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GOING IT ALONE: SLAVERY AND SOUTHERN NATIONALISM

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Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
Robert E. Bonner, *Mastering America: Southern Slaveholders and the Crisis of American Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010)

Her husband was away fighting the Yankees and she was struggling to get in the crop at their east Texas farm in the summer of 1864. Lizzie Neblett, a woman in her early thirties, was worried about the slave workers. They knew the war was going badly for the masters, and they knew about the shortage of white men in the neighborhood. If the slaves find that no one is checking on them, she wrote her husband, "the jig will be up."[1] She did not have to explain, and she scarcely could have been more eloquent. Everything for Neblett and her husband—their livelihood as planters, the Confederacy, the sense of themselves as masters astride their world—depended on slavery and the war. The Nebletts supported the war and were ready to sacrifice more if they had to. They were favorable enough toward the Confederate government in faraway Virginia, which was then going into its last summer of existence. They had long benefitted from slave labor, having made a good living and taken pride in sound mastery. Their identities, like those of so many white southerners, were embedded in all of these things, and the three books reviewed here each combine in different ways matters of slavery, national conflict, and southern identity, as they were articulated by the

[1] Elizabeth Scott Neblett, *A Rebel Wife in Texas: The Diary and Letters of Elizabeth Scott Neblett, 1852–1864*, ed. Erika L. Murr (Baton Rouge, 2001), 431.

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political classes of the South who tied their fortunes to them and for whom, in 1865, the jig was up.

Lacy K. Ford's *Deliver Us from Evil* has the biggest heft and the tightest focus of the three works. His story of southern slave-owners reaping slavery's benefits while fearing its dangers makes it clear why by 1840 the white South was not likely to let slavery go without a fight, and he shows how political and religious thinkers across the South put together the personally demanding and oddly fragile ideology of paternalism that made race the center of southern society. In *Mastering America*, Robert E. Bonner sees southern political and intellectual leaders as more confidently, even aggressively, fashioning the political aims that defined their long effort to harness slave society to American nationalism—to an American empire—and, sensing failure by the 1850s, to make a new country for slaveholding men, their better America. A particular group of these men, along with a few women, concerns Michael T. Bernath in *Confederate Minds*, which follows journalists, clergy, educators, and other social commentators during the war who founded periodicals, rallied the patriotic, and educated the young in a vibrant, street-level intellectual life that they hoped would make the Confederacy deserve the independence it sought through war. A worthy nation was known through its intellectual works, and these advocates drove themselves and others to create a grassroots intellectual South worthy of itself.

Southern identity within the American nation, varieties of American nationalism, and how these came to a boil in the US Civil War of 1861–5 continue to shape historical writing on the significance of the war. Probably no historian of the era doubts that the war strengthened the federal government and the central state, and fired a passionate American nationalism that extends to the present day. There has been more debate about the Confederacy's standing as a nation and southerners' embrace of it. One view is that the Confederacy was wobbly from the beginning, a derivative United States fostering little loyalty and a lot of internal conflict which brought it down more surely than anything Lincoln did. Another view is that the Confederacy, with its wartime symbols, Robert E. Lee, and the southern fighting man, fetched a surprising intensity of popular support. No weak nationalism would require the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of lives and vast material resources beyond what any sane American thought possible at the war's beginning.[2] Each of the works here sits most comfortably with

[2] The first view has been argued by Paul D. Escott, most recently in *The Confederacy: The Slaveholders' Failed Venture* (Westport, CT, 2010). For the second view, see Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave off Defeat* (Cambridge, MA, 1997). For a more heated view of how the sheer carnage of the Civil War excited an unbalanced popular nationalism, see Charles

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the latter view that Confederate nationalism drew on the deepest levels of its citizens' identity; to be southern, white, and bound to slavery as the road to wealth and as the mirror of personal character is the bass line running through all three studies. Each sheds light on nationalism by asking questions about how white southerners made the Confederacy possible and then, if they were lucky, outlived it.

