the war, Lamar became Mississippi’s first post-war Democratic congressman, but not without a lot of trouble. Lamar’s personal views about his secessionist past and the editorials of Mississippi newspapers serve as a

6 Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 182.
highlight the discussion of issues and concerns affecting the national discourse on the meaning of the Civil War. Ultimately, the discussion underlines how secession was not a forgotten issue in 1872. The legacy of secession in the careers of Mississipians was long-lived. Never quite forgotten, personally or publically, it served locally as a means by which one asserted loyalty and membership to larger political and social communities. Nationally, it restricted many men from reentering public service until the 1870s. The proscription only provided southern candidates with a positive credential for office according to southern constituencies. Evidence from Mississippi newspapers suggests that the larger public joined former secessionists in working through just what secession—its convention, ordinances, proponents, and ultimate failure—meant. Secessionists could and did return to national offices after the war, and ultimately a southern interpretation of secession and war by 1872 was not only embraced, but also celebrated by the South. Despite a broad acceptance of their honorable roles in war, secessionists could not forget their own personal struggles and remained ever aware of their political past. Some like Lamar labored with an ever-present guilt for the rest of their lives.\(^7\)

Following his Lamar’s political career and that of his fellow secessionists from 1872 through the 1880s allows us to see how Mississipians contributed to late nineteenth-century national political culture, shaping how Americans, particularly southerners, would remember secession and war for a number of generations. This process culminates with the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890, where six former secessionists joined with a larger body of Mississipians to create a new constitution. The delegates almost to a man were all Democrats, and their actions did nothing short of return the state to its antebellum status. The presence of the

\(^7\) United States Supreme Court, *In Memoriam, Lucius Q. C. Lamar* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 55-57. Chief Justice Melville W. Fuller seemed to have seen through the veneer of Lamar’s prominence on the United States Supreme Court, judging him to be a haunted man, consumed with an idea of personal failure and a constant desire to achieve the impossible.
secession generation at the 1890 convention conveyed a sense of purpose for the delegates and righteousness to the proceedings. The constitution upheld many of the values of the previous generation, and ensured that their vision for Mississippi and at least the South, would live well into the twentieth century.

Little of Lamar’s post-war resume would have been possible without the failure of Andrew Johnson and Radical Republican Reconstruction to bar ex-Confederates and secessionists from politics for the remainder of their lifetimes. Lamar returned to Oxford in the war’s aftermath. In 1866, Virginia Lamar wrote to her mother, Mrs. Frances Eliza Parke Longstreet that her husband “feeds his cows and helps cut the wood.” A restless Lamar wrote to his mother-in-law around the same time explaining, “I feel sometimes pretty blue about the future. How I am to get along I can’t see now; but I hope to get some law practice in addition to my salary.” The salary of which he spoke was that which he earned as a college professor. In 1866, the University of Mississippi offered Lamar a position teaching at the school, which he accepted. After serving a brief stint in the Chair of Ethics and Metaphysics in 1866, he was appointed to the Law Chair in 1867. A well-loved and respected professor by his students, Lamar missed politics.

Edward Mayes, Lamar’s biographer and son-in-law, wrote that Lamar abstained from public service from 1865-1870 out of duty. Mayes’s vision of Lamar was that of the gracious secessionist stepping out of the way while the victorious Union worked on Reconstruction and while southerners, the vanquished, properly accepted the “issue’s decision.” Mayes cited a statement made by Lamar in 1866 as proof of his voluntary withdrawal in which Lamar stated:

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8 Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 120
9 Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 121.
To none of these things [Reconstruction] can one who has been an ardent secessionist lay his hands actively. Wherever he might take his stand, suspicion and distrust would spring up around him and choke him.\textsuperscript{10}

The language Lamar’s statement is romantic, but typical of the era of the Lost Cause, and begins Mayes’ post-war portrait of Lamar, which few biographers of Lamar question. Lamar stayed away because Reconstruction removed his voting rights and prohibited him from holding office. In spite of Mayes’s romantic Lost Cause proclivities, Mayes familial relationship with Lamar provides useful details lost to future generations lack because they did not know the man. Without Mayes’s human perspective of Lamar, the historic record contains too many gaps. Viewing secession and Civil War as a fire from which no human soul could pass through unchanged, Mayes believed that the war softened Lamar. He used a letter from a childhood friend to illustrate his point. Mr. Henry Craft, a Memphis lawyer and childhood friend, wrote to Lamar in 1870 reflecting, “Do you know that your character has been greatly improved by what you have gone through: softened, rounded, made sympathetic? I think so and congratulate you.”\textsuperscript{11}

Whatever the degree of change, it is foolish to think a failed attempt at creating a southern nation which brought about great ruin and the abolition of the very institution that nation was created to preserve would not have affected a man. Lamar returned to the political arena after an imposed period of intense soul searching. Whether or not the war changed his soul, secession disturbed and haunted Lamar throughout the remainder of his public career. By 1888, twenty-eight years after South Carolina initially endorsed secession, Lamar spent a great deal of time defending his antebellum decisions. Secession weighed heavily on his mind in the early

\textsuperscript{10} Mayes, \textit{Lucius Q. C. Lamar}, 121.  
\textsuperscript{11} Mayes, \textit{Lucius Q. C. Lamar}, 168.
1870s as he pondered, and was pushed by various friends and colleagues to consider a return to Washington, D.C.

After “North Mississippi’s” bold endorsement of Lamar’s candidacy in the *Weekly Clarion*, a second champion of Lamar’s return appeared in the pages of the *Clarion* in response to “North Mississippi’s” letter. The writer of the second letter to the editor, “Mississippi,” claimed the conservative masses of the First Congressional District of Mississippi would be well-served by Lamar, alluding to the fact that the congressional seat was almost too small of a job for a man of such prestige. Mississippi enthusiastically mused:

> Indeed, looking out over all the Southern States where can a man be found who would be so likely to stand forth on the floor of the National Legislature as the recognized leader and champion of the party and the policy which will bear the honest old Horace Greeley into the Presidential chair on the 4th of March next, as the silver-tongued orator of the South, L. Q. C. Lamar, who, since the death of the illustrious Prentiss, has never had a peer or rival amongst us?  

Lamar’s political disabilities would not be an obstacle to his admission to Congress. “Mississippi” claimed a responsible source asserted it would only take Lamar’s assent to the people’s call for his services to place him in office. Just how Lamar would regain his rights was left to the reader’s imagination.

Lamar’s call to service came in August 1872. The *Clarion* discreetly announced Lamar’s candidacy by adding his name to their columns endorsing Greeley for President. In a small paragraph on the second page, the *Clarion* announced Lamar as the “Anti-Radical Nominee—First District,” writing:

> From among the good and true men, whose claims were presented to the Tupelo Convention, the delegates have selected Hon. L. Q. C. Lamar as the standard-bearer of

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the opposers of the Grant Administration in the First Congressional District. The people will ratify the nomination. We have placed his name at the head of our columns.\textsuperscript{14}

Though the \textit{Clarion} believed Mississippians of the First District would vote Lamar into office, the newspaper skimmed over a seemingly innocuous detail. Lamar received the nomination at the Tupelo Convention, but only after the delegates had voted fifteen times. Neither the \textit{Clarion} nor any other source gave any details pertaining to the nominating process at the convention, but why delegates took so long deciding, speaks to a greater difficulty than suggested by newspaper writers, possibly for the specific reason of electing a man who might not be seated.\textsuperscript{15}

Regardless of the nominating process, Lamar’s victory in the election as a former secessionist and Confederate was not the primary issue in the canvass. Unlike Alcorn, Lamar’s candidacy did not generate a great deal of press in terms of rival newspapers sounding out Lamar’s secessionist or Confederate past. Instead, the issue that immediately produced lines in the newspaper was that Lamar continued to labor under restrictions from the franchise and holding office. The great fear, at least in the \textit{Clarion}’s opinion, was “that if any candidate receiving the highest number of votes cast cannot take the oath required of the said Constitution, the candidate receiving the next highest number of votes shall be installed.”\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{Clarion} and its readership, as well as its writers, worried that the people’s choice for Congress might in the end be denied his seat.

Desirous to see a candidate chosen by Mississippians for Congress take his seat in Washington, the \textit{Clarion} saw Lamar’s election as a chance to strike a blow at the machinery of Reconstruction. In an editorial, the \textit{Clarion} advocated:

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion}, 15 August 1872, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion}, 29 August 1872, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion}, 12 September 1872, p. 2.
Mississippians, by electing Lamar to office, could force the hands of Reconstruction’s leaders. Since 1869, Mississippians could elect their own officials, provided those men were able to hold office. Those who were able to gain office were mild in their secessionist leanings and Confederate participation, as had been the case with Alcorn. Such men conceded early to Union victory, signed loyalty oaths, and hastened to receive pardon through direct meetings with President Andrew Johnson. While Lamar, like many men, showed mild reluctance to ride secession’s wave, his resignation from Congress in 1861 and subsequent involvement in the Confederate government made him more “dangerous” in the eyes of northerners upon the war’s end. Lamar was an intimate of Davis, had served in both diplomatic and military positions, evidenced by his inclusion in the surrender of Lee’s army at Appomattox. In addition, he found additional restrictions because of he owned more than $20,000 in property, which placed him into an economic class singled out by Johnson for proscription.

Lamar’s nomination generated increasingly negative remarks from the Republican presses as the election neared. The Clarion reproduced an excerpt from the Mississippi Pilot on September 26, 1872, which suggested Democrats were fooling themselves if they thought Lamar would be allowed to take his seat if elected. At least one paper suggested that Lamar’s candidacy was an indirect means by which Democrats could test northern resiliency to support Reconstruction proscriptions. The Pilot writer argued, “It is no affair of ours, but we do think that he committed a grand mistake when he decided to thrust his case upon Congress.”

