

Reform in the Land of Serf and Slave, 1825-1861

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the significance of pre-Civil War southern opposition to slavery has been largely marginalized and mischaracterized by previous historiography. By contextualizing southern antislavery activism as but a single wing within a broader reformist movement, historians can move beyond simplistic interpretations of these antislavery advocates as fool-hardy and tangential “losers.” While opposition to slavery constituted a key goal for these reformers, it was not their only aspiration, and they secured considerable success in other aspects of reform. Nineteenth-century Russians, simultaneously struggling with their own system of bonded labor, offer excellent counterpoints to reorient the role of antebellum southern reformers. Through their shared commitment to reforming liberalism, a preference for gradualism as the vehicle of change, and a shared intellectual framework based upon new theories of political economy, the Russian and southerners’ histories highlight a transatlantic intellectual community in which southern reformers were full members. Adapting multiple theories from this transnational exchange of ideas, southern reformers were remarkably liminal figures useful for contemporary scholarly exploration into the nineteenth-century culture of reform. Ultimately, it was this liminality coupled with the inegalitarian nature of their movement that ensured that the southern antislavery movement would fail to secure a gradual demise to slavery.

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Introduction

Gapping from a ten-foot limestone bluff and bubbling with a strong spring, Russell Cave was a well-known landmark for natives of Lexington, Kentucky. The cave was a frequent site for political rallies like the one attended in the late summer of 1843 by Cassius Marcellus Clay, who had spent much of the election year stumping for Garrett Davis over Robert Wickliffe, Jr., the son and namesake of Fayette County's "Old Duke." Wickliffe and Clay were old political opponents, and they had even dueled in 1841 without injury on either side. Slavery was the main source of contention between the two. Clay supported emancipation; Wickliffe was the son of one Kentucky's largest slaveholders. In the animosity of the election year, Wickliffe sought to settle the score against Clay and paid Samuel Brown, a vehemently pro-slavery advocate from New Orleans, to attack the emancipationist. At that August 1 rally, Brown insulted Clay and then clubbed him. The offended Clay reached for his infamous Bowie knife and rushed his assailant who, in turn, drew his pistol. Brown put a bullet squarely in Clay's chest, which successfully angered the six-foot, three inch Kentuckian; Clay's scabbard had prevented the round from piercing his flesh. At this point, accounts of the fight differ, but regardless of whether a disdainful Clay hurled the body over the bluff or pro-slavery men in the crowd hoped to save the assassin by tossing him into the spring and away from Clay's knife, Samuel Brown found himself plummeting ten feet into the cool water flowing from the cave. Miraculously, he survived, albeit lacking an ear, missing an eye, nose split, and skull opened. Brown discovered that summer day what several men would learn over the course of Clay's life: the Kentucky

emancipationist had a hyperactive sense of masculinity, never backed down from a fight, and assuredly had more than nine lives.¹

The year 1843 was not good to the Wickliffes. While the son's henchman tumbled into the waters of Russell Cave, the elder Wickliffe could not rid himself of an infuriating Presbyterian minister. In the summer of 1840, Robert Wickliffe, Sr. and the Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge, virulent enemies, publicly debated the merits and future of slavery in Kentucky from the lawns of the Fayette County Courthouse in Lexington. Wickliffe and Breckinridge's speeches, given individually and weeks apart, layered the merits of slavery with personal denunciations and venomous accusations against the honor of both men. Finally, in late 1840 Breckinridge, though originally a Lexingtonian, returned to his church in Baltimore, Maryland, seemingly ending the conflict in the Bluegrass. And then the reverend began publishing pamphlets. For three more years, Wickliffe engaged Breckinridge in a long-distance war of words; some of Breckinridge's pamphlets even entered into multiple editions. By 1843, Wickliffe had questioned whether the "J" in the minister's name stood for "Judas" rather than "Jefferson," but still the antislavery and colonizationist Presbyterian would not back down from the fight.² Also in 1843, the Maryland Colonization Society published Winfield Scott's opinions on slavery in its journal. Assuredly, many of its readers nodded their heads when Scott, whose name was being raised as a prospective presidential candidate, affirmed, "I am persuaded that it

¹ J. Winston Coleman, Jr., *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1970), 305-306; Kevin McQueen, *Cassius M. Clay: Freedom's Champion* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing, 2001), 15-16; H. Edward Robinson, *Cassius Marcellus Clay: Firebrand of Freedom* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 34-35.

² See Robert Wickliffe, *Speech of Robert Wickliffe, Delivered in the Court House in Lexington, on Monday, the 10th Day of August 1840, Upon Resigning his Seat as Senator from the County of Fayette* (Lexington: Observer & Reporter, 1840); Robert J. Breckinridge, *Speech of Robert J. Breckinridge, Delivered in the Court-House Yard at Lexington, KY., on the 12th Day of October, 1840, In Reply to "The Speech of Robert Wickliffe, Delivered in the Court-House in Lexington, on the 10th Day of August, 1840, Upon the Occasion of Resigning His Seat as Senator From the County of Fayette,"* 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Richard J. Matchett, 1841); Robert Wickliffe, *Speech of Robert Wickliffe, in Reply to the Rev. R. J. Breckinridge, Delivered in the Court House, in Lexington, on Monday, the 9th November, 1840* (Lexington: Observer & Reporter Print, 1840); Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Second Defence of Robert J. Breckinridge, Against the Calumnies of Robert Wickliffe, Being A Reply To His Panned Speech of November 9, 1840* (Louisville: Prentice and Wissinger, Printers, 1841); Robert Wickliffe, *Reply of Robert Wickliffe to Robert J. Breckinridge* (Lexington: Observer & Reporter, 1841); Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Third Defence of Robert J. Breckinridge Against the Calumnies of Robert Wickliffe* (Baltimore: Richard J. Matchett, 1843), Robert Wickliffe, *A Further Reply of Robert Wickliffe, to the Billingsgate Abuse of Robert Judas Breckinridge, otherwise called Robert Jefferson Breckinridge* (Lexington: Kentucky Gazette, 1843).

is a high moral obligation of masters and slave-holding States to employ all means, not incompatible with the safety of both colours, to meliorate slavery to extermination.”³