Lacy Ford's *Deliver Us from Evil* is a lengthy, thoroughly researched, powerfully written study addressing "the slavery question" in the South from the early national years to the mid-1830s. This is to say, it ends a decade before the main geopolitical events which triggered secession and Civil War: the war with Mexico, the fiercest sectional fights over free soil and territorial expansion, and the heating and breaking of American political discourse in the moral fires of the slavery debate. Ford barely alludes to the story of imperialism, Constitutional struggle, and political partisanship on a national scale.[3] The "slavery question," as he frames it, was a question of white southerners adapting themselves and their ideas of being American to the realities of being slave-owners for life. The question became an urgent one a generation and a half before the 1840s, and Ford casts it as a "domestic" question that shaped a debate over how best to make slavery work for owners' material gain and yet not grow in sloppy ways that would threaten their security. Neither farsighted principles nor systematic ideas drove southern slaveholders, but rather wary calculations of work and bondage rooted in countless southern locales. Ford's angle of vision means that iconic antebellum political turning points in the growing tension between North and South before 1835—the territorial crisis over Missouri statehood and slavery in 1819–20, the Constitutional crisis over South Carolina's nullification of federal tariffs in 1832–3—are in the background. His view is of the slave-owner's immediate concerns, and from this vantage point the "question" of slavery was at first a question of tactics (how best to increase profits while preventing slave insurrection) and by the 1830s a matter of ideological orthodoxy (the South is and must remain a white men's country). Along the way, a southern identity came to life. Two groups of southern states arrived at this point by different routes over the decades of continental expansion and investment in cotton between the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and the beginning of national antislavery agitation in 1835. The northernmost, or upper, South, which gradually depended less on producing a big-money crop and more on exporting slaves to

Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York, 1991), and, with a focus on soldiers, Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens, GA, 2007).

[3] A story told most recently and definitively by William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1990).

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the lower, cotton South, chose a "demographic" route which embraced slavery as an institution, but one in which most slaves lived elsewhere; that is, in the lower South. To keep black people moving out of a "whitened" upper South was the goal. The lower South formulated what Ford calls an "ideological" route that accepted the large numbers of slaves in the population but at the same time shored up white power with increasingly strong proslavery protections in law and practice.

By the 1830s, of course, such developments can be seen as having both demographic and ideological consequences in both southern regions, and in broad outline this upper-South–lower-South story is well known to students of land, cotton, and slavery.[4] Yet as Ford's slow-paced, lucid narrative proceeds it takes on a certain stately drama that yields a new appreciation for how the question of slavery led to a repressive and ultimately untenable answer. His sources are mostly the public writing of powerful men, but in Ford's hands we see precisely how they made the edifice of white control, piece by piece, state by state, matching creation to destruction, hope to cynicism. We can see the coming crash. More than any recent "big" book on the antebellum South that I can think of, Ford's features slave insurrections—or white fears of them—as the main force that shaped the question of slavery and the question whether the rapidly spreading net of bondage in the South should be allowed to continue. He emphasizes that there was genuine debate, not just posturing, among propertied whites about ending slavery, somehow phasing it out, because it was too dangerous to social order (and in the view of some political leaders, dangerous to republican ideals). Across the entire South, enough slaves kept pressure on masters, and fearful masters pressured each other—a "balance of terror," Ford calls it—in ways that show the utterly contingent, piecemeal shifts in white tactics that led to a well-articulated if always contested white racial dominance.[5] The specter of 1790s Saint Domingue (where Caribbean slaves won their bid for freedom); Louisiana's German Coast conspiracy of 1811; the 1816 Camden, SC plot; the foiled but deeply alarming Denmark Vesey scare of 1822 in Charleston, SC (which ended with the summary execution, which Ford calls a "massacre," of dozens of black suspects); freeman David Walker's well-distributed *Appeal* in 1829 calling upon African Americans to rise up against whites; and the deadly 1831 Virginia uprising of Nat Turner and his followers—these and many smaller scares fueled the engine that drove the planter class and drives Ford's story. He sees slave masters as continually reactive, often caught off-balance, relentless in maintaining their control. His view, a bleak one,

4 For example, Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998) and Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

5 Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 356.

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is that white thinking about slavery came down to not much more than material greed and existential fear. In the end, slave-owners went full-throttle for profit, but they never lost sight of the fact that, as one wealthy Mississippian said, "we will one day have our throats cut in this country."[6]