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17 Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, 12 September 1872, p. 2.
18 Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, 26 September 1872, p. 2.
Additional evidence of how Republican newspapers blasted Lamar’s candidacy came from the *Clarion* itself in an editorial in the same issue that reprinted the *Pilot’s* remark, claiming, “The Mongrels are pouring out their gall upon the Democratic and Liberal nominee for Congress in the 1st Congressional District.” The same editorial defenses of Lamar’s activities in the post-war suggests Republicans brought up Lamar’s past record in some form, because the *Clarion*’s language became increasingly frustrated as it argued:

> It avails nothing that Col. Lamar has, ever since the close of the war, accepted the results, and advised a policy of conciliation and harmony on every occasion on which he has been drawn out from the retirement he has coveted.\(^{19}\)

The writer of the editorial accused Republicans of trying to use the issue of Lamar’s proscription to force him out of the canvass. Instead, the editorialist asserted, Republicans “have neither the moral courage nor the intellectual capacity to meet him in a fair discussion before the people on the issues involved in the election.”\(^{20}\)

The Republican candidate for office was the Mississippi Republican Party’s means by which to discuss the issues of the day and remain in power. By running a secessionist and a Confederate they may have hoped to make past secessionist indiscretions a moot point in favor of keeping current issues in the forefront. What the campaigns ensured was that a secessionist would be placed in office, an issue perhaps not to Mississippians, but certainly, either candidate would face opposition by northerners in taking his seat. Republicans ran Robert Watkins Flournoy, Lamar’s fellow secession convention delegate and self-described and proven reconstructed member of the 1st Congressional District. Despite Flournoy’s post-war conversion, including his selfless acts on behalf of African Americans through the Freedman’s Bureau and personal lawsuits against the Ku Klux Klan, he could not escape his past. Reminiscent of their

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\(^{19}\) *Jackson* (Mississippi) *Weekly Clarion*, 26 September 1872, p. 2.  
\(^{20}\) *Jackson* (Mississippi) *Weekly Clarion*, 26 September 1872, p. 2.
attacks on Alcorn in 1869, the *Clarion* poked fun at the idea of Republicans nominating a secessionist and former slaveholder as their candidate. On October 5, 1872, the *Clarion* heckled Flournoy for supposedly sending his slaves further south to avoid Federal capture during the war.\(^{21}\) Pointing out the national Republican Party’s hypocrisy in professing “holy horror” of the nomination of “original secessionists,” the *Clarion* noted the Republican Party nominated a secessionist of their own. Political antecedents did not matter to Grantites, the *Clarion* proclaimed, as long as the candidate would “join their clan, wear the Grant collar, and go before Congressional “outrage” committees and swear away the lives and liberty of the Southern whites.”\(^{22}\) The victor would be the personification of the values and vision of the community of which he was elected, even if that man could not vote in the election in which he was elected or hold the office to which he was elected.

News of Lamar’s attempt to return to office spread outside Mississippi. On October 17, 1872, the *Clarion* printed a tribute to Lamar from the North Carolinian *Wilmington Journal*. The author of the Lamar tribute wrote: “The announcement that this gentleman is a candidate for Congress in the Northern District of Mississippi brings back times of the good old days when the country rejoiced in peace, plenty, and prosperity.” Recounting Lamar’s service to the Confederacy in glowing, romantic terms, the writer praised Lamar as a man of his people, devoted to Mississippi. Evidence of Lamar’s devotion, the author intimated, was in his words upon surrender. When it was suggested to him that he leave the country, Lamar replied, “I shall stay with my people and share their fate. I feel it to be in my duty to devote my life to the alleviation, as far as my power lies, of the sufferings this day’s disaster will entail upon them.”\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\) Jackson (Mississippi) *Weekly Clarion*, 5 October 1872, p. 3.
\(^{22}\) Jackson (Mississippi) *Weekly Clarion*, 17 October 1872, p. 1.
\(^{23}\) Jackson (Mississippi) *Weekly Clarion*, 17 October 1872, p. 1.
The North Carolinian assured his audience Lamar’s participation in secession had to be seen in his subsequent feelings of agony and guilt upon the war’s failure to achieve independence.

The *Wilmington Journal* tribute is a Lamar love feast, despite the author describing Lamar’s role in secession in terms of duty, sacrifice, and devotion to his people. His candidacy reminded the writer of the world that existed before the war, when men like Lamar loomed large on the horizon as the leaders, not only of their state, but also of the nation. Secession, though a lost cause, had tested their mettle, perhaps more in defeat, which would only serve them more upon a return to political power. Lamar not only helped kindle the fires of secession and war, he had walked through its flames, felt the agony and responsibility of defeat. The North Carolinian closed his tribute with the assertion, “A man of bigger heart or bigger brain it has never been our fortune to meet. We pity the Radical, scalawag or carpetbagger who stands up before him.”

After the *Wilmington Journal*’s tribute, the *Clarion* fell silent on the canvass for the First District, focusing most of its efforts on the Greeley vs. Grant contest. Following Election Day, when returns came back showing a Republican victory, the *Clarion* despaired and spent a great deal of effort trying to figure out just what went wrong in the Greeley campaign. The paper showed a general preoccupation with presidential returns, publishing county-by-county results and arguing that either “white voter apathy” or crowding at the polls spawned defeat. What should have been a bright moment in the Greeley defeat was the simple fact that Lamar won the First District. Tucked away on the bottom of the second page of the November 15, 1872, edition of the *Weekly Clarion* was the simple admission under the title of “The First District,” stating,

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“Notwithstanding the apathy of the white voters, Col. Lamar’s majority will be three thousand. It would have been 12,000 on a full vote.”

A week or so after the election, including the announcement of the sudden death of the just-recently defeated Democratic presidential candidate, Horace Greeley, the Clarion’s pages hummed with the excitement of following Lamar’s path to Washington, D.C. to seek the removal of his disabilities. The Clarion was optimistic, noting in an editorial:

Although a Conservative, Col. Lamar is one of those who frankly accepted the situation, and is held in high esteem by both parties in Mississippi. His application is favored by the two United States Republican Senators from Mississippi, Alcorn and Ames, by Governor Powers, and a number of the Republicans of the State and United States officials in that State.

Despite the Clarion’s optimism, the Mississippi Pilot continued to oppose the reinstatement of Lamar’s political rights. The Clarion responded to the Pilot’s opposition by stating that it was no longer Lamar who applied for amnesty, but the people of Mississippi, standing behind their nominee, who appealed to Congress to support their representative to Congress.

Lamar’s petition to Congress would be short and humble, and it is questionable whether the Clarion was correct in its argument that the people of Mississippi supported him. With brief mention of his previous service to the House, Lamar asked for the removal of political disabilities imposed by the Fourteenth Amendment. Such a request was no small task, and his exception would pave the way for others like him to regain their full citizenship rights. Congress would decide whether a reward of rights was merited after twelve year’s time to think on his crimes. He argued, “Your memorialist would not sue for such special legislation in his favor if he were not, after due self-examination, conscious of his fidelity to the interests and happiness of

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26 Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, 12 December 1872, p. 2.
27 Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, 12 December 1872, p. 2.
the people of the United States and to the Constitution and laws thereof.”28 Supporting his petition were the names of the Governor of the State, the United States district judge, the United States district attorneys of the Northern and Southern districts of Mississippi, the United States marshal of the Northern district, several United States assistant assessors and collectors, several circuit judges and chancellors, all leading Republicans of Mississippi, and most of the United States officials of the State.29 Such men were not “the people of Mississippi” but mainly Lamar’s people, many of whom shared in at least part of his guilt in secession and war, but who had returned to service or gained service because their guilt was judged by northerners to be less than his. Those who voted for Lamar were not wrong in their assessment that his candidacy would be a blow to Reconstruction; however the important element to note is that the men who voted to return Lamar to full citizenship rights did not see things the same way. In front of them stood a man reformed, or so he said, and for the first time since before the war, northern Congressmen put their trust in a penitent Democrat from Mississippi, suspended the rules of the House and voted to restore his rights.

On December 19, 1872, the Clarion reported to its readership, “The bill to remove Col. Lamar’s disabilities (having passed the House) has passed the Senate, no one dissenting. . . The State will be represented in the House by at least one able and true Mississippian.”30 Unspoken in this assertion of Lamar’s position as a “true” Mississippian, was that Mississippians saw secessionist ties as a qualification, not a mill stone for political office. Yet throughout the

30 Jackson (Mississippi) Weekly Clarion, 19 December 1872, p. 2.
campaign, the word “secession” was not bandied about like it had been in the gubernatorial race of 1869. Discretion was the order of the 1872 process, but also, the simple idea that contrary to what Republicans and supporters of Reconstruction would have liked, politicians’ participation in secession and the subsequent Confederate government failed to become anathema to the people of Mississippi. The Clarion itself proclaimed its desire to see a change in how southerners’ political pasts would be viewed. For the good of the nation, or perhaps just the South, the Clarion advised:

We think the sooner the people who assume to direct public opinion cease to fight over battles of former political parties and to forgo their preferences for mere names, and address themselves to the issues of the day, the sooner our state will be relieved of the evils from which she is suffering in common with the other carpetbagger communities.\(^{31}\)

Besides having no desire to bow to Republicans, Lamar pondered how his role in secession would affect his credibility to suggest alternatives to what, up to this point in Lamar’s experience and opinion, had been a failed Reconstruction. Though Lamar doubted whether he owed it to the South and Mississippi “to go into public employments,” he won election to Congress in November 1872 and entered Congress as a representative to the 43rd Congress.\(^{32}\) Once in positions of national importance, men like Lamar would use their newfound power to slowly inculcate the minds and hearts of the nation to their own interpretation of the meaning of the Civil War as well as dominate the process of bringing the nation back together. L. Q. C. Lamar would become influential in determining the tone of reunion. Just two short years after his impressive return to national politics, he seized the initiative given to him in form of an invitation by the Massachusetts delegation to give a eulogy for Charles Sumner—a secessionist lamenting the death of an abolitionist. Yet, initially, he stood back and watched, waiting for the

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\(^{31}\) Jackson (Mississippi) 19 December 1872, p. 2.
right moment, which would provide the right opportunity at the right time to say and do the right thing.

Lamar’s return to Congress in 1873 forced him to face the embarrassment of events past and to recognize the gravity and responsibility of his future actions. Judging from his personal writings, speeches, and actions in Congress from 1873-1877, the Senate from 1877-1885, as Secretary of the Interior in President Grover Cleveland’s cabinet from 1885-1888, and later as an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Lamar desired nothing more from his public service than to return Mississippi and the South to self-rule and to lend every resource available to fix northern misrepresentations of the South and cure sectional animosity. At the same time, his ambition pushed him into positions of increasing responsibility and visibility, making him well-respected and admired, despite his own continued doubts as to his performance, image, and purpose. His post-war ambitions were not any more fully formed in the 1850s and 1860s as they were in 1873. In many ways, he was a product of his environment, changing his stances to fit the needs of his present and if possible, changing his political position, to fulfill aspirations compelled by present events.