These Marylanders and Kentuckians, combined with allies in Delaware, Virginia, mountainous North Carolina and Tennessee, and Missouri, constituted a moderating band at the northern extreme of the slaveholding states that continued to foment opposition to slavery. But the inhabitants of the Upper South had limits. When Cassius Marcellus Clay’s Lexington-based antislavery newspaper, the *True American*, published a dire warning of slave rebellion, a pro-slavery mob shipped the press out of the state. A similar fate awaited George S. Park’s *Industrial Luminary* after the weekly paper condemned the intrusion of pro-slavery Missourians into the Kansas Territory. Although opposition to slavery clearly could be hazardous to one’s health, the Upper South comparatively provided a haven for antislavery sentiment when juxtaposed against the Deep South. A number of unique geographical, political, cultural, economic, and intellectual factors merged at different times and places to ensure greater unease with slavery in the Upper South at the same time that most white southerners increasingly accentuated the supposed positives of slavery.⁴ The Upper South had a more mixed economy, more direct access to the markets of the Free States (and closer eyes for the growing wealth industrialism was bringing them), and the Appalachian Mountains, terrain ill suited for plantation slavery.

Nat Turner’s revolt particularly affected white southerners’ understanding of racial antagonism between whites and blacks. The suddenly real possibility of servile insurrection produced unlikely bedfellows. Thomas Roderick Dew’s *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831-2* has been proclaimed the “inaugural effort in the post-1830 proslavery movement.”⁵ Indeed, Dew’s condemnation of colonization as impractical and characterization of emancipation without colonization as impossible challenged the assumptions of the revolutionary generation, most notably Thomas Jefferson’s. In his summation of post-Nat Turner Virginia, however, Dew presented complex political and economic arguments. Dew’s dialogue waffles between affirmed pro-slavery convictions and implicit antislavery propositions. Rather than

³ Winfield Scott, “General Scott and the Slave Question,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, April 15, 1843, 367-368.

⁴ For an examination of the continuance of the “necessary evil” argument in the case-study of Kentucky, see Harold D. Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); historian Drew Gilpin Faust’s edited compilation of slavery apologists’ writings offers wonderful insight into the pro-slavery arguments of the Antebellum South, see Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

⁵ Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery*, 21-23.

focus on emancipation, Dew argued, the Virginia legislature should concentrate on internal improvements and other economic incentives that would gradually revolutionize Virginia's economy and workforce. The domestic slave trade would remove the slave population and allow Virginia to follow in the footsteps of Maryland and Delaware and secure a work force largely composed of free whites.⁶ Intellectually, many upper southerners straddled the fault line between the North and South: sharing white southerners' concern for property rights while craving the modernizing influence of the free markets they viewed in the non-slaveholding North.

The significance of this southern antislavery intellectual movement (and southern reformism as a whole) has been disputed by historians. Many historians of the first half of the twentieth century viewed southern antislavery advocates as indicators that the South was working towards solving "its slavery problem," or that minimally antislavery sentiment was a prevailing intellectual product of the revolution that died before maturation because of the fear Nat Turner's revolt inspired in white southerners.⁷ However, post-World War II historical skeptics began questioning this supposed southern commitment to the gradual emancipationist ideals of Jefferson (who, despite his hypothetical commitment to abolition, only liberated five slaves in his will). By the 1960s, Gordon E. Finnie challenged the very existence of a southern antislavery movement, and most historians dismissed southern opposition to slavery as a marginal fringe. Carl N. Degler's 1974 work, *The Other South*, offered an unusually in-depth treatment of southern emancipationist activity, but his study of the South's nineteenth-century "losers" assumed that southern antislavery activity never offered a credible threat to the peculiar institution. Rather, Degler primarily focused on the marginality of southern abolitionism and contended that the pro-slavery majority only allowed its existence at times in which slavery was supposedly safe from external forces. For Degler, the significance of antebellum abolitionism in the South lay in dispelling the interpretive construction of a monolithic South—that southern

⁶ Peter Wallenstein, *Cradle of America: Four Centuries of Virginia History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 158-160.

⁷For example, Coleman, Jr., *Slavery Times in Kentucky*; Ivan E. McDougale. *Slavery in Kentucky, 1792-1865* (Lancaster, PA: New Era Printing, 1918). Conversely, Joseph C. Robert's 1941 study of the post-Nat Turner debates in the Virginia House of delegates argues that the Virginia debates signified a pro-slavery/anti-slavery turning point in Virginia (and southern) history. Alison G. Freehling countered Robert's hypothesis in 1982 by asserting that the Virginia debates reflected but a single major battle in an ongoing struggle between Virginia's pro-slavery and emancipationist forces. See Joseph C. Roberts, *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1941); Alison G. Freehling, *Drift Towards Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

opponents of slavery reflected the pre-civil war “other South.”⁸ There is also disagreement and confusion on whether antislavery activism survived in the South after Nat Turner’s 1831 revolt and the Virginia General Assembly’s celebrated debates regarding the future of slavery. While some historians have embraced Alison G. Freehling’s argument that the Virginia debates were but a significant event in a longer trajectory of white dissonance over slavery, other authors continue to interpret the 1831-1832 debate as singular in nature.⁹ Conversely, a few historians have pointed to the survival of antislavery sentiment in the South after 1831 as evidence of the growing nineteenth-century assault on slavery. Both Ira Berlin and William W. Freehling (Alison Freehling’s husband) follow this tack. Berlin suggests that “toleration” instead of “celebration” characterized the white Upper South’s conceptualization of slavery. William Freehling goes so far as to suggest that slavery was in fact eroding from the Upper South by the 1840s, especially Kentucky, which led to stronger support and anxiety for slavery’s survival in the slave states further south.¹⁰

This study repositions the southern antislavery movement between the extremes of non-existence—not only did it exist and survive until the Civil War, but it constituted a significant discourse in the Upper South—and claims of sluggish success. Frankly, antislavery sentiment never successfully yoked the disparate interests of moderate upper-class reformers and the supposed working-class beneficiaries of abolition into a broad coalition capable of securing a democratic death for slavery. Yet, although these southern emancipationists failed to secure peaceful abolitionism, they were not the hopeless “losers” portrayed by Degler. If we broaden our perspective of southern antislavery sentiment to encompass an antebellum southern reformist movement, then these activists appear less pathetically hapless in their defeat. Slavery’s opponents dramatically failed to secure an antislavery majority in Kentucky’s constitutional convention of 1847, but the state was unusual amongst its slave state companions in its strong and innovative public education system. Tennessee petitioners likewise failed to secure the same

⁸ Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 1-96.