Slavery and security thus became masters' terrible puzzle, and they responded to every insurrection or scare with bursts of coercion against slaves and free blacks alike. They supported laws punishing slave literacy, restricting manumission, harassing the movement and association of slaves and free blacks, curtailing autonomous slave religious worship (viewed by many masters as a facade for sedition), and hounding free blacks out of neighborhoods. Loopholes in masters' political power were sealed shut. Two states, Tennessee and North Carolina, which had permitted voting by free black men, struck down the right in the mid-1830s. When laws did not suffice, masters went outside the law. At the same time, many slave-owners were willing, into the early 1830s, to give at least some thought to colonization schemes that would free slaves and remove them to Africa, and even considered plans for gradual emancipation over a generation or more. But efforts in this direction, though serious and well argued, came again and again upon the same sticking point: whites might envision a South without slavery, but they could not envision a South in which free blacks and whites lived in anything like equality. The solution they came up with, put forward with urgency after the 1831 Turner revolt, was ideological; it developed haphazardly with much dissension. This was the bundle of qualities, ideas, and practices termed paternalism, the linking of mastery to the good character of the master and his willingness to "lift up" the character of his slaves. Ford sees the advance of paternalism as an ideological "insurgency" because it openly challenged the traditional mastery founded on the simpler premise that a master had unquestionable authority and few obligations, and would be expected to exercise violence. The term "paternalism" has its own vexed history in slavery studies. Among historians in the early twentieth century, paternalism was synonymous with "kindliness" and was so used by Ulrich B. Phillips in his learned apologia for slavery in 1918. Some forty years later, Kenneth M. Stampp, though critiquing Phillips' benign view of southern bondage, gave the term a similar meaning. For both men, paternalism was more impulse than idea and did not seem to merit study. Eugene Genovese showed that it did, dramatically recasting paternalism as a complex, fluid negotiation of power in the everyday lives of slaves and owners—a set of practices among unequals that nevertheless leveled the field a bit.[7]

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6 Ibid., 453. The theme of fear and greed runs throughout the book, but see, for example, 117, 143, 194.

7 Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1918); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956); Eugene D.

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Ford sees paternalism not as a struggle, but as a top-down effort by the master class to reshape an institution that it was not willing to give up but might be willing to alter if they could feel safer at night. Paternalism, for Ford, was neither an impulse nor a dialectic, but a tactic of the master class that became an orthodoxy of white control. A paternalistic master was one who attempted to persuade slaves through reason before resorting to coercion; he fostered supervised religious devotion among slaves, who had immortal souls; he created hierarchies of rewards and individuals among slaves, in the name of merit as well as efficiency. There were many slaveholders who saw this as nonsense, even suicidal; there was no such thing as a trustworthy slave. Not so, replied paternalism's advocates, many of whom were Christian ministers and theologians; it accepts the truth that slavery is here to stay. To live a good life as masters, masters must be good people. If we do our best and fail, some paternalists argued, it will be God telling us that it is time for slavery to end. While slave-owning critics of paternalism scarcely took comfort from this sort of argument, and debate continued, paternalism won the partisans with the most persistent voices. For them, paternalism was the solution that promised the "best practice for slave management."[8] It generated options, made distinctions among individuals (slave and free), and got masters talking to one another. It made slavery personal. It made it modern. As such, it seemed to give the most forceful answer to the growing numbers of Americans who found slavery a morally abhorrent leftover from a savage past. And as paternalism became a binding ideology, Ford shows, it pulled together two other lines of thought that would become the heart of southern commitment to slavery down to the Civil War. The first was the assertion, advanced on many fronts, of the racial inferiority of dark-skinned people; slavery was cast as a social welfare system for a permanent racial underclass. The second was the politically useful corollary that all whites, rich or poor, slave-owners or not, shared in the power of having white skin; no white person need fear falling into the underclass as long as slavery remained strong. As southern political and social leaders argued against mounting antislavery efforts from the North by the mid-1830s, and paternalism's vision of slavery as both useful and good became orthodoxy, the white South

Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1972). Slave-owners themselves rarely used the term "paternalism." Instead, they spoke of being "good" or "Christian" masters, evoking what they perceived as fair or morally upright treatment of bonded labor, in part because paternalism in the fully fledged European sense had no counterpart in antebellum America. Most historians of slavery agree with the testimony of many former slaves that "good" masters provided at least a few better working conditions than harsher masters.

8 Ford, 508.

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made a decision: "race mattered; little else did."[9] This, too, was fatefully modern.