One of the best sources of insight to Lamar’s personal ambitions from 1872-1885 was a group of letters Lamar sent to junior law partner, Edward Donaldson Clark, in Oxford, Mississippi.\(^{33}\) Candid and frank, Lamar’s letters contained a common thread, which he described in his own words when discussing his support for Alcorn, a Reconstructed Republican running for the Senate in 1872:

I am for Alcorn and am warmly enlisted in his favor now. . . [he] claims to be consistent in principle and changed as to personal measures. True patriotism and statesmanship only

\(^{33}\) Clark was Lamar’s law clerk from 1868-1873 in Oxford, Mississippi. The partnership dissolved when Clark moved to Vicksburg, but the two remained life-long friends. http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/archives/finding_aids/MUM01174.html
require consistency as to aim and end. It allows and requires changes of means. . . [the purpose of the election] is to secure for our people restored and harmonious relations with the Federal Government . . . deliverance of the State from Military thralldom and to its investiture with civil authority and Federal rights. All nominations and platforms should be made with a view to these goals.34

As early as 1867, most whites in the South wanted to cooperate with Reconstruction without party identification. Either men considered all parties too radical or they desired to resist through what Baggett called, “a strategy of masterly inactivity.”35 Lamar’s support for Alcorn suggests solidarity of cause, regardless of party affiliation and his language suggested that means had to be changed in order to accomplish one’s political goals. By supporting Alcorn, Lamar hoped to rid Mississippi of men like military Governor Adelbert Ames for whom Lamar reserved harsh criticism. Ames belonged to the class of carpetbaggers who entered Mississippi during Reconstruction admitting that they were “new to the political institutions of the State.” Lamar felt Ames (and other carpetbaggers) could not be trusted in government because he did not share in the traditions, pride in past history or the sufferings and hopes of the white people of the State. Believing it was not practical, let alone humane, to ask suffering southerners to put up with another four years of bad government, official corruption, and ruinous taxation, Lamar learned to place his support in means that could accomplish nothing less than Mississippi’s readmittance to the Union and the reinvestment of civic authority to the people of Mississippi.36

Lamar carried his policy of changing one’s means to achieve political goals well into the 1870s. By 1877, he not only applied his new thinking to supporting political opponents or men from other parties, but in the case of his relationship with Blanche K. Bruce, Mississippi’s

34 Lamar Photocopy Collection, ALS from L. Q. C. Lamar to E.D. Clark, October 19,1872, Small Manuscripts Collection 76-7. UMASP
36 Lamar Photocopy Collection, ALS from L. Q. C. Lamar to E.D. Clark, October 16, 1873, Small Manuscripts Collection 76-7, UMASC.
second black Senator, it meant lobbying for support from men who before the war he considered nothing but valuable property. In March 1877, Lamar, impressed by Bruce, expressed to Clark that he needed to gain Bruce’s support because he “commands general respect.” Lamar, like Alcorn, recognized the need of southerners to court black votes, and by developing a plan to enlist Bruce on the side of the Democrats, Lamar hoped to woo black support through the distribution of Federal offices, which would stem the Republican gains in the State.

In private letters, one can see the dual nature that was Lamar the politician. Even while courting Senator Bruce, Lamar used racist innuendo against Republicans, appealing to whites in 1873 to reverse the “cruel and hideous despotism” and to stem the “saddest black tyranny on the face of this earth.” Whether meant for Clark’s consumption or as a letter directed toward wider audiences, perhaps newspaper publication, Lamar wrote a strong letter on October 14, 1874, calling for a rallying of public interest. Using some rather inflammatory language Lamar wrote to Clark:

> It does seem that if there ever was time when the white people of this State, the men in whose veins flows the blood of the ruling races of the world, should rise and with one unanimous voice protest against the domination about to be fixed upon them the present is the time. Can it be that the souls of our own proud people which a few years ago rose with such deep sense of wrong and heroic effort has, by long oppression, been dulled into indifference and sullen despair.

A lament for the lack of secessionist fire, Lamar’s private correspondence expressed impatience and frustration at the lack of enthusiasm by political men. While Henry Craft believed war

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37 The first black senator from the State of Mississippi was Hiram Revels. Revels served in the first months after Mississippi’s re-admittance to the Union.
38 ALS from L. Q. C. Lamar to E.D. Clark, March 18, 1877, Small Manuscripts Collection 76-7, UMASC.
39 ALS from L. Q. C. Lamar to E.D. Clark, October 16, 1873, Small Manuscripts Collection 76-7, UMASC.
40 ALS from L. Q. C. Lamar to E.D. Clark, October 14, 1873, Small Manuscripts Collection 76-7, UMASC.
softened Lamar, Reconstruction failed to squelch Lamar’s fire and enthusiasm, even if the post-war offered few opportunities for the fullest incarnation of his emotions to show themselves.

Lamar’s first year in Congress revealed his internal passion for pre-war issues and contentions continued to burn in his personal correspondence, and even in 1874, when the Massachusetts delegation invited Lamar to second the usual resolutions and to deliver a memorial address in the House for the Honorable Charles Sumner who died on March 11, 1874, Lamar chose a careful course. Many historians, modern and contemporary, argue that Lamar’s eulogy for Charles Sumner marked the turning point in Lamar’s career, but also the turning point in the shaping of the war’s memory. While focusing on the romantic language of reunion, many scholars miss the underlying irony of the speech as well as Lamar’s ability to utilize rhetoric to speak his own “truth” about the meaning of war in plain language without apology. In short, a secessionist spoke rather unkind words over the dead body of an abolitionist who worked his whole career for the good of a people Lamar did not respect or appreciate. Curiously, it worked. Few noticed how Lamar’s speech alludes to the fact that the North won the war, but it failed to convince southerners of the moral wrongness of the institution of slavery, that their cause in war had been for naught, or that the northern position that black men and women deserved anything close to the freedom enjoyed by white Americans was the best vision for the future of America.

A speech which brought men on both sides to tears, Lamar’s speech and its meaning would transform the post-war era and bring him, as he described, “a reputation that I have never

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41 Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 184. According to parliamentary procedure, a resolution is “seconded” to show that a matter be brought to the attention of the assembly. Such is not required in American congressional procedure, so it seems that the invitation on the part of the Massachusetts delegation was meant to be an honor and perhaps a gesture of good faith between sections.
had before . . . . the whole world is my audience.” To a captive audience, Lamar sought through a eulogy about a man he never met, to “heal sectional conflict.” Read in light of what came to be in the South and the nation, his condolences sound sinister, and serve as a flimsy mask for Lamar’s opportunity to offer up a sort of state of the South’s thoughts on the war, abolition of slavery and reconstruction. As W. E. B. Du Bois noted, “Lamar of Mississippi, fraudulently elected to Congress, unctuously praised Sumner with his tongue in his cheek.”

Speaking to the “characteristics which brought the illustrious senator who has just passed away into direct and bitter antagonism for years with my own State and her sister States of the South,” Lamar began with Sumner’s “instinctive love of freedom.” While building him up as a man of vision and doctrine, he scoffed, “Whether his measures to secure this result showed him to a practical statesman or the theoretical enthusiast is a question on which any decision we may pronounce today must await the inevitable revision of posterity.” No secessionist could have put it better.

Lamar mocked Sumner’s love of freedom as well as the people he strove to free, freedom wasted upon men and women brought out of bondage during the Civil War. He did not directly call out Sumner, but argued that it “matters not” if those freed slaves had been “contented with his lot,” that his “condition might be immeasurably more desirable than that from which it had transplanted him; that it gave him physical comfort, mental and moral elevation; and religious culture not possessed by his race.” In the same breath, he argued the living generation had not placed him in bondage, but that his condition was a part and he an element in a “mixed social system” formed and regarded by the founding fathers as “too complicated to be broken up without danger to society or to civilization” and sanctioned by the “organic law of a Republic.”

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42 Mayes, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, 188 and 191-192.
Lamar utilized Sumner’s eulogy to argue the virtues of slavery, to demean African Americans and their culture, to relieve Lamar’s compatriots of responsibility for the perpetuation of an inherited institution, and to argue the United States had been formed and founded on the notion that anything less than white enslavement of black peoples would threaten the fabric of the nation and bring down civilization.⁴⁴

Healing sectional conflict required additional explanation, so Lamar utilized to his own end Sumner’s characteristics of undaunted passion and activity. Lamar spoke to the war’s meaning as he understood it, and offered his own version of reconciliation and forgiveness. He did not renounce southern antebellum principles, but appealed to both sides to find common ground in each other’s “prowess” and “courage.” He attempted to translate a physical war fought for the preservation of a Union of states and later the freedom of subjugated black men and women into a mere “war of ideas” fought for principles each side believed true without a single mention that the South’s understanding of the principles of freedom and equality were narrow and passé. His words formed the beginnings of what would become the Lost Cause’s interpretation of the Civil War and the romanticism of the reunion of sections, which ignored the realities of Emancipation:

Let us hope that future generations, when they remember deeds of heroism and devotion done on both sides, will speak not of Northern prowess and Southern courage, but of the heroism, fortitude, and courage of Americans in a war of ideas; a war in which each section signaled its consecration to the principles, as each understood them, of American liberty and of the constitution received from their fathers.

It was my misfortune, perhaps my fault, personally never to have known this eminent philanthropist and statesman. The impulse was often strong upon me to go to him and offer him my hand, and my heart with it, and to express to him my thanks for his kind and considerate course toward the people with whom I am identified. If I did not yield to

that impulse, it was because the thought occurred that other days were coming in which such a demonstration might be more opportune, and less liable to misconstruction. Suddenly, and without premonition, a day has come at last to which, such a purpose, there is no to-morrow. My regret is therefore intensified by the thought that I failed to speak to him out of the fullness of my heart while there was yet time.\textsuperscript{45}

That Lamar failed to speak to Sumner may or may not have been true, though his personal correspondence betrays little of this deep and heartfelt compunction to grasp the hand of his former enemy—one who his compatriots helped to strike down unawares in the Senate chamber. Both sides were swept up in the feeling of the speech, which ended with the intimation that Sumner might have uttered: “My country-men, know one another, and you will love one another.” It is hard not to imagine the spirit of the dead abolitionist banging on the lid of his coffin, pleading with anyone within earshot to listen not to the words of Lamar, but to judge his actions. The former secessionist claimed the South to be “prostrate, exhausted, and drained of her life-blood as well as her material resources,” but insisted that her honor remained. If Reconstruction stood as a blight upon the honor of the nation, what followed would be nothing more than the actions of men desirous to preserve their honor.\textsuperscript{46}

Of the fame the speech brought him, Lamar expressed surprise, but it was to his wife that he conveyed that, “I know for once that I have done her [the South] good. . . . It is time for a public man to try to serve the South, and not to sub serve her irritated feelings, natural and just as those feelings are.”\textsuperscript{47} The Sumner eulogy expressed publicly many of the ideas that Lamar expressed internally to his colleagues and friends. The conciliatory language of the speech was strong enough to please the North, and yet, its expression of desire for the nation to recognize the

\textsuperscript{47} Mayes, \textit{L. Q. C. Lamar}, 191-192.
valor and bravery of southern soldiers and a careful defense of slavery allowed Lamar to skillfully shift the public memory of the Civil War’s image as a war over slavery back to a war over ideas, which was much more palatable to southerners.