⁹ See Alison G. Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution*. Steven Deyle’s 2005 study of the internal slave trade calls Virginia’s debate the “first and last time in the nineteenth century that a southern state openly considered abolishing the institution of chattel slavery.” Ironically, Deyle cites Freehling as his source for this claim, see Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 40.

¹⁰ See Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 185-186; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 197-200, 462-474.

kind of voice in that state's constitution revisions of the early 1830s, but it along with Delaware did pass temperance ordinances. Abolitionism may have been the most significant movement for nineteenth-century American reformism, but its failure in the South should not obscure the other successes reformers had there.

Stanley Harrold's scholarship is particularly unique as work that integrates southern and northern abolitionists into the same antislavery network.¹¹ The main actors of Harrold's research are largely absent here, the ever useful Cassius Clay being the significant exception. Harrold is interested in the work of abolitionists (those who favored immediate emancipation) in the South, whereas I focus on the network of conservative, white, and gradual emancipationists who constituted a much larger movement in the Upper South. In his examination of the "biracial" antislavery community in Washington, D.C., Harrold highlights more of the figures compatible with this study: antislavery Whigs, free soilers, and gradual emancipationists. But there Harrold's focus is largely on the unsung (and largely unknown) heroes who constituted the foot soldiers, teachers, and slave rescuers of this "subversive" activism. This study meanwhile largely grounds itself in the more elite reformers of the Upper South, a prolific community that in order to propagate its message created a number of institutions, publications, societies, and schools. Of course, nineteenth-century notoriety does not necessarily equate to twenty-first century fame. Breckinridge, though one of the most significant education reformers, antislavery activists, and Presbyterian theologians in nineteenth-century America, still awaits his biographer. George S. Park also awaits similar recognition despite giving his name to Parkville, Missouri, Park University, and being a significant contributor in the settlement of Manhattan, Kansas and the ancestor institution of Kansas State University. At least in 2005, the accordion-playing pirate mascot of Park University was renamed "Sir George" in honor of Park.¹² This is not to suggest that Harrold's movement was any less significant, though I do quibble that his "biracial" antislavery community in the District of Columbia appears more like white elites ordering free blacks, but rather that there were a number of antislavery and reformist impulses across the South, much like the North, that resulted in multiple movements. Like the microcosm of

¹¹ See Stanley Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995); Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

¹² "2007-2008 Spirit Squad," *Park University Athletics*, <http://www.parkathletics.com/news/dept/cheer.shtml> (accessed March 6, 2008).

Washington D.C., across the South these disparate movements were often able to come together, at least for limited amounts of time or for established goals.¹³

The reformers of this study were overwhelmingly upper-class white men grounded in a nineteenth-century liberalism that conceptualized them as the primary agents of societal change due to their elevated political power and station. Aside from appeals to African-Americans to serve as colonists for the American Colonization Society (ACS), they were staggeringly unconcerned (and often unwilling) to join with blacks in their opposition to slavery. Like African-Americans, white women were given lip service, but again these white men demonstrated an overwhelming aversion to women's presence in their organizations. Women formed their own benevolent societies and auxiliary colonization societies, in fact constituted the majority of slave manumissions earmarked for colonization through the ACS, and provided significant support to southern reformism, but southern women never constituted the army of reform like their northern sisters.¹⁴ Although repeatedly asserting that their actions were aimed at securing a better life for yeoman farmers and working-class individuals, the elite reformers of the Upper South were also unwilling to incorporate the lower classes into their associations. As gatekeepers to their press, societies, educational institutions, political offices, and religion (many of these reformers were members of the clergy), the upper-class, male reformers of the Upper South were remarkably successful at policing the boundaries and projecting their particular brand of conservative reform. Often slaveholders or former slaveholders, these men desired dramatic social change: an industrialized South without slavery and, for the large sect of colonizationists, without African-Americans. This vision entailed a veritable revolution in the social fabric of the nineteenth-century South, but the revolutionaries were largely wealthy, conservative, white men who feared the social chaos that their program would inspire.

While these conservative reformers waffled between modernity and social control, they were not alone on the globe. Over five thousand miles away, a corps of reform-minded Russian elites was also intellectually reinventing their world. Serfdom developed slowly with brief spurts of legislative acceleration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its origins lay not so much in the economic realm, but rather the political. With a growing and under-governed empire,

¹³ See Stanley Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995); Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 34-56.

Russia's rulers increasingly sought a reliable pool of manpower from which to draw the state's military personnel. This burden of state service fell upon the nobility, whose dedication was rewarded with land (Russia being a land-rich and cash-poor empire). As land without labor lacked value, and the estate owners were away serving the tsar, the state gradually bound the serfs to their estates. Eighteenth-century wars, particularly the Seven Years' War, accentuated the gross inadequacies of this bureaucratic and military model. Thus, Peter III "emancipated" the nobility from their state obligations in 1762.¹⁵ In addition to removing the very reason for serfdom, the "emancipation of the nobility" fostered an identity crisis in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Russian noblemen; absentee landlords serving in the tsars' wars suddenly found themselves without purpose. The turn-of-the-century Napoleonic Wars and France's defeat provided Russian officers the opportunity to observe and live in Western Europe. A small cadre of nineteenth-century Russian noblemen built upon these intellectual foundations and feared that serfdom fostered an economic inefficiency comparable to the unproductive military and bureaucratic obligations of noblemen. The disaster of the Crimean War coupled with exposure to western European ideas and manufacturing only reinforced those suspicions of backwardness. Industrialization forced agrarian elites on both shores of the Atlantic Ocean to reconceptualize the role of labor in agricultural production. The reformers of Russia and the American South shared this question of labor, a parallel that came under historical scrutiny in the 1980s with rise of comparative analysis.

Despite now being over two decades old, Peter Kolchin's *Unfree Labor* remains a masterpiece of comparative history examining American slavery and Russian serfdom. The framework employed by Kolchin is a deeply contextualized two-sided comparison of slave owners and serf holders followed by an exploration of serfs and slaves. This study builds upon the comparative work of Kolchin and those later scholars who have applied his model, and often employs a comparative framework between the reformism of the Upper South and its Russian counterpart.¹⁶ However, as noted by Daniel T. Rodgers in the prologue to *Atlantic Crossings*, the

¹⁵ See Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility, 1762-1785* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹⁶ Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987); Peter Kolchin, *A Sphinx on the American Land: The Nineteenth-Century South in Comparative Perspective* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); M. L. Bush, ed., *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage* (New York: Longman, 1996).