The central role of paternalist ideology in Ford's study, the way it facilitated the South's passage to becoming a race-based republic, yields a history of a popular mode of thinking that was complex enough to work on personal as well as political levels. It was flexible enough to combine a vision of a "good" master with practical means for mastery that many slave-owners admitted were not so good. However, there are some interpretive roads in this direction that Ford chooses not to take. Although he observes that paternalism was a "domestic" vision of slavery, where the personal character of owners was pivotal and the whole paternalist drama was acted out in the household and inside families bound together by "mutual" need, Ford does not take us to plantations and farms for even a glimpse of the everyday experience of slavery's "question." This means, among other things, that women of the planter class, and therefore gender as cultural frame, are not seen making the reality of paternalism day by day as they in fact did; making slavery habitable for white people was in large measure women's work.

Too, Ford seems uncurious, or uneasy, in thinking too far about personal morality in the working out of paternalism. Although his book's title is beseechingly moral, the title could well be "deliver us from indecision." Not good and evil, but tactical dilemmas motivate his southerners. The Presbyterian minister Charles Colcock Jones and the Congregationalist Benjamin Palmer get some attention as thoughtful if blinkered Christian paternalist reformers, and sometime Cassandras, but neither they nor any of the many clergymen in the book become the occasion for Ford to look for very long at the moral dimensions of the paternalist effort. Jones, in particular, as a young man, was troubled by the immorality of bondage and thought hard about leaving the South, exchanging many letters with his fiancée Mary on the subject. In the end he stayed on his family's Georgia plantation and became probably the best-known advocate of paternalistic reform. Ford seems reluctant to get into matters of the subjectivity revealed in struggles like Jones's to explain himself to himself as well as to Mary. In a rare instance where Ford does bring up southerners' subjective sense of their mastery, he observes that after the Turner rebellion, as whites "learned to live" with their fear of insurrection, they "perhaps . . . engaged in a number of self-deceptions, such as believing that their slaves . . . were far less likely to rebel or resort to violence than slaves generally." "Perhaps" is the oddly tentative word here, as it is not hard to find white southerners deceiving themselves in just this way throughout the antebellum years and the war. In muting

[9] Ibid., 532.

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questions of subjectivity and the role of gender, Ford leaves in the background the important tie between paternalism and the rise of antebellum humanitarian thought, and that between paternalism and the evangelical Protestant emphasis on an individual's accountability to God.[10] And so, despite the steady collapse of world slavery by the nineteenth century, and notwithstanding the growing number of Americans outside the South who were mobilized by the moral horror of human bondage, slavery oddly remains a local, southern "question" for Ford, seen through a glass darkly by southerners. Even so, Ford's textured view of paternalism as a way to understand the greater panorama of violence and prosperity that drove slavery is convincingly argued and fascinating in its somber unfolding.

In *Mastering America*, Robert E. Bonner stakes out a very different viewpoint, one from which southern statesmen and writers are seen, from the 1790s onward, as eager to look beyond the South when judging their region's well-being and promise. Not fear of slave insurrection, or concern for tactical mastery, but an aggressive view of slavery as an American juggernaut, and as good for the nation, motivates Bonner's slaveholding class. His lively, informative study takes on the entire antebellum period and the Civil War years as well, arguing to good effect that historians' continuing preoccupation with a North-versus-South narrative has slighted the imperial ambitions of a proslavery southern nationalism that was for most of its history a variation of *American* nationalism—expansionist, race-based, and both secular-republican and assertively Christian. Bonner's aim is thus to follow the development of a southern variant of the fully modern "American project of 'becoming national'" until slavery required too much special handling by the 1850s and war became the alternative.[11] Prior to that decade, the most worrisome period for southerners was the first two decades of the nineteenth century when the United States was economically and militarily weak and many slave-owning political leaders (Thomas Jefferson being the most prominent) were troubled that slavery fit very awkwardly into republican ideals and practice. But as the nation became more secure and nationalists more aggressive after 1820, slaveholding statesmen and intellectuals became more confident that a proslavery American nationalism was not only feasible but bound for glory. Proslavery

[10] Ibid., 357. On Charles Colcock Jones see Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven, 2005).

[11] Bonner, *Mastering America*, xvi. On the hemispheric ambitions of slaveholding southerners and their allies see Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854–1861*, 2nd edn (Gainesville, 2002); Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley. CA, 2002).