Lamar left the House in 1876, when the Mississippi Legislature chose him to fill the position vacated by James L. Acorn in the United States Senate. His career as a Senator proved a challenge as he found himself at odds with the voting instructions of the Mississippi Legislature. Lamar sided with the findings of the advisory commission made up of five senators, five representatives, and five Supreme Court justices to sort out the mess regarding electors in the presidential election between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden. The commission voted in favor of Hayes, mainly along party lines, and Lamar agreed with the result. Lamar’s decision did not sit well with the Mississippians who put him in office, and his continued and staunch opposition to the “free coinage of silver movement” did nothing to help the situation. While Lamar understood Mississippians desired a solution for their suffering economic situation, he believed the sort-term gain did not equate with the long-term results of a devalued currency. His vote was a matter of principle, and he maintained strict integrity and consistency between his lessons to his former students at the University of Mississippi and his own life when citing his reasons to vote as he did:

Upon them [his students] I have always endeavored to impress the belief that truth is 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 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.
Applauded by both sides, such comments and actions would later come to help support his nominations to executive and judicial positions, though at the time were as close to political suicide as few politicians dared to come.\textsuperscript{48}

During his career in the Senate, Lamar also stood resolutely on the importance of education, which he viewed as the proscription against the dangers of ignorance. As a former law professor and life-long scholar with a house strewn with books, Lamar championed education, though the racist motives behind his support is disturbing. While he backed national aid for education to the states, he argued from at least 1879 onward for a less-progressive approach to education for black Americans while lifting up education for whites as a positive good. Republican-led Reconstruction failed, according to Lamar, because it prohibited from public office the South’s best men and provided the franchise to ignorant former slaves. In “Ought the Negro to be Disfranchised?—Ought He Have been Enfranchised,” an article Lamar published in the National American Review in 1879, he argued that placing the ballot “in the hands of an ignorant negro majority as a means of education and progress, you must be patient while they learn their lesson.”\textsuperscript{49} According to Lamar, the cost of educating African Americans through enfranchisement resulted in ten years of “gross and shameless dishonesty, their [Republican] exorbitant taxation, their reckless expenditure, their oppression of native interests, the social agonies through which they have forced all that was good and pure to pass through a fiery furnace.” Oddly, the furnace of which Lamar spoke was not Civil War, but Reconstruction, as an unnecessary second refiner’s fire for white southerners who stood powerless to change events. In the same article, Lamar scoffed at black voter intimidation and fraud at southern polls, arguing

\textsuperscript{49} L. Q. C. Lamar, “Ought the Negro to be Disfranchised?—Ought He Have been Enfranchised?” \textit{National American Review} 128, (1879), 225-239.
that the people protesting could not accept the realities of the results such elections produced. Lamar hinted that the real educational lesson black voters required was that of submitting to an unpopular or undesired result of a solid and fair election in a democratic state.\textsuperscript{50}

In a speech given before the Senate in 1884, Lamar further illustrated his support of education in light of the events of the time. Whether because of the change of his audience or a more mature outlook, his comments imply the opinions he expressed in 1879 without overt racism. Lamar supported the bill for national aid for education as a boon to the entire population of the South “that cannot be overvalued.” Throughout the South education prior to the war existed only for those who could afford to pay for lessons, which rendered much of the white population as ignorant as the black men and women held in bondage. The creation of a common school system would repair the gap in white education, and provide much needed education for African Americans upon whom he believed “it will tell more powerfully and decisively upon the future destinies of the colored race.” White interest in black education stemmed from a desire on the part of Lamar and other white southerners to “raise him out of his present state of barbarism.” He identified the problem of race was more an issue of illiteracy, and that most of the difficulties with race were a result of an unenlightened demographic content with “ignorance, prejudice, and superstition.” Without education, the race question would never be understood and the South would not recover from the result of war –its general crash and desolation.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} L. Q. C. Lamar, “Ought the Negro to be Disfranchised?” 225-239.

\textsuperscript{51} L. Q. C. Lamar, “Ought the Negro to be Disfranchised?” 225-239, and Michael H. Hoffheimer, “L. Q. C. Lamar 1825-1893,” Mississippi Law Journal, Volume 63, Number 1, Fall 1993, deserves credit for helping the author convey ideas contained within this section. The article devotes much attention to Lamar’s legal and judicial opinions as well as the motive behind his positions, and the appendix provided key reprints of underappreciated articles often missed by Lamar scholars.
Lamar’s post-war political career also included public responses in defense of Confederate leaders, antebellum concepts of secession, and the engagement of northern leaders on the truth of their efforts to work with southerners and move the nation toward reconciliation. Lamar emphatically supported his ex-commander-in-chief without faltering. Jefferson Davis had no better defender than L. Q. C. Lamar. In the Senate, Senator John Sherman of Ohio, now in the post-war, riled Lamar’s temper when he attacked Davis:

Mr. Davis is an old man. I do not desire to say anything personally unkind . . . but great God! will it ever be disputed in this country of ours at any time, even a thousand years hence, that Jefferson Davis in the war and before the war was a conspirator and a traitor to his country? I trust . . . I cannot while I live at least see that great truth and fact in history challenged, and Jefferson Davis praised as a patriot any more than our revolutionary fathers would have allowed in their time and their day the name of Benedict Arnold to be praised at least without entering their most solemn protest.

Lamar returned in kind:

We of the South have surrendered upon all the questions which divided the two sides in that controversy. We have given up the right of the people to secede from this Union; we have given up the right of each State to judge for itself the infractions of the Constitution and the mode of redress; we have given up the right to control our own domestic institutions. We fought for all these, and we lost in that controversy; but no man shall in my presence call Jefferson Davis a traitor without my responding with a stern and emphatic denial.

Defining Davis as a man who wanted peaceable settlement within the Union until the eleventh hour, Lamar argued that Davis had no personal reason to break-up the Union. As one of the most successful politicians of the South, he had acquired over a long political career the nation’s highest honors. Believing that resistance to secession would sacrifice southerners honor and trust in him, Davis seceded, according to Lamar, and then devoted heart and soul to the creation of a new nation.

52 Mayes, L. Q. C. Lamar, 464.
54 Mayes, L. Q. C. Lamar, 466.
Lamar’s defense of Davis in the 1880s was part of a growing trend in the Confederacy to reshape the war’s image and therefore the image of secession. Former Confederates were willing to admit that the Civil War settled the question of secession as a viable option of redress. A solid Union was not just in the hearts of Americans as a compact of friendship but a political fact that the use of force in the Civil War showed would not be broken. Definitions of secession and the purpose of war morphed from pre-war fears of northern interference with the institution of slavery as well as the immediate post-war conception that secession was the result of a small reckless radicals dissatisfied with the American form of government, into the idea of southerners as patriots. Though many secessionists and Confederates cited during the secession crisis their belief that their revolution was similar to that of the founding fathers, the justification for secession had almost unanimously rested, in the language of the conventions themselves, on slavery. In the postwar, southerners retooled this way of thinking to shape their patriotic Civil War endeavors as actions “to save the Constitution as we read it, and to save ourselves, and preserve our cherished form of government from a perversion of the Constitution.”

Southerners also began stressing that secession was not about war, but about peaceful separation and the hope of the South’s amicable relations with the North. Jefferson Davis helped to spread this view in his memoir *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*. Immediate reviews of the two-volume work picked up on Davis’s peaceful interpretation of secession. Confederates were for peace, not war, Davis explained, and had exhausted every means of pacification. Davis claimed that the North’s actions in South Carolina, at Fort Sumter specifically, forced the Confederacy into war. It was “senseless” to say that the South “fired the

first gun.” As the grandson and great-nephew of men who fought in the American Revolution and the brother of men who fought in the War of 1812, Davis, as much as Henry Adams, was a legacy of the suffering and success of the founding generation. Davis described secession—as he and as other Confederates defined it in the post-war—as an action of ultra-patriotism, used only in the gravest of situations.

The belief that secession was a conspiracy theory began in the immediate post-war, and to some degree, modern historians, like Charles Dew, have attempted to show that there was some truth to conspiracy. L. Q. C. Lamar and many of his southern contemporaries used Davis’s eleventh hour pleas for Union as the example that disproved the theory. Secession, Lamar argued in the post-war secession was not about destruction of the American idea of government, but about improvement of existing institutions. If secession succeeded, the Confederacy would have kept the same form of government, departments, functions, laws, and with a few word changes, the Constitution. Lamar stated:

[Secession was a] movement to change the boundaries of the country, by sovereign States in their capacity of states, it can never be confounded with such conspiracies as that of Cataline and the cabals of ambitious traitors . . . . Sovereignty is the highest power in a state; and secession is the extreme power, which no other civil power can control or coerce.

Lamar, with this statement, believed that the Civil War ultimately undermined and destroyed the notion of a State’s individual sovereignty over its own institutions, as he asked, “How can a State be sovereign if there be the political organization an authority which can limit its action?”

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weighed in finally that it would be left to posterity the verdict of whether secession was “a conspiracy of a few ambitious individuals, or whether it was an uprising of a whole people, to preserve as they thought, their autonomy and their institutions.”

In a speech on the Senate floor on April 1, 1881, L. Q. C. Lamar exemplified not only how far former Confederates had come from 1865, but also their confidence that, though the Union would find success in war, the South would win Reconstruction. Lamar placed the burden of Reconstruction’s failure on the backs of northern Republicans who refused to meet the South in the middle. Lamar was especially angered by what he felt to be an ongoing feeling in the North that southerners, especially ex-secessionists, could not be trusted in government, and instead of standing down and speaking in a conciliatory manner, he lashed out:

I know that there is a distinction drawn, and repeatedly drawn by Senators on the other side, that while they will condone and forgive connection and implication with secession and the secession movement, they will not do it, they will not grasp hands across the bloody chasm.

Affirming his own patriotism and drive to mend the country’s divisions, Lamar resurrected his words from his 1860 speech on the House floor in response to then Representative Sherman of Ohio. Refusing to hide from his antebellum leanings, Lamar proudly claimed:

I belong to that class of public men who were secessionist. Every throb of my heart was for the disunion of these States. If that deducts from the force of the statements I have made today it is due to candor and to you to admit it. I confess that I believed in the propriety of its exercise. I will say further that it was a cherished conception of my mind. That conception is gone; it is sunk forever out of sight. Another one has come in its place; and by the way, it is my first love . . . . It is that of one grand, mighty, indivisible Republic throwing its loving arms around all sections, omnipotent for protection, powerless for oppression, cursing none, blessing all.

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60 Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar*, 464.
Whereas the 1860 speech claimed that the South would only secede if the North made the South feel as if her rights were in danger, the 1881 speech implied that the South tried secession (their choice) and failed, and upon trying Reconstruction and finding the North at fault, Lamar hinted that perhaps the South had always taken the higher ground, and that fault rested, not in the South, but in the North.