“method of comparison throws a powerful light on differences.”¹⁷ Like Rodgers’s work, the crux of my argument rests on the striking similarities between the reformism of the Upper South and Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century despite their radically different contextual environments.

The Russians and the reformers of the Upper South also shared a fear of economic backwardness. That unity was fostered by their joint placement on the fringe of the Atlantic community. The Russians looked towards the advance of Western Europe’s manufacturing, transportation and communication networks, large public works, and agricultural modernizations, while their agrarian economy stagnated and proved itself incapable of supporting the military and political necessities of empire. The inhabitants of the American South cast the same gaze northward and watched the populations, land values, manufacturing interests, and private wealth of the free states handily surpass the slave states. Landed elites in both countries cast their eyes and ears into the transatlantic exchange of ideas fostered by the rise of steam and telegraph, and simply did not like what they saw at home. New schools of political economy developing in Western Europe and modified in the United States informed both the drivers of slaves and owners of serfs that national wealth was built upon the individual wealth of its citizenry. Such a formulation did not bode well for states that encompassed millions of bonded laborers legally prohibited from amassing their own independent wealth. The industrial revolution likewise gave these Russians and white southerners pause, as each lamented the practical absence of manufacturing from their lands. Their understanding of modernity was defined by the industrial successes of England and the northern United States, successes underscored by the grating proximity to the North for the Border State inhabitants and embarrassing military defeat to the French and British (and their Turkish allies) in the Crimean War for the Russians.

As the respective elite within their societies, both the southerners and the Russians of this study fused radical sentiment with conservative concerns for social upheaval. Both sets of reformers hoped to secure sweeping changes in their respective states: industrialization, modernization of farming techniques, internal improvements, improved transportation and communication networks, and superior governance to create *au courant* states fully integrated

¹⁷ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Transatlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 5.

within the Atlantic community. The southerners, in particular, were intrigued by the question of citizenship raised by the American Revolution first, and then to a much greater extent by the French Revolution. Many of these reform-minded men supported a paternalistic view of race similar to their pro-slavery brethren, but significantly different in its understanding of citizenship. White southern males, regardless of their stance toward slavery, generally pictured the citizen of the United States as a white man. But many of the individuals highlighted in this study, the colonizationists in particular, differed in their understanding of blacks' "natural" abilities to self-govern. For many reformers of the Upper South, the American landscape may have been white, but blacks were fully capable of self-improvement and citizenship within their own democratic societies. Naturally, these reformers, largely members of the ACS, struck upon Liberia as the ideal place for black citizenship. These southerners then dreamed even more grandiosely than their Russian counterparts, desiring to not only change the economic, political, and social institutions of their state, but also its very racial make-up.

Both the Russians and the southerners rectified their contradictory desires of awe-inspiring change and fear of social chaos through a shared commitment to gradualism. The successful abolition of serfdom and the vast majority of southern plans for abolition were constructed on the equally contradictory foundation of immediate gradualism. The emancipatory schemes of both nations would be instituted and legally unstoppable, but their fulfillment would require decades. The southerners, terribly afraid of the race war many of them believed imminent in the wake of Nat Turner's rebellion, placed a nearly fanatical faith in the ability of gradualism to alter society. The Russian experience with gradualism *almost* justifies their devotion. Despite upheavals and revolts, the Russians never experienced the organized military rebellion that occurred in the United States, either by the nobility or the serfs. With increasing pressure from all sides, however, the Russian experiment in gradualism ultimately failed to secure the complete transformation of society, which suggests that the Americans were overly optimistic that their decades-long plans would stand the test of time.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first two chapters highlight the American South and Russian experiences, respectively, through an analytical lens that emphasizes their shared conceptualizations of nineteenth-century reformism, hopes for gradualism, and theories of political economy. The final chapter examines the transatlantic origins of these common ideals and the utility of employing the Russians as counterparts to southern reformers. Many of the

interpretive differences surrounding antislavery sentiment in the early nineteenth-century American South center around the questions of what this movement reflected. Were they hopeless losers? Did they even exist at all? Were they significant? The southern antislavery movement constituted but one large wing of a broader reformist impulse, itself a product of the transatlantic exchange of ideas, which characterized the early nineteenth century. The overwhelming unpopularity of many of the movement's ideas was due to the surprisingly liminal nature of the southern reformers themselves. Educated men with the means to thoroughly tap into the transatlantic discourse, these men selectively chose ideas from across this multinational community to apply in their respective homes. They had a New Englander's love of commerce, a southerner's devotion to private property, and a Midwesterner's fondness for the small farmstead while casting a colonial eye to Africa, keeping an ear to slave unrest in the Caribbean, and speaking in gasped expressions of Russian atrocities in Poland. As liminal figures, they are remarkably instructive inhabitants and participants in the transatlantic community. This same liminality not only prevented them from being totally at home with their fellow inhabitants of the Upper South, but also ensured that they could hear their names denounced and plans rejected from such disparate places as the Deep South, the North, and Europe.

Chapter 1
“Neither the Abolitionist, Nor the Slaveholder, Seems to Have a Correct View of Our
Motives:” The Significance of Southern Reformism

The numerous scholarly examinations of southern reformism accentuate the historiographical paradox that marginalization does not necessarily stem from a lack of attention. While most works on abolitionism or reform give a quick rhetorical nod to southerners, they are most often presented as an inconsequential band of fool-hardy dreamers who never seriously contested slavery or planted a culture of reform in the South. Those historians who did emphasize the southern antislavery movement largely wrote as apologists for the South who mobilized southern antislavery sentiment as an indication that northerners were overly aggressive and imperialistic. In their eyes, the South was working towards ending slavery, but northern impatience and obstinacy forced southerners into secession. These pro-southern interpretations, and their emphasis on southern reform, fell out of academic favor after the Second World War. Subsequently, recent scholarship, although with some noteworthy exceptions, has consistently fostered an image of southern reform as a fringe movement, useful for noting colorful characters and cultural foils, but never as a serious intellectual movement.