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thinkers were nothing if not confident. These thinkers—Bonner features the most outspoken political and religious shapers of thought—anchored slavery in Constitutional guarantees, racial theory (notably the paternalist idea that slavery "protected" Africans), literary imagination, and a hungry evangelical Christianity. These bolstered paternalistic claims, but Bonner sees them working on the broader stage of national prestige and power. All of this changed in the 1850s as US territorial expansion sparked debates over what "America" stood for in terms of free labor and white land-ownership. These debates, accompanied by a new, political abolitionism, led southern intellectuals to think less about how their views were coupled to the North's emerging nationalism, and to think more about going it alone as a nation.[12] Southern secession in 1861, in Bonner's view, thus grew less from an inflated sectional identity than from a scaled-down national one, an alternative America. In what is perhaps Bonner's most forcefully argued insight, the Civil War led southerners to undertake nationalist innovations which had been in hiding, so to say, in American republicanism, including authoritarian strains of political thought and elaborations on white supremacy. A social benefit of slavery in a modern society, Confederates argued, is that it plainly acknowledges the commonsense fact that in no society are men *precisely* equal.

Much of what Bonner suggests about proslavery nationalism's effect on antebellum national events—on territorial expansion, say, or the advent of a popular literature on slavery—is deftly portrayed, if largely familiar, and at times frustratingly embedded in a thematic approach that pulls writers out of their contexts and leaves shadowy the historicity of their ideas. When chronology kicks in, as it does in the discussion of the 1850s and the war, the career of ideas over time is more subtle and Bonner's discussion compelling. There might be more depth of vision as well had Bonner asked questions about genres of nationalist texts (how, for example, a Romantic/racialist body of writing shaped nationalist claims by the 1840s) and questions about changing audiences (women as readers of all sorts of literature, for instance). Ideas fly through this study disarmingly free from the acts of reading and writing. A sharper focus on chronology and the morphing of texts and readership might have let his study add more to an understanding of slavery as a lived experience for growing numbers of white southerners who were increasingly both vexed and ambitious in its embrace. Though Bonner nods to the plantation as the source "on a daily basis" for the

[12] The ambiguities resulting from the fact that American nationalism and American regionalism were simultaneously in partnership and conflict are explored in terms of political culture in David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

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power of proslavery nationalism, he does not portray the plantation or show how this worked out in practice.[13]

Even if somewhat detached from the grit of place, genre, and timing, Bonner's insight that Confederate nationalism was neither patched together from wartime contingencies nor an attempt to escape from American history is an important one. Southern nationalism grew directly from an American national experience and carried with it the seeds of a long-standing imperial adventure. For most of the antebellum decades, it gave a southern accent to American identity on the continent and beyond. In this sense, Bonner joins historians who see Confederate nationalism in the war as strong in spirit if weak in execution, and as fully deserving the historical judgment that falls on a people indulging in the ambitions of their nation-state.

Michael Bernath in *Confederate Minds* also sees the energy driving Confederate nationalism as substantial and creative, although his focus on the war years alone turns up the expected bitter division between South and North with little sign of the shared national aims found in Bonner's study. Bernath's richly peopled, judicious book centers on the writers, editors, and teachers who acted as "cultural nationalists" encouraging the scores of literary and educational efforts undertaken by Confederate southerners for whom the Civil War was the opportunity for an intellectual life free from their overbearing (and far better equipped) counterparts in the North. Although he looks at education and, in passing, the fine arts, his "Confederate minds" belong mostly to the group of middlebrow intellectuals who worked as "facilitators" of a popular literary culture they hoped would arise from the South's decision to go it alone.[14] Indeed, they felt it *must* arise, else the Confederacy would not be worthy of being called a nation. These women and men labored at writing and editing the dozens of new and revitalized popular periodicals and school texts in circulation after 1861, and although these writers are not unknown, Bernath's study is the first to give them center stage. They were by turns cheerleaders and scolds. They celebrated the advent of war as the moment for southern greatness, and most continued to do so long after military fortunes dried up and it was clear, in retrospect at least, that they could not alone supply a popular culture free from slavery's dampening effects on intellectual experimentation. They loved the southern nation in terms that spoke to a warm, domestic imagination—as a small ship on a stormy sea, a knight on a quest, a light in the darkness. They spoke against silence and, as the war continued beyond the few months many thought it would take to exhaust the Yankees, they counseled perseverance and criticized doubt. Some of their publications circulated only locally and lasted only a short time. Others, like the

[13] Ibid., xix.

[14] Bernath, *Confederate Minds*, 4.

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Southern Literary Messenger, *The Countryman*, or the *Southern Fields and Forests* reached a wide audience over most of the war years. Editors somehow found paper and ink; they shamed and praised authors; they called for words to match soldiers' deeds. These popular nationalists were tireless, and though they were often mistaken they were rarely in doubt.