By the late 1870s, more and more former Confederates returned to the halls of Congress. In 1876, controversy arose in Mississippi, when Republicans alleged voter fraud caused large Democratic victories in November elections. O. R. Singleton, an ex-Confederate congressman elected to the 45th Congress, argued that he was inclined to ignore charges of voter fraud because of the “motives of those who gave them currency” and to “do justice to a deeply injured” people.63 Suggesting that the voter revolution had more to do from the fact the people of the state had suffered in body, mind, and estate, Singleton claimed that “the refuse of Northern society without honor, principle, and social status” scourged Mississippi searching for the spoils of war.64 Absentee carpetbaggers, referring to Governor Ames, and local people in the hands of a black lieutenant governor witnessed the pardon of murderers and gouging taxes that went into the pockets of elected officials. According to Singleton, talk of voter corruption and investigation into such charges could only worsen the situation Mississippi faced. He summed up his diatribe with the words:

I can envy no man who delights in tearing the bandages from the wounds of his victim, that blood may flow afresh. Whatever laurels he can gather upon this field let him wear them complacently. I leave him alone in his glory believing that time will set all things even, and posterity will award his memory the scorn and contempt it so richly merits.65

63 Speech of the Honorable O.R. Singleton of the State of Mississippi in the House of Representatives, August 14, 1876, 3. UMASC.
64 Speech of the Honorable O.R. Singleton, August 14, 1876, 5. UMASC.
65 Speech of the Honorable O.R. Singleton, August 14, 1876, 12. UMASC.
Singleton’s thinly veiled threat of southern vindication was prophetic, and by 1876, the political scene proved that it was becoming a reality.

Singleton was not alone in his return to Congress or positions of leadership within Mississippi, and many of his compatriots were former secessionists. Thomas H. Woods was only twenty-four years old in 1861 at the time of the convention. His service in the war kept him from fulfilling an appointment as attorney for the Third Mississippi District in 1866, and he could not take his seat as a State Senator, despite winning the election in 1869, for the same reason. The Democratic revolution 1875 allowed Woods an opportunity to become district attorney from 1875-1876. He retired to private practice until Mississippians called him back to service in 1882, first as a legislator in the state house and then in 1889 to an appointment to the Mississippi Supreme Court. He became its chief justice and earned reappointment for another term in 1891. War hero William Robert Barksdale was elected to a seat in the lower house of the Mississippi legislature in 1875, largely on the merits of his service to the Confederacy, and he took an active role in the “dethronement” of Governor Ames.66 Though he died without living to see the result of the home rule revolution he helped begin, he was mourned for his selfless courage and zeal in the fight for the independence of his native south.67 Fellow secession delegate James Ronald Chalmers joined Barksdale in the Democratic rush to rid Mississippi of Republican leaders in 1876. Elected to the State Senate in that year, he served a single term before beginning a career in the United States House of Representative that lasted until his retirement in 1888.

66 James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1881), 483. Governor Adelbert Ames found himself under siege in 1875, when Democrats united to defeat Republicans. Ames called for help of the federal government, but found no help forthcoming. When Democrats gained majority in the House and Senate of Mississippi, they attempted to impeach Ames and other Republican public office holders. Ames resigned and did not serve in another public office for the rest of his life.
67 James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi*, 482.
Possibly the only man beside Lamar from the Mississippi secession convention to achieve post-war prominence and a successful political career was James Zachariah George of Carroll County. His description by biographers as a “Southern man, and a Mississippian in all the terms it implies” is as mysterious to the twenty-first century as it was apparently understood by the nineteenth century. His biographers believed George—the staunch friend of the southern people—kept southern interests and values near to his heart, and his knowledge of the Constitution served Mississippi well. A thirty-four-year-old lawyer in 1860 with twenty-five thousand dollars in real estate and more than sixty-three thousand dollars in personal estate, including thirty slaves, in the 1860 census, George went on to serve as a captain in the 20th Mississippi Infantry and later brigadier general of state troops and colonel of the 5th Regiment Mississippi Cavalry in the Civil War. Though disenfranchised after the war, he held onto his home and lands, affectionately known as “Coatesworth” and resumed his legal practice. In 1875-1876 he chaired the state’s Democratic executive committee and involved himself in private practice before being appointed to the Supreme Court of Mississippi and elected its chief justice. He resigned his position in 1881 to become a United States senator, serving until 1897.

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68 For George’s biography, Goodspeed Brothers. *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, embracing an authentic and comprehensive account of the chief events in the history of the state and a record of the lives of many of the most worthy and illustrious families and individuals* (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1891), 784. George purchased Coatesworth from an innkeeper in 1847. He converted the one-time inn and stagecoach stop into his plantation home, which included a separate structure that served as George’s personal library and study. It was from this space where George would go on to craft the Mississippi Constitution of 1890. Source: [http://cotesworthcenter.com/Cotesworth.html](http://cotesworthcenter.com/Cotesworth.html), last accessed October 31, 2012, or M.C. Miller, *Must See Mississippi: 50 Favorite Places* (The University of Mississippi Press: Oxford, Mississippi, 2007). 83-86.
In that capacity he helped frame the legislation that would become the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and the development of the Department of Agriculture.\(^\text{69}\)

The importance of a number of former secessionists in the judiciary is easily underestimated. Men in such positions had an incredible opportunity to overturn and decide cases that resulted from Reconstruction policies. Jehu Amaziah Orr advised African American enfranchisement on a limited basis as a means to escape Reconstruction. He did not cooperate with the Democratic Party in Mississippi until after the nomination of Tilden. Though his career on the bench of the Sixth Judicial District of Mississippi lasted six years, his biographers’ utilize cryptic language to suggest their approval of Orr’s success in dismantling his predecessor’s efforts to instill equality into the minds of African Americans.\(^\text{70}\) In addition, retirement did not discourage secessionists from political office or influence. A number of men became successful and prominent lawyers, remaining lifelong Democrats. Samuel Heidelberg Terral spent his years as a disenfranchised southerner organizing the Democratic Party in the state and becoming its leader. He was eventually elected to the legislature and chosen its speaker as a result of his efforts, though his murder in 1882 suggests an unknown seedier side of his life.\(^\text{71}\) At least six secessionists were offered positions and served the University of Mississippi as trustees before or after the war, creating a legacy of secessionist influence unbroken only when the war interrupted the University’s operations. Such men shaped the educational and social environment of the

\(^{69}\) George was important enough to Mississippi that the state gave a statue of George as one of its two pieces for the National Statuary Hall Collection. A short biography from the Capitol Hill Art Collection can be found on its website, last accessed April 2013, http://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/national-statuary-hall-collection/james-zachariah-george.


\(^{71}\) Terral also eulogized Sumner, located in Franklin L. Riley, *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* (Oxford, Miss.: [n.p.], 1898-1914), Volume 12 (1912), 287.
Alfred Edward Lewis served as sheriff of Jackson County for fourteen years and was noted as a “prominent man in agricultural and political circles” until his death in 1885.\(^\text{73}\)

The return of Mississippi Democrats to office signaled the end to careers built by men who had tried to mitigate northern Radical Reconstruction and to stave off southern Democrats’ desire for home rule and a return of white power. The situation became untenable. Orlando Davis left the circuit court bench and retired from politics in the 1870s. Upon losing the 1873 gubernatorial race to Republican Party-backed candidate Adelbert Ames, Alcorn continued in his position as Mississippi’s senator until his term ended in 1876. His main reason for running for governor a second time despite a life-long ambition to serve in the Senate was that he could do more from the governor’s seat than the Senate to save the state from Ames’s influence and that of other carpetbaggers. While he found support from conservative portions of the state’s Republican Party, he also found unusual support from Democrats, including Lamar. The Democratic Party failed to run its own candidate, and many party members unofficially supported Alcorn. Republicans saw this ploy by Democrats to be a show of Alcorn’s connections to ex-Confederates and Democrats and turned from their support of him. When Alcorn lost the race, he viewed his defeat as a personal failure in his duty to Mississippi and the South.\(^\text{74}\)

Continued Klan violence and the presence of men like Ames as well as the entrance of Democrats returned to their political rights, like Lamar, continued to eat away at whatever

\(^{72}\) Jeremiah Watkins Clapp (1857-1867), Alexander Clayton (1844-1853, 1857, 1878-1889), Jehu Amaziah Orr (thirty years no dates), John Anthony Quitman, Jacob Thompson (1844-1864), Harvey Washington Walter (no dates).


\(^{74}\) Regarding Lamar’s support of Alcorn, see Lamar Photocopy Collection, ALS from L. Q. C. Lamar to E.D. Clark, October 19, 1872, Small Manuscripts Collection 76-7. UMASP.
credibility Alcorn retained of his precarious perch between Republicans and Democrats. At the end of his career in the senate he announced,

The democrats have shown great political sagacity, they supported Ames two years since that he might drive every decent white man in the state out of the party, they have succeeded admirably—it is now a settled question that no state can be maintained under carpetbag rule.\textsuperscript{75}

Alcorn’s scorn came not from his fights so much with Ames as it did his feeling that the Democrats continued to wield power, despite restrictions, and that men like Lamar were on the rise. The desperation as well as the exhaustion was evident when he uttered, “I am a republican now as in the past, have done all I could to save Mississippi from democratic rule, have spent six years of my life in the cause. All my labor is lost.”\textsuperscript{76} Alcorn’s cause seems to be related to a sense of guilt he had felt from his actions in 1861, and that by his fighting the return of Democrats up to 1876, he felt a great feeling of despair, because these were the men that Mississippians really wanted to lead, and not Old Whigs like himself.

In 1876, Alcorn busied himself with the support of the Republican ticket of Hayes for president. Campaigning for the ticket on July 15, 1876, Alcorn returned to waxing philosophical on his Democratic opponents when he stated that the pre-war and post-war blunders of the South were the fault of Democratic Party leadership. If the South would support the Republican Party, according to Alcorn, issues of war, race, and reconstruction would be put behind them and parties could return to the Whigs and Democrats of earlier times. Though the disputed election between Tilden and Hayes is well-known, Alcorn’s role in it was that of a politically active southerner, and Alcorn’s name at one point was circulated as a possibility for the Vice-Presidency in order the balance the ticket, and later as a member of the cabinet, to help smooth


\textsuperscript{76} Pereyra. \textit{James Lusk Alcorn}, 174-175.
over continuing sectional divides. Though Alcorn was not chosen for either the vice-presidency or a cabinet post, it is interesting to note that one of the last actions Alcorn made in the Senate was the support of the establishment of the Electoral Commission, which reflected the country’s desire to avoid another Hayes-Tilden episode. The Mississippi legislature saw fit to nominate L. Q. C. Lamar to Alcorn’s senatorial seat in 1877, and Alcorn quietly retired.