J. Winston Coleman’s 1940 book on antebellum Kentucky, a period he characterized as the “most romantic and picturesque era” in the commonwealth’s history, concludes with two chapters dedicated to the ACS’s efforts to relocate free blacks from the United States to Liberia and the white men who endeavored to end slavery in Kentucky. Indeed, in Coleman’s account there were “numerous [white] Kentuckians who, through motives of benevolence and humanity,” willingly embraced the idea of colonization as an altruistic means to end slavery in America and elevate blacks in their supposedly natural environment of Africa. Despite this widespread support, inadequate financial backing ultimately doomed the “worthy, but impractical social experiment” of colonization.¹⁸ The benevolence espoused by Coleman was clearly underlined in the official report of Kentucky’s auxiliary colonization society that highlighted the dangers of free blacks in light of the recent Nat Turner revolt in Southampton County, Virginia. The free black population, asserted the official committee before its audience in Frankfort, Kentucky, would incite slaves into future insurrections, and the commingling of races on the American

¹⁸ Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, 271, 325, 275, 271-325.

continent was labeled a national evil requiring a national response.¹⁹ In Norfolk, Virginia, nearly two hundred like-minded humanitarians petitioned their legislature to support the colonization movement in order to remove “that indigent, ignorant and wretched people to the land of their ancestors.”²⁰ While these reports may reflect the same enthusiasm for colonization noted by Coleman, they also lack much of the humanity he highlighted.

Coleman, however, was only etching into stone a well-established apologue of the antebellum South and its relationship with slavery. In these earlier tracts, the courageous South valiantly struggled with its internal problem of slavery. White southerners laboriously sought slavery’s solution, but lacking that extra dollar for colonization, pushed to extremes by the rise of northern aggressive abolition, and requiring that extra minute denied by radicalism, these well-intentioned patriots were forced into war. In 1908, Alice Adams concluded that a “Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America” existed from 1808 until 1831 in which the origins of abolitionism were actually established in the South during a period of northern indifference. These early southern efforts at emancipation built the foundation upon which northern abolitionists erected their antislavery movement, a radical movement that ultimately signaled the demise of the South’s more-conservative emancipationist agenda.²¹ Ivan E. McDougale argued for a similar trajectory when he asserted that “the wise and constructive plans of the gradual emancipationists” of Kentucky imploded with the rise of radical abolitionism. Instead of aiding the cause, abolitionists really buttressed the South’s pro-slavery faction and ensured that bloody conflict rather than peaceful gradual emancipation would end slavery in the United States.²²

By the 1940s, this presumed dégringolade of southern antislavery sentiment to the radicalism of Garrisonian-type abolitionism came under assault. In the *Journal of Negro History*, Kenneth M. Stampf resurrected southern opponents of slavery in the decades immediately preceding the Civil War. Although the movement waned, according to Stampf, “diminished and their organization broken,” southern antislavery advocates continued resistance until the eve of

¹⁹ *The Proceedings of the Colonization Society of Kentucky, with the Address of the Hon. Daniel Mayes, at the Annual Meeting, at Frankfort, December 1st, 1831* (Frankfort: Commentator Office, 1831), 4-5.

²⁰ Petition Analysis Record 11683301, Race and Slavery Petitions Project, Series 1, Legislative Petitions, microfilm. Each petition catalogued within the Race and Slavery Petitions Project is assigned a distinctive Petition Analysis Record (hereafter abbreviated PAR).

²¹ Alice Dana Adams, *The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America (1808-1831)* (Cambridge, MA: Radcliffe College Monographs, 1908), 251-252.

²² McDougale, *Slavery in Kentucky, 1792-1865*, 117-118.

war.²³ A major gulf separated Stamppp's argument from earlier postulations. In the accounts of Coleman, Adams, and McDougale, the headway of southern emancipationists had been stymied by external forces like radical northern abolitionism or inadequate funding. Stamppp, rejected these influences and instead highlighted internal dissonance as the primary impediments to the success of southern emancipation schemes; instead of defeat in 1832, the southern antislavery movement survived to the Civil War, but succumbed to its own dissidence and lack of popular support. In the 1960s, Gordon E. Finnie challenged the very existence of an antislavery movement in the Upper South. Confronting the large historiography of pre-1830 southern antislavery sentiment, Finnie distinguished activists opposed to slavery from those who worried about the consequences of slavery on the South's white population. "Many mistakes in historical judgment can be avoided," argued Finnie, "if scholars will make a clear-cut distinction between Southerners who were *genuinely opposed to the principle of slavery itself* and those who were *opposed only to the adverse effects white men had to endure when slavery was not properly controlled.*"²⁴ With such a categorization, historians would clearly see that at no point in its history was there widespread agitation in support of emancipation in the Upper South.

Unfortunately, historical actors rarely operate within strictly delineated binaries. Robert J. Breckinridge's "Hints on Slavery," which first appeared as a newspaper serial in his native Kentucky, are a prime example. The third number in Breckinridge's multipart series laments both the care "lavished" on slaves that in non-slaveholding states would have white recipients, and the loss of white emigrants from the state, its "bone and sinew," who could not compete with slave laborers. In his fifth installment, Breckinridge, who would soon enter the Presbyterian ministry, turned theological arguments supporting slavery on their heads. "You may take man at his birth, and by an adequate system make him a slave—a brute—a demon. This is man's work. The light of reason, history, and philosophy—the voice of nature and religion—the spirit of God himself proclaims that the being he created in his own image he must have created free."²⁵ One wonders under which of Finnie's categories Robert Breckinridge would fit.

The end result of this reevaluation of the South's antebellum abolitionist crusaders is an ambiguity to their place in history. Historians Carl N. Degler, David B. Chesebrough, and

²³ Kenneth M. Stamppp, "The Fate of the Southern Antislavery Movement," *Journal of Negro History* 28 (1943): 17.

²⁴ Gordon E. Finnie, "The Antislavery Movement in the Upper South Before 1840," *Journal of Southern History* 35, no. 3 (1969): 341.

²⁵ Robert J. Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery: Founded on the State of the Constitution, Laws, and Politics of Kentucky, Thirteen Years Ago* (Lexington: 1843), 8-9, 15-17.