Their voices were pitched differently and came from different directions, but Bernath is persuasive that they shared a literary vision for what the Confederacy needed: intellectual independence in all ways from the Union. He adopts the formula of one of their number, the educator A. B. Stark, who wrote in the *Home Circle* in 1861 that the new southern nation required both a "literature of knowledge," meaning the everyday traffic in journalism, fiction, critical essays, and poetry, and a "literature of power," by which he meant great and timeless works of art.[15] Bernath shows that southerners generated much of the first (including, interestingly, a huge outburst of poetry) but nothing of the second. In nearly every way possible, the cultural nationalists grossly overestimated the will and ability of southerners to act within a nationalist frame as the war's dislocations and brutality wore them down. By war's close, some nationalists, like Edward Pollard, lowered their voices and slipped rather easily from Confederate vision of a white, southern republic to a vision of the same thing in the Union. Others, like Joseph Addison Turner, the Georgia editor of *The Countryman*, loudly acknowledged defeat but vowed never to change. "From my youth up," he wrote, "I have hated yankees."[16] Bernath is a rather gentle critic who tends to explicate and paraphrase rather than judge his subjects. But he allows that the crew of writers and editors were, after all, "grandiose" and "hopelessly quixotic" nationalists who failed to measure up, along with their nation: "there was little to be found in Confederate literature that would stand the test of time."[17]

Why was their failure so resounding? Bernath suggests that it is best understood as resting on the paradox, perceived by some nationalists themselves by 1865, that southern nationalism would somehow grow from the very war that was busily finishing off the Confederacy. This seems part of the explanation, but it seems possible to go deeper into other tensions in the cultural nationalists' project, which was good at boosting confidence in the Confederacy but unfocused about the intellectual route to southern national identity. Many argued (joining a broader nineteenth-century debate over the elements of a distinctively "American" national literature) that a southern nationalism called for a full airing of "pure" southern themes and stories, while others thought that national identity would arise organically from southerners writing about anything of significance,

[15] Ibid., 80.

[16] Ibid., 157.

[17] Ibid., 221, 291, 212.

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certainly not just cotton fields and a sunny climate. Oddly, Bernath finds that slavery, even an idealized slavery presided over by paternalistic owners, was scarcely a topic in most nationalist magazines, though he does not pursue why. Perhaps writers and editors were exhausted by the subject that had filled countless pages before the war. Or maybe they were wary of hurting the Confederate cause from within by opening up a discussion which might become a disturbing debate. In any case, silence on slavery created a strange stillness at the center of nationalist periodicals and doubtless constrained the national conversation on what the war had to do with southern identity. Even more widespread was a muddled sense among nationalists of the sources and strength of popular nationalism. On the one hand, writers saw nationalist feeling as essential for creating popular unity; on the other, they believed that unity must precede any true nationalist feeling. Why did sorting this out prove so difficult? Bernath observes a "principle of exclusion" driving much nationalist writing which probably explains as well as anything the stumbling of popular Confederate nationalism.[18] In particular, writers and editors rejected anything from the toxic Yankees as harmful to southern "independence." But in so doing they rejected much of their own history as well. Muffling discussion of slavery, searching for Greatness and Purity, and shunning a common American experience boosted moments of separatist emotion at the expense of a sense of nationhood more long-term and thoughtful. Indeed, many cultural nationalists by the end of the war threw up their hands and advocated—as southern writers had earlier and would again—looking to Europe for models of intellectual creativity and independence. But here, too, they tripped on their fear of contamination and their will to exclude. Eagerly embracing Victor Hugo as a model intellect, one Confederate editor offered an English translation of *Les Misérables* in 1864. By the by, he told his readers, "a few scattered sentences" on slavery had been excised. But not to worry, these sentences did not have "the remotest connection with the characters or the incidents of the novel."[19] To their credit, some southern reviewers of the Hugo edition lamented the editor's decision as embarrassing to a society fighting to take its place as a modern nation among nations. But they could not have been surprised. The "principle of exclusion" at work in censoring a novel was the same relentless policing of social life at work throughout a society where slavery shaped white identities in its image.

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[18] Ibid., 246.

[19] Ibid., 277. Stephanie McCurry argues that the Confederacy was in effect brought down by an exclusionist blindness which ignored white women and people of color who made up the polity's majority even if male slave-owners did not count them as citizens. See her *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

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