Alcorn returned to home to his successful plantation, Friar’s Point, in 1877. In 1879, he completed work on his home Eagle’s Nest, which served as a base for local and regional political rallies and barbeques for tenant farmers, white and black. As events in Washington continued on, Alcorn declined to write to a friend for a judgeship stating, “I would feel no more humiliated in requesting an appointment at the hands of Jeff Davis, if he were President, than I would at the hands of President Hays—would have as much to hope in one as the other case.”77 Obviously Alcorn’s memory of being denied the opportunity for service to his country affected his will to continue on. In 1881, he refused to be considered as a gubernatorial candidate, adding in a letter that he “ceased to care for the fortunes of the Republican Party.”78 Though he refused public service, he maintained an interest in Delta levees and was appointed to seek Federal funds for levee construction.

As Alcorn’s career waned, Lamar’s career waxed. President Grover Cleveland acknowledged Lamar’s formidable statesmanship and newfound love for country by offering him two opportunities to further serve his country. The first would be as Cleveland’s first Secretary of the Interior, a position Lamar held for three years. The appointment is curious. Lamar was not a proponent of Reconstruction in his own state and fought to restore home rule. Reconstruction’s negative implications for white Mississippians aside; reconstruction legislation

77 Pereyra, James Lusk Alcorn, 186. Spelling from original document.
78 Pereyra, James Lusk Alcorn, 188.
featured important programs to assist African Americans’ transition from slavery to freedom, including the Freedmen’s Bureau. Lamar shared many of his fellow white countrymen’s paternal assessment of white roles in this transition and negative views of African American equality. Reconstruction’s failure according to Lamar was not due from failure on the part of southern people to change their mindset so much as the fault of Republican-appointed inept carpetbaggers and scalawags unqualified for leadership capacities. Appointing Lamar to oversee Federal programs designed to civilize Native Americans may have seemed logical to those who shared Lamar’s views. At best, Lamar’s role in the implementation of the Dawes Act and other measures designed to civilize or manage Native Americans illustrates how returning such men to office had a negative impact beyond African Americans and poor whites in the South.

From Lamar’s perspective, the prestige of the position came at great cost and frustration. Recently widowed, he struggled with being away from family, believing he had given little to his family over the years. In writing to his daughter Gussie, he expressed his belief that he was not much “in an individual way” as “the Nation has robbed me of private life in giving me public duties.” His duties as Secretary did not deter him from finding a second wife. Though initially hesitant to marry Lamar on account of “the comments & criticisms” she would be subjected to as his wife, Mrs. Henrietta Holt relented and braved the gossip of Washington to become his wife and “sweet, noble, confiding, lovely & lovable friend.” Whether Washington found the second wife of Lamar more or less fascinating is unknown, but in the midst of letters home in the period full of messages of longing for home and news of children and grandchildren, he expressed in a

single sentence what may have been an understated truth of his entire tenure on July 5, 1887: “I have been having trouble in my Department.”

As the sixteenth Secretary of the Interior, Lamar’s tenure came at a time of great change in the Department. He was the first supervisor of the newly formed Interstate Commerce Commission, and the first Secretary tasked with implementing the Dawes Act. The later would give him no peace, judging from his own personal statements and annual reports. The Dawes Act was the first stage of a larger long-term Congressional plan to assimilate Native American societies to white American values, including nuclear or small household families who owned and found economic subsistence from individual property ownership and cultivation. The act authorized the President to survey Native American land and divide it into individual allotments. Lands not claimed by Native American individuals would be considered surplus and sold by the government to interested parties, including railroads and white settlers. What legislators believed would be efficient in theory proved to be otherwise in practice.

Lamar’s annual report of the Department of Interior illustrated that African Americans were not alone in their rapidly deteriorating social and political environment of the 1880s. Unlike African Americans who could argue their rights and citizenship through the protections of the American Constitution, Native Americans remained a nation within a nation. Their support of the Confederacy during the war placed them in the unique role of being part of Reconstruction, as a number of Federal government officials believed treaties to be null and void after the conflict. Despite their status apart from Americans, the Federal government did not stop trying to disrupt or change that fact. American removal of Native societies from East to West and war relegated them to ever-smaller amounts of land. Defeat by the American military in the Indian

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wars from resulted in Native Americans resettlement on reservations, with space allotted to each nation. White Americans remained unconvinced of Native American civilization and desired to settle and develop Native American lands. The scattered wars and conflicts between the United States Army and various nations in the West provided a convenient rationale for strong Congressional legislation. The result, beginning with Dawes, was a program that proposed to civilize Native Americans by distributing communally held land to individuals, which was really a cover for white Americans with designs on Native lands.\(^{82}\)

Lamar’s Annual Report for the Department of the Interior, dated December 5, 1886, alludes to the difficulty of his position. The year 1886 was a great change from the year prior in which “I stated in my last annual report, these Indians were so restless and threatening as to require precautionary measures to prevent open hostilities.” Secretary Lamar declared a “state of general quiet among the Indians,” as well as no “disturbance or serious alarm caused by any of them except the Chiricahua Apaches.” Referring to Native Americans as “souls,” Lamar happily reported the “progress of the work of Indian civilization.” He cited increases in cultivation, fencing, and haymaking as well as the enrollment of more than 150 children of a total of 260,000 people in school as examples of industry and development. Construction and operation of railroads within Native territory would increase land values, which would further allow Native peoples to understand the value of their land and the importance of individual ownership. Bringing Native laws into compliance with Federal laws were what he believed would help protect their current holdings. While Native American refusals, reluctance or inability to

understand the value of land or profits therein, the real problem was white men. Hovering close
to Native lands with schemes to acquire land, unlawful enclosure of public lands, threatening
public water supply, or wandering cattle, white men interfered with the “development of
agricultural and industrial pursuits of the Indians.” In short, Lamar writes, “These things all
considered show that the work of elevating the race is bearing fruit.”

While Native Americans would go on to lose roughly two-thirds of the lands held prior to
1887, Lamar would be heralded for his reclamation of public lands and humane treatment and
policies for Native Americans. His contemporaries honored him by naming a river after him. The Nineteenth Century progressed to the point where outright annihilation of a people would be
unconscionable, but the robbing of a people of their land and with it, their culture, considered
humane. Though their rapidly diminishing land and people seemed to give Native Americans
greater consideration than African Americans in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries,
white Americans considered both to be unequal to whites. Lamar’s understanding of the role in
which white Americans played in the thwarting of the civilization projects of the Federal
government is interesting. Believing white southerners to be in the right for their lack of support
for Reconstruction, he was open to the idea that the same people could be hindrances to similar
Federal projects for Native Americans. His allusion to the “work of elevating the race,” panders
to the audience of his report and may speak to his belief that such programs were necessary.

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83 “The Interior Department, Annual Report of Secretary Lamar, Rapid Improvement of the
Indians—the Fencing and Unlawful Occupation of Public Lands. Washington, Dec 5,” The New
York Times, December 6, 1886.
84 Prior to the 1884-1885 Geological Survey the Park, the Lamar River at Yellowstone National
Park, was known as the East Fork of the Yellowstone River. During the survey, Arthur Hauge a
geologist who was part of the study, named the river for L. Q. C. Lamar, the current secretary.
http://www.greater-yellowstone.com/Yellowstone-Park/Lamar-River.html, last accessed October
Lamar’s service to the Department of Interior ended with an opportunity to serve on the bench of the nation’s highest court. On May 14, 1887, the death of Supreme Court Justice William Burnham Woods created a vacancy on the bench. President Grover Cleveland did not immediately announce a nominee. In a letter from Washington, D.C. dated July 5, 1887, Lamar wrote to his daughter Gussie on the subject,

The S.C. Judgeship I know nothing about except the impression on the minds of others, from conversations with the President. He has never spoken to me about it except in [illegible] relation to the qualifications of others for the position. I don’t regard myself as qualified for it. \(^8^5\)

Lamar’s qualifications for the position were never in question. President Cleveland’s first Supreme Court nominee was the first Democrat suggested for the position in a quarter century, and he would be only the second of two post-war appointments offered to southerners after the war. \(^8^6\) President Cleveland formally nominated Lamar in December 1887. The nomination went to the Senate Judiciary Committee, which recommended against confirmation with a close 5-4 vote. When the full Senate voted, a 32-28 vote confirmed him as the next Associate Justice. Lamar’s tenure on the Court reveals little about his past, though his colleagues claimed that he continued to labor under the weight of his secessionist past when they eulogized him in 1893. He often sided with the majority, and his dissents were as rare though they affirmed his conservative view of Constitutional issues. \(^8^7\)

\(^8^5\) L. Q. C. Lamar to Augusta “Gussie” Lamar, Washington, D.C., July 5, 1887, Folder 1.55, Lamar Family Papers, The Grisham Library, School of Law, University of Mississippi.  
\(^8^6\) William B. Woods who was appointed in 1880 was a Ohioan by birth who moved to Georgia. The first Southerner to be appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States after the war was John Marshall Harlan of Kentucky. Denis Steven Rutkus and Maureen Bearden, “Supreme Court Nominations, 1789-2010: Actions by the Senate, the Judiciary Committee, and the President,” a Congressional Research Service Report, 7-5700, RL33225, August 23, 2010, www.crs.gov.  
\(^8^7\) Ibid. For examples of the eulogies offered for Lamar, see 1-8 of the Introduction of this dissertation, and for more on Lamar’s Supreme Court decisions, see Michael H. Hoffheimer, “L. Q. C. Lamar 1825-1893,” 5-106.
In 1888, Lamar pronounced his last sentiments on secession at the unveiling of a statute of Senator John C. Calhoun. Speaking to the Ladies of South Carolina Association, Lamar utilized portions of his 1860 speech *The Question of Slavery* to reaffirm the image of the “careful, patient, provident, industrious, forbearing” southern planter. As Calhoun saw Nullification as an instrument to preserve liberty during his lifetime, Lamar used the speech to demonstrate the similarities between nullification and secession, and how in two generations, Southerners attempted to redress what they believed to be unequal power distribution by focusing the right of states to check Federal government as an added level of checks and balances implied, but not specifically outlined in the Constitution. Secession destroyed the Union because the association failed to uphold its end of the partnership and the whole system needed correction. Propagators of the political theories of nullification and secession believed that the people had the power to strike down laws or dissolve association on the basis that a convention of States agreed on the Constitution, as a social compact, in which the people could take power into their own hands if crisis presented itself and government refused to act or caused the problem. Many Southerners argued that if the Constitution allowed for the admission of new states, states could withdraw if the terms on which they entered became unbearable or threatened basic rights of life, liberty or property.\(^88\)