William W. Freehling have highlighted these dissenters as evidence that no monolithic South existed in the pre-Civil War period.²⁶ This is a fair point, but the significance of this diversity for most of these authors is to blame internal squabbles for the demise of the Confederacy, both ignoring the internal divisions of the North during the war and an equal lack of cohesion within the abolitionist movement.²⁷ On the other end of the spectrum, some historians have followed in Finnie's footsteps and dramatically downplayed antislavery advocacy in the South along with the nineteenth-century culture of reform that fueled abolitionism. In his two volumes on the antebellum South's intellectual history, Michael O'Brien dedicated but a few paragraphs out of one-thousand and two-hundred pages to the South's antislavery impulse and other reformist movements, concentrating primarily on colonizationists with "their schemes and hopes and money." Referencing the 1820s as the period in which it was "fashionable and safe" for Southerners to espouse the cause of colonization, despite the fact that petitions advocating colonization continued to find their way to state legislatures well into the 1850s, O'Brien quickly dismissed the South's antislavery movement after acknowledging an initial uneasiness for many Southerners with slavery. Unfairly highlighting Thomas Jefferson and Cassius M. Clay, an unusual duo, O'Brien questioned the munificence of these (apparently representative) antislavery advocates for their lack of concern for the slaves.²⁸ O'Brien may be right in his criticism of Jefferson, but the inclusion of Clay freezes the "Lion of Whitehall" in his youthful views on slavery and completely ignores the evolution of the abolitionist who by the 1840s was publicly proclaiming in a slave state that "Slavery is an evil to the slave, by depriving nearly three millions of men of the best gift of God to man—liberty."²⁹ Nominally, John W. Quist's comparative county study of reformers in Alabama and Michigan underscores the similarities of northern and southern commitment to moral and religious improvement. However, there were significant differences in gender: the Alabamians embraced a male-driven reformism lacking the virtual army of women who powered much of the North's reformist agenda and abolitionism. Although they formed a colonization society in 1830, Alabamians appeared largely apathetic to

²⁶ See Degler, *The Other South*; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*; David B. Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996).

²⁷ For an excellent examination of the friction between Garrisonian moral abolitionists and political abolitionists, see Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁸ Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1: 181, 2: 942.

²⁹ Cassius Clay, "Slavery: The Evil—The Remedy," in *Letters of Cassius M. Clay* (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1844), 3.

the endeavor and the organization was defunct by 1846. As Quist admits, “Of all the major reforms preached in Tuscaloosa, colonization was the most likely to be questioned as a threat to slavery.”³⁰ More concerned with demonstrating the similarities of northern and southern reformers, Quist minimizes the significance of antislavery sentiment within the constellation of antebellum reforms.

In lieu of ignoring or diminishing southern emancipationists and their reformist agenda, other scholars have downplayed their activities. Steven Mintz occasionally highlights the efforts of southerners in his sweeping overview of antebellum reformism, but glimpses are largely unexamined in this fast-paced work. Mintz also informs his readers that southern antislavery activity had ceased by 1830 in all parts of the South aside from Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, and the North Carolina piedmont.³¹ This would have been news to the fifty-two citizens of Baltimore, Maryland who petitioned Congress to abolish slavery within the District of Columbia in 1848 or the twenty-four Delaware men who in 1837 petitioned for the “immediate abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, and in the Territory of Florida, and the immediate prohibition of the traffic in human beings between the States.”³² Southerners are also largely absent from Ronald G. Walters’ *American Reformers* aside from their utility as foils to abolitionism and their embrace of temperance; a curious omission for a work whose first chapter literally begins with an account from a Kentucky religious revival. Peter Kolchin dismisses the efforts of education and temperance reformers in the Upper South as largely ineffective while their more radical cousins—utopianism, feminism, pacifism, abolitionism, etc.—were “almost totally absent from the South.”³³

Kolchin softens his claim with the quantifying “almost,” but he clearly does not see the same reformist inroads into the South as Quist (although Quist reluctantly admits to the same rejection of radicalism). The generic “South” is a poorly defined area, and when viewing from the clouds the areas that utilized slave labor, they appear rather uniformly conservative and

³⁰ John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 314, 315-337.

³¹ Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America’s Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 122.

³² Petition of 52 Inhabitants of Baltimore, Maryland for the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, HR26A-H1.2, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Petition of the Citizens of New Castle County, Delaware, HR26A-H1.2, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³³ Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 21, 138-139; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 186-187.

suspicious of all ideas that could be construed as an attack on slavery. Returning from the clouds to *terra firma* complicates this monochromatic picture, especially if the would-be flyer touches down in those territories sitting astride the boundary between slave state and free. The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, the religious sect commonly called the "Shakers," commingled religious fervor, pacifism, utopianism, communalism, and feminism, and by the early 1820s had established two of their nineteen communities in the slave state of Kentucky. With a handful of practicing Shakers continuing to live in their community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, they remain one of the longest-lasting utopian societies in American history. Scottish abolitionist Frances Wright founded the Nashoba Colony near Memphis, Tennessee in 1826. An integrated cooperative endeavor, the Nashoba community offered both education to slaves and money in order to purchase their freedom. Obviously, an interracial antislavery community organized by a Scottish woman determined to abolish slavery and private property was not welcomed by the majority of west Tennessee's white citizenry, and the community lasted only four years. Prince Edward County had its Israel Hill, a community of free blacks in Virginia established in the will of their former master Richard Randolph, and John G. Fee and Cassius Clay founded a community of abolitionists in Berea, Kentucky.³⁴ Ultimately, these scattered white radicals are not indicative that the South was heavily influenced by their presence, but within certain contexts and localized perspectives, these reformers played a significant role. The Shaker community at Pleasant Hill was part of an anti-slavery belt flung across south-central Kentucky that linked the gradual emancipationist stronghold at Centre College in Danville with the more fervent abolitionists established at the Berea settlement on Cassius Clay's land.

The significance of these antislavery and reformist pockets is not that they held widespread influence or were formidable producers of culture, but rather that they provided points of entry into a reformist network. This does not mean that abolitionist Fee and colonizationist Breckinridge were ideologically united. They were, however, united under a broad umbrella of institutions, colleges, communities, publications, societies, political parties, churches, and discourse, which fostered an exchange of ideas within this reformist community.

³⁴ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 297-298; Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 150-151; Melvin Patrick Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005); Lowell H. Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 71-77.

Thus, Breckinridge was a prominent leader in the Old School branch of the Presbyterian Church affiliated with Centre College, a school presided over by ardent colonizationist John C. Young; colonizationist-turned-abolitionist and future presidential candidate of the Liberty Party James G. Birney served as a member of the college's first Board of Trustees.³⁵ Conventions of colonization societies linked members from across the various states and nation, and the publications of these meetings notified members of other like-minded men (and women who rarely addressed these male-dominated southern conventions but invariably appeared on treasurer's records or notices of the events like the "Ladies Society for the promotion of Education in Africa").³⁶ Maryland's state colonization society determined to publish a journal similar to the national organ's *African Repository*.

Eric Burin's recent examination of the ACS from its first sentence frames the organization as one to "rid the United States of both slavery and black people."³⁷ For Burin, the projects of the ACS subverted slavery by implying that slavery was a problem requiring a solution. Much of *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, however, is filled with the actions of southern legislatures to legally block the private manumissions that fed the colonization effort. Additionally, internal divisions between northern and southern members, constituents who perceived colonization as a means to abolish slavery, and those who supported the endeavor to strengthen slavery by removing the country's free black population rocked the society. As such, there is a real disconnect in Burin's work between his claims that the ACS disrupted slavery and the society's statistically poor showing in its efforts to thwart the peculiar institution; after reading of the repressive measures employed by southerners to impede any progress by the ACS and of the lackluster support among many of its own members for abolition, one wonders exactly how the society disrupted slavery when legislatures, courts, and mobilized white citizens increasingly obstructed their efforts. At least in terms of Virginia's wing of the ACS, Marie Tyler-McGraw does not see the same overarching commitment to ending slavery. McGraw's exception is to the pro-colonization women who hoped to erect joint utopias on the shores of the Atlantic: a white America and black Liberia. The Virginia women were never able to secure enough clout within the society to enact their vision, but worked within their gender-defined

³⁵ Centre College, "Centre College Board of Trustees Minutes, Volume 1," Centre College Special Collections, Digital Archives, <http://www.centre.edu/web/library/sc/digital.html> (accessed January 4, 2007).

³⁶ "Annual Report of the 'Ladies Society for the promotion of Education in Africa,'" *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1, no. 19 (December 15, 1842), 290-292.

³⁷ Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, 1.

roles to secure African-American education and to support African-American families. Despite the activities of these women, the Virginia branch of the ACS increasingly came under control of pro-slavery members who viewed colonization as a means to strengthen slavery (the exact opposite pattern occurred in Kentucky). The findings of Tyler-McGraw's study of the Virginia ACS almost directly contradict the spirit of weakening slavery Burin argues characterized the society as a whole. For Tyler-McGraw, "African colonization was but one among various theories and practices that permitted Virginians to live with the intensifying contradictions of slavery and liberty. It was no more fanciful than the 'diffusionist' or 'safety valve' arguments that promised slavery would weaken and die once it spread over a greater geographical surface."³⁸

Partly, the issue is rhetorical. Those members of the ACS who favored slavery accented the organization's commitment to property rights while those sympathetic to emancipation highlighted the commitment of the society to their cause. For example, in the July 1833 edition of Princeton Seminary's *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*, Breckinridge, while linking Christian benevolence and colonization, also asserted that "ninety-nine in every hundred friends of colonization, who do any thing for the cause, are ardent friends of emancipation also."³⁹ Joseph Underwood, however, presented a more realistic grasp of the ACS's ambiguous relationship to slavery: "Whilst the abolitionist declares that our object is to strengthen and tighten the chains of slavery, and to render more valuable, as property, those human beings, who are by *human* laws converted into beasts of burden; the slaveholder perceives no other design than to disturb the long settled rights of property."⁴⁰

The ACS served as a vehicle for these Upper South antislavery reformers, but the disjointed organization never formally adopted their enthusiasm for emancipation or their denunciation of slavery as contradictory to the laws of God. Unsurprisingly, the ACS was dominated by white upper-class southerners who did not all share the reformist agenda of Breckinridge and Underwood. The ACS was a remarkably malleable organization capable of embracing within its fold Whig and antislavery conservative Henry Clay and states' rights

³⁸ Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 7-8.

³⁹ Robert J. Breckinridge, "Hints on Colonization and Abolition; with reference to the black race," *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 5, no. 3 (1833), 297.

⁴⁰ Joseph R. Underwood, *An Address Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky at Frankfort, Jan. 15, 1835*. (Frankfort: Albert G. Hodges, 1835), 7-8.

activist and vehement pro-slavery advocate John C. Calhoun.⁴¹ Indeed, most southern reformers shared a Whiggish trust in the capacity of government to orchestrate internal improvements and envisioned government sponsorship as the only means of success for the colonization movement. Under their framework, the ACS represented a model to demonstrate the feasibility of the scheme in order to secure governmental funding.⁴² A central feature of the ACS not specifically noted by Burin was the networking of these like-minded individuals into an organization that provided them with a medium and shared language through which to share their ideas and visions for the future of a white America. Burin does note, however, the transatlantic nature of the ACS. There is a discernable chuckle in Michael O'Brien's intellectual history of the South when the author ironically notes that Liberia, with ninety percent of its colonists emigrating from the South, was the most discernibly southern "outpost" on the nineteenth-century globe.⁴³

The ACS was but a single aspect of this transatlantic community. Indeed, much of the project of early nineteenth-century reformism emerged as a transnational movement that enveloped Western Europe and the United States.⁴⁴ It was an era in which American audiences could read the debate held in Glasgow, Scotland between colonizationist and gradual emancipationist Breckinridge and fiery British abolitionist George Thompson with accompanying commentary provided by William Lloyd Garrison.⁴⁵ As such, it is unsurprising that Quist determined that southern and northern reformers were largely interested in the same things. Reformism did not emerge in a vacuum. While reformists adapted ideas to fit their particular ideology and locality (Alabamians were largely uninterested in abolition and elevating women), the key concept of a moral and benevolent response to the effects of modernity and industrialization mobilized men and women in Europe and America. A shared commitment to altruism dispatched thousands of petitions to Congress calling for abolition and emblazoned

⁴¹ Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (New York: University Press of America, 1991), 3.

⁴² See John C. Young, "Address," in *The Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society, with An Address, (Delivered at the Request of the Society,) by Rev. John C. Young* (Frankfort: Albert G. Hodges, 1833), 9-32; *Proceedings of the Colonization Society of Kentucky, with the Address of the Hon. Daniel Mayes, at the Annual Meeting, at Frankfort, December 1st, 1831*, 4; Matthew Carey, *Letters on the Colonization Society and in Its Probable Results*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: L. Johnson, 1832), 13-14, 17-22, Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*.