The late 1880s, as exemplified by Lamar’s speech on Calhoun, saw southerners increasingly adding “states rights” to the list of causes of the Civil War. While trumpeting secession as the South’s attempt to secure state’s rights, the Southern Historical Society’s pages contained hundreds of opinions in the forms of speeches, letters, poetry, and songs as to the causes of the war, and specifically what secession meant. By the late 1880s and 1890s,

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southerners reached back into America’s past to find historical basis for secession. Beginning with the American Revolution, one commentary claimed that America’s revolution with Britain was an act of secession because the British threatened Americans’ rights and liberties. Many articles put forth the theory that it was Massachusetts’ threat of secession during the War of 1812, and not the South, that first set forth and considered the political notion of secession. That the North supported secession in 1812 and then denied the South the right in 1860 seemed hypocritical to southerners.\textsuperscript{89}

Putting their stamp on the interpretation of the history of the Confederacy was only possible as southerners continued to break down Federal reconstruction measures, and by 1890, one of the only remaining blockages to home rule remained—the rewriting of the state’s constitution. Unlike the convention of 1876, the Convention of 1890 attempted to legally disenfranchise blacks, eliminate fraud and intimidation by outsiders at Mississippi elections, and get rid of the fusion tickets that added token black members to small pieces of government offices under the auspices of looking inclusive.\textsuperscript{90} At the 1876 convention, the expansion of the franchise to blacks and poor whites through the breakdown of property and education requirements, also added a great number of white voters to the election rolls. Consequently, by 1890, the hill counties threatened to take back some of the power that was traditionally held by the Delta counties, and the Delta counties feared the influence of these new, mainly poor whites, on Delta conservatism.

Coahoma County Democrats unanimously nominated Alcorn as a delegate. In a letter, Coahoma residents praised Alcorn for his years of service and explained that “mindful of the fact


\textsuperscript{90} Pereyra, \textit{James Lusk Alcorn}, 198.
that in two important crises your prominent services have been of inestimable value to the commonwealth. We have an abiding faith in your ability to meet this third important crisis.” In deference to the aging politician, both Democrats and Republicans in an unusual show of unity invited him to speak at Friar’s Point. His electors charged him with preserving the status quo.

Alcorn found at least five familiar faces from the 1860 Mississippi Secession Convention among the one hundred and thirty-four delegates. While their presence at the convention—like Lamar’s—was a means by which the new generation of Mississippians could include honored, aging members of their imagined community of loyal and trusted Mississippians. Alcorn would serve again as a delegate from Coahoma County, and he was joined by Wiley P. Harris, who repeated his 1860 role as a Hinds County delegate. Walter Leake Keirn, last seen in a political capacity as a secession convention delegate, reprised his role as a delegate from Holmes County as did Thomas Dudley Isom of Lafayette County, who had retired after the war to a private medical practice. John A. Blair of Tishomingo County and James Z. George served as delegates from the state at large.

The convention itself boasted a register of one Republican, one National Republican, one Greenbacker, and 130 Democrats. At seventy-four, James Lusk Alcorn registered himself for the last time at a Mississippi constitutional convention as a planter, but his political preference, which in years past had fluctuated between Whig, Old Whig, and then Republican, now read simply, “conservative.” Present at every session and a speaker on many issues, Alcorn served as a member of the committees on militia and penitentiary reforms and election and franchise. Of particular interest to him was the creation of Article 11: Levees, which provided for the maintenance of the levee system, the creation of levee districts and board of levee

91 Pereyra, James Lusk Alcorn, 199.
92 Pereyra, James Lusk Alcorn, 199.
commissioners. A tax system was implemented to pay for the levees and their continued maintenance. The article represented Alcorn’s life-long struggle to see the project to fruition, and one in which he had a vested interest, given the location of his plantation in the Delta. Unfortunately for Alcorn, the levees were neither the highlight of the convention, nor its lasting legacy.\textsuperscript{93}

The Constitution of 1890’s lasting legacies were the strictures placed upon the freedoms guaranteed to black Americans by the Constitution in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and the creation of racial segregation of public facilities, beginning with schools. \textit{Article Six, Section 207} provided that separate schools be maintained for children of “white and colored races.”\textsuperscript{94} Six years later \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson} would uphold the constitutionality of “separate but equal” public facilities. Perhaps more sinister was the provision in \textit{Article Ten: The Penitentiary and Prisons, Section 223}, which provided for the lease and hiring of penitentiary convicts. Such laws provided that black men and women charged with lesser crimes of vagrancy or other, often spurious, charges would find themselves on state farms, as provided for in Section 225.\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Article 12: Franchise} contained the one of the more repressive actions of the convention, which created the Committee for Elective Franchise, Apportionment, and Election, which moved to disenfranchise blacks as well as poor whites through the use of reapportionment and literacy tests. \textit{Section 243 and 244 of Article 12} specifically contained provision for a poll tax and

\textsuperscript{93} The Mississippi Constitution of 1890 remains the current Mississippi legal framework. While many of the provisions have since been repealed, other sources of the Constitution do not do justice the changing nature of its life from 1890-present than the Mississippi Department of State’s site: http://www.sos.state.ms.us/ed_pubs/constitution/constitution.asp, last accessed October 31, 2012. For Alcorn’s levee article, see page 44-46.
\textsuperscript{94} The Mississippi Constitution of 1890, 25.
\textsuperscript{95} The Mississippi Constitution of 1890, 43.
required every elector to be literate. Finally, Article 14: General Provisions, Section 263, declared a marriage between a “white person and negro or mulatto with one-eighth or more negro blood.” Jim Crow was not born of law, but mirrored the values and beliefs held by the men who crafted the Constitution of 1890 and practices already abhorred or instituted.

The constitution drafted at the Convention of 1890 was not submitted to voters but declared law of the land upon the affirmative vote of 129 of 134 delegates to the convention. Alcorn’s biographer believed that Alcorn either chose not to realize or ignored the fact that the constitution did everything but return Mississippi to roughly its prewar days, where Democratic rule, through the hands of southern nationalists, placed the state on the road to war. Though the Convention of 1890 did not lead to war, it evidenced the rise of a new generation of Democratic rule, and one which proved, once Alcorn and other dinosaurs of the prewar, Whig mentality stepped aside, much more palatable to white Mississippians in their search for a postwar identity in the wake of secession and civil war. More specifically, Alcorn’s stepped to the side to allow a new generation to take his place, but he also stepped into the Democratic mindset he had fought his entire career and allowed for the transition into the one-party Democratic system and the completed rise of a new generation of Mississippians who would lead their state into a troubled twentieth century.

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96 The Mississippi Constitution of 1890, 47.
97 The Mississippi Constitution of 1890, 51.
98 The Mississippi Constitution of 1890, 63.
99 Peyora., James Lusk Alcorn, 204.
CONCLUSION:

BY THEIR FRUITS YOU SHALL KNOW THEM

While southerners focused on the right of secession as a means to preserve the hearthstone, slavery, the cause listed by the majority of secession conventions as the basis on which to secede, silently slipped behind the scenes. David Blight articulated the desperation and frustration of Frederick Douglass who, after fighting so hard for black freedom throughout his lifetime, watched as the South hijacked the nation’s shaping of the Civil War’s memory.¹ There were a group of men who remained resolute when the war was over, wanting nothing to do with reunion. They lived with the burden of a secessionist dream that failed to root after the devastating losses of the Civil War. Some passed from life silently, described by their peers to have done so with a broken heart. Yet still others bided their time, waited for the right moment and skillfully won office and fought their way back to win the peace.

With men like L. Q. C. Lamar in positions of leadership the definition of secession, tied securely to the memory of war, was left in the hands of men who in their youths allowed secession’s flames to touch their hearts. In 1888, the Honorable Peter Turney, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Tennessee spoke before the Tennessee Association of Confederate Veterans and stated:

₁ David W. Blight, “‘For Something beyond the Battlefield’: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War.” (The Journal of American History), 1156-1178.
We retract nothing, and believe the cause in which our comrades fell was just; that they and we were not traitors or rebels against the authorized action of that government from which we seceded; otherwise it would be unlawful and immoral to attempt to keep alive and perpetuate the memories of those who fell, or to preserve for history the records of their deeds of heroism.  

Secessionists and ex-Confederates affected not only the way that America remembered secession and the Civil War, but as they did so they “stumbled backwards over a wilderness of graves while proudly reliving the mistakes of the past, reap the bitter fruits of another generation of pride, prejudice, and blind folly.” The North cut down the men who inspired and fomented a southern rebellion, but they never were able to remove secession’s roots. In the spring of the post-war, secession’s trees blossomed despite Reconstruction, which acted as a scythe to cut down southern leaders without touching the roots from which they had sprung. The fruit of the post-war era brought the North little encouragement, as the South pushed ahead into the future on the road to black codes and discrimination.

The Georgian judge’s brilliant observation regarding the requirement of southerners to shake down their principles like apples from a tree inspired the preceding pages to a great degree. A secessionist could appear changed, but the causes he supported, the legislation he created, and the actions he took should be the means by which historians judge proponents of secession in 1860. Though commercially only four varieties of apples exist in twenty-first century America, the cultural and political fruit of the southern people as well as the varieties of apples in the nineteenth century were varied. Like fruit, they were culled and grafted for their pleasing shape, color, and taste—what fit the generation’s desires. America’s palette changed

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3 Carter, *When the War Was Over*, 275.
from the antebellum to the years after Reconstruction, but the trees remained the same. No one cut down the trees, pulled out the roots, and burned its wood—the only assured method of killing a tree. Shaking down apples from trees implies harvest, not destruction. The Battle Hymn of the Republic argued God would trample out the vintage, but it falls short of the method suggested on the day of judgment, by fire, so that root and branch would not be left.⁴

L.Q.C. Lamar imagined a future for the South and moved to implement his vision by methods few have truly understood. Most try to break up his and his fellow secessionists’ lives to answer greater questions of specific times rather than focusing on the unique and troubled transformation of the individual, a state, a region, and eventually the nation. Lamar himself brought up this point in 1879 when he asked “Could anyone expect, did any one expect, that such a tremendous political change...could be made without violent disturbance and disorder?”⁵ Anyone who claims to completely understand and know the motives of men like Lamar and his fellow secessionists should be questioned. Would the Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar of 1859 recognize the Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar of 1880? Historians would have us believe the war was the refiner’s fire. How else does a man who wrote the Ordinance of Secession for the State of Mississippi in 1861 become a justice of the United States Supreme Court? It would be as if Thomas Jefferson after writing the Declaration of Independence returned “home” to England after a failed American Revolution and took a seat in the House of Lords. Not possible, but similar in their ability to shock anyone who did not know the entire story of their political careers.

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⁴ Following the biblical references of the “Battle Hymn,” Malachi 4:1 mentions the destruction of the final judgment. Consumption by fire destroying the wicked and arrogant, root and branch, ensuring a people would be utterly destroyed.
⁵ L.Q.C. Lamar, “Ought the Negro to be Disenfranchised? Ought he to have been Enfranchised?” North American Review 128 (1879) 225-39.
The Twentieth and the Twenty-First century have tried to understand these unique men who survived revolution’s scythe with mixed results. The efforts have underemphasized the underlying roots of Lamar’s values and actions, resulting in an ironic failure in one century and perhaps a commercial failure in the present. In 1954, a young junior senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts took leave from the United States Senate to recover from back surgery. As he recuperated, he studied the topic of political courage. In 1955, Senator John F. Kennedy published his book, which went on to become a bestseller and earn the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 1957. In the book, Kennedy profiled eight United States Senators deserving of attention due to their bravery and integrity. L.Q.C. Lamar earned his place in Kennedy’s book for three actions considered controversial to his state and the South in general: his eulogy of Charles Sumner, his role in the committee that gave President Hayes victory in the election of 1877, and his stance against the “free silver” movement. Kennedy’s choice of Lamar would not be so surprising if the author of Profiles in Courage remained a senator. As it happened, Senator Kennedy became President Kennedy in 1961, the hundredth anniversary of secession and Civil War. Though the Civil Rights Movement can chart its origins from the beginning of slavery in America, the momentum for the cause for the securing of the rights of African Americans already guaranteed by the Constitution came to a head during his administration and coincident to the centennial celebrations of the Civil War.

John F. Kennedy was forced to deal with the ghost of the sixth profiled man of courage in

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6 Though John F. Kennedy is listed as the author, Kennedy’s contemporaries argued the research was done by and the book ghostwritten by his speechwriter, Ted Sorensen. The challenge was first issued by Mike Wallace, then retracted by his television station. Herbert S. Parmet, Jack: The Struggles of John F. Kennedy (New York: Doubleday, 1982) and later Sorensen in his own autobiography, Ted Sorensen, Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009) cleared up the issue, though Sorensen gave Kennedy credit for the beginnings, he did most of the work on the substantive chapters.
his book: L.Q.C. Lamar. Kennedy praised him for having vision beyond that of his fellow Mississippians, but failed to see the larger vision and future Lamar helped restore. When James Meredith decided to enroll at the University of Mississippi in 1962, it required the efforts of the embattled NAACP, four hundred federal marshals, and three thousand Federal troops. The battle for Ole Miss left two dead and required a long-term occupation of the school where Lamar once taught. The desegregation of Ole Miss and countless other Civil Rights movement milestones were the last battles of the American Civil War. Revolution always comes full circle.

The means by which the present generation has chosen to remember L.Q.C. Lamar and his contemporaries is troubling. Travel down Lamar Avenue headed north in the sleepy southern town of Oxford, Mississippi, beyond William Faulkner’s home and just through the square. Turn right on Jackson Avenue, as in Andrew Jackson or perhaps Stonewall Jackson. Then make a quick left onto the rather narrow North Fourteenth Street and keep going until you almost meet Sisk Avenue. The house sits off to the right, deep within its lot and awkwardly incorporated into the city block. Most miss the house unless they catch sight of the historical marker. Doubling back, most people become conscious of the narrow streets beyond Lamar Avenue. The homes and streets squeeze and isolate the past, hiding the remnants the places and people of now less-than-fond memory, including Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar.

Though not an antebellum home, the modest Greek-Revival structure was the home of Lamar and his family from 1870 until 1888. Built in the years following the war after a failed attempt with a plantation called “Solitude,” the home was his respite from his duties in

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7 Missing Lamar’s home might have been a common occurrence even in the Nineteenth Century, as a Boston Herald article from 1882 suggests: “…the house is invisible save the roof; it is walled in by a thick hedge on the western and southern sides of mixed cedars and gnarled old seeding pears, some twenty feet high.” Later it is described as “secluded as if miles in the country, although a good rifle could pick off a man on the square.” “Senator Lamar’s Home,” Boston Herald, Fall 1882.
Washington, D.C. Lamar is one of the few Americans to have served in all three branches of government. The historical marker in front of the house highlights his career, which also included his service as an educator at the University of Mississippi and as a colonel in the Confederate army. What is missing from the sign is as telling as what is included. Memory, particularly that of the collective, is as much about forgetting as it is remembering. The elephant in the room, or the career as this dissertation argues, is the exclusion of Lamar’s role in the secession of Mississippi and the South from 1860-1861. The exclusion of his dates of service allows visitors to marvel at his career without the invasion of the messiness of revolution, war, and reconstruction, which haunted Lamar and his post-war political career.

Up the short set of stairs next to the marker, one travels down a quaint brick path. Docents tell visitors that this innocuous, partially reconstructed path once connected Lamar’s home with that of his father-in-law, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, who lived just a few hundred yards beyond the front of the site of the present day home. The relationship between these men has been explained in Chapter 2, but the mere physical distance of a few hundred yards of easily and readily traveled brick path between father and son in law, is often lost on visitors who see a house set awkwardly within a modern city block.

The brick path leads to the steps of the porch and a statue of Lamar as well as to the yard beyond. While the home contains much of the original floors and fresco ceiling art, little is known about the rooms’ functions or even the placement of the kitchen. A few artifacts remained: a travelling trunk, some books borrowed from the University of Mississippi library, a

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8 L. Q. C. Lamar’s statue appeared in Oxford after that of James Meredith’s statue on the University of Mississippi, but the erection of another statue to the white southern establishment that suppressed previous generations of men and women desirous of opportunity in Mississippi disappoints even the most hopeful of those who point to the progress of the State in the decades after the Civil Rights Movement.
sofa given to Lamar by his law students, and his wife’s silver. The renovation allowed the home a new and conflicted life as a historical landmark in a town and region wrestling with the role of its past in the present. A great deal of work went into the interpretation of the life and career of L.Q.C. Lamar within the context of his time. The scholarship within the exhibits reflects more of the conflict between those who claim a love of history, a respect of local and regional history, and those dedicated to the practice of history. The result is a very human man with many faults on an exalted pedestal whose home attracts more attention from the local squirrels than out-of-town visitors.

The home is often quiet. Lamar hosted a large number of politicos over the course of his life in Oxford, and many contemporaries traversed this well-worn path to his home. Today, one cannot argue the same. His legacy is a hard sell to tourists, despite his Sumner eulogy and a room devoted to the “courage” Kennedy ironically admired. Visitors to the home eagerly ask questions about the restorations, but many want to know more about his slaves, his plantation, and the Civil War. Many buy into the idea of the romance of reunion before they step foot into the home, so the Lamar’s career of reinvention and the irony of Kennedy and Lamar is lost on them.

A great number of quiet Saturdays and Sundays have allowed a graduate student who serves as docent plenty of time to enjoy the home’s sunbeams and to answer and test the many ideas reflected in the proceeding pages. The final story of this paper began on a spring afternoon, when the clear skies and bright sun beckoned me with a good book to find the shade of a tree to read, knowing no visitor would take one of the first of spring’s bright days to visit the home. Looking up into the immense branches of the tree in Lamar’s yard, I was inspired to wonder just what sort of tree this was and how old could it be?
When a reporter from the Boston Herald walked down the original narrow brick walk on a visit to Senator L.Q.C. Lamar’s home in 1882, his article’s subtitle described “a cozy retreat amid fantastically tangled vines, shrubs, and trees.” Descriptions of waist high red clover, Guinea grass high as one’s head, fences overrun with honeysuckle and wild raspberries make a case for a light human footprint upon the land. Amidst this jungle, the reporter also commented on dog roses, fringe trees, lilacs, grape vinces, enormous magnolias and greville roses. One should not be surprised the reporter also noticed the area was full of harmless black snakes, rendered harmless perhaps not because they were garden snakes or belief that such a picturesque sight could not include any dangerous element.⁹ Today, what constitutes Lamar’s “backyard” resembles most twenty-first century lawns, lush and green with a few errant dandelions outshone by landscaped flowers. Gone are most of the magnolias, box elders and cedars described in the Herald account. The symbolic heart and natural transition to the substance of this paper is a mere tree.

A single nineteenth-century tree remains today of those culled by time and landscaping. Nominated as a champion of its species in the State of Mississippi, this *Maclura pomifera* or Osage Orange was probably just a small shrub or sapling at the time of Lamar, possibly a gift from his service to the Department of the Interior, but definitely one of the first of the species in the area.¹⁰ The Osage Orange is free of insect enemies and fungal diseases, making it a prolific species. Without severe pruning, the shoots of an Osage Orange will grow three to six feet and

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become fruit bearing. Native to Arkansas, Texas, and Indian Territory, the species’ earliest mention in the United States dates to [January 20 and 24] 1805, years before Mississippi’s statehood in 1817, when William Dunbar, a Scottish explorer, noted the tree’s presence in a trip along the Mississippi River in 1807[1804?]. Louis Meriwether sent cuttings to Thomas Jefferson as a curiosity. French settlers named the tree bois arc or “bow tree” as Native Americans of the Osage and Comanche Nations prized the wood and traversed great distances to utilize it for war-clubs and bows. Beyond its militaristic uses, it was valued in constructing fences, tool handles, and nails. As the wood has the highest BTU content of any wood, it burns long and hot. Later in the twentieth century, the WPA project planted Osage orange or “hedge-apple” trees in prairie states to combat soil erosion. Despite its practicality and relation to the mulberry tree, the fruit of the Osage Orange is inedible. Larger mammals can eat the fruit and disperse the seeds, though it is not good for them. Humans are well advised to refrain from eating them.

The Twenty-First Century is removed from the natural world, trees and their fruits were touchstones and metaphors for past generations. For this author, no other tree in the history of mankind would have fit the convoluted and troubled life of L. Q. C. Lamar so well. Its resilience in the face of the passage of time presents a very solid, thought-provoking artifact of the century. It is hard not to stand next to the tree on a warm summer day and wonder how many others have utilized its canopy for shade or puzzled at its odd shape and branches. So in closing, I offer a

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verse with which Lamar would have been familiar, Biblical verses warning readers to judge persons, like trees, by the fruit they manifest:

By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\) New Revised Version, Matthew 7:16-20
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Holloway Fellowship, The University of Mississippi, Spring 2009.


PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

The American Historical Association
The Society of American Archivists
The Society for Historians of the Early American Republic
The Southern Historical Association

OTHER EXPERIENCE


VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Lafayette County Literacy Council


Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Lebanon County, Lebanon, Pennsylvania, 2002-2003.