⁴³ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, I: 182.

⁴⁴ See Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*; Louis S. Gerteis, *Morality & Utility in American Antislavery Reform* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

⁴⁵ Robert J. Breckinridge, George Thompson, and William L. Garrison, *Discussion on American Slavery, Between George Thompson, Esq.,...and Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge...Holden in the Rev. Dr. Wardlaw's Chapel, Glasgow, Scotland*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836).

names like William Lloyd Garrison, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, and Harriet Beecher Stowe into the annals of history. This same spirit of moral reform also led lesser-known men like Henry Payne, Joseph Buckner, and David Birdwell to affix their names along with other Tennesseans to a petition to their state legislature begging that body “to take into consideration the deplorable situation of the people of colour, held in slavery.” The petitioners hoped that the state legislature would enact a plan of gradual emancipation and simultaneously encourage slaveholders to teach their slaves “some useful occupation, and learn them, if practicable, to read the scriptures, that they may be qualified to become members of civil society.”⁴⁶ This is benevolence similar to that noted by J. Winston Coleman and ample reminder that the southern opposition to slavery embraced both altruistic endeavors and misanthropic distrust for African-Americans.

Although distinct from its northern cousin, the South did have a reform movement as evidenced by the individuals and organizations that formed its antislavery wing. This more conservative southern antislavery movement, or movements to borrow Lowell H. Harrison’s terminology, survived until the Civil War.⁴⁷ Although the rise of aggressive abolitionism did impede its success by providing alternatives to colonization and gradual emancipation that appealed to African-Americans and aroused the ire of pro-slavery southerners, the South’s antislavery movement failed primarily due to an inability to logistically prove the feasibility of their schemes and insufficient support (or open hostility) from most white southerners. Interacting with the same conceptualizations of morality and benevolence that motivated reformers across the nineteenth-century Atlantic world, southern reformers adapted the principles of abolitionism to conform to their own concerns for societal stability. Southern opponents to slavery were overwhelmingly characterized by their broad commitments to reform and gradualism, and a faith in the number crunching of the new science of political economy.

Reformism

Southerners largely did not embrace the full spectrum of reform advanced in the North. Partly, this stemmed from the entrenched masculinity of the South’s social and political institutions. White southern women supported colonization, formed their own benevolent

⁴⁶ Petition of 99 Tennesseans in 1833, *Race and Slavery Petition Project* # 11483302, Reel 13.

⁴⁷ Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*, v.

societies, took up the cause of temperance, and adopted many of the same reforms as northern women. However, at a time when a veritable flood of northern women took up the banner of reform, carved public roles for themselves under the guise of their moralizing influence, and breathed life into the nascent women's rights movement (many of the grand matrons of the movement like Susan B. Anthony or Elizabeth Cady Stanton cut their political teeth on temperance and abolitionism), even a study as minutely detailed as John W. Quist's examination of a single Alabama county can only note that "information on the activity of women in other benevolent movements [aside from a scattering of bible societies] is scarce...."⁴⁸ In the decades before the American Civil War, northern women boldly petitioned state legislatures for corporate charters of female-run organizations, prayed for Congress to abolish slavery, and met at Seneca Falls to edit the Declaration of Independence to read that "all men and women are created equal."⁴⁹ Of course, the North was not an egalitarian utopia for women, and they certainly struggled to assert themselves as political beings. But compared to the South, northern women secured enormous victories over the nineteenth-century gender hierarchy. Generally, the women of the South were not nearly so bold in their political maneuverings.

Foregoing any claims of citizenship by basing their right to petition as "Mothers, wives, & daughters of a faction of the citizens," the women of Ohio County, Virginia (now West Virginia) requested that Congress reject the annexation of Texas, deny the admittance of Florida into the Union as a slave state, abolish slavery from the District of Columbia, and prohibit the domestic slave trade. In the wake of Nat Turner's revolt, three petitions bearing two hundred and fifteen signatures of Augusta County, Virginia's female population arrived in Richmond asking the legislature to enact a plan of emancipation and colonization. In so asserting their right to petition the General Assembly, the women acknowledged that it was "unexampled, in our beloved state, that females should interfere in its political concerns." The "peculiar circumstances" of Nat Turner's rebellion led the women to overcome the "timidity incident in our sex" and notify the legislature of their desire to remove both slavery and African-Americans from the borders of the commonwealth. Not all women highlighted their internal struggle with inherent tentativeness. Indeed, many of the South's white southern women could have been

⁴⁸ Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 81.

⁴⁹ See Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, & Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

mistaken for their more aggressive northern cousins. Over three hundred women from the quirky slave state of Delaware interpreted the Declaration of Independence and notified their male legislators that slavery was incompatible with that document's "sentiments." Less overt than the Delaware women were the female inhabitants of Fleming County, Kentucky who joined with their male family members in petitioning Congress for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. On a single page, seven women penned their names in their neatly demarcated column on the right-hand side of the petition. What makes this otherwise unextraordinary document interesting is that both the men and women completed their columns with a place name, presumably the location of where the petition was signed. The men apparently conducted their business at Mt. Carmel, but the women met several miles away at Mineral Springs. Only the location of the meeting is disclosed, leaving unanswered the nature of the business conducted there, but these women established a small public space for themselves by the very act of informing the United States Congress that their political action retained a level of independence from their male relatives.⁵⁰

These southern antislavery petitioners were a unique minority amongst southern women. Stephanie McCurry argues that Southern male elites maintained their privileged political status within the South's democratic republicanism by forging a gendered partnership with their male yeoman neighbors. By metaphorically casting their slaves as children, upper class slaveholders symbolically linked their political rights to sound stewardship of the home; a paternalistic dominance easily adaptable to (and equally agreeable to) non-slaveholding men. "Citizen" was a gendered category delegated to men based on their paternal protection and lording over their homes (regardless of whether this home constituted a few fenced-in acres or a palatial estate). McCurry's scholarship focuses on the overpowering of white women by white men to secure this gendered partnership that forged a political system built upon intersecting constructions of race

⁵⁰ Petition of 45 Mothers, Wives, & Daughters of Ohio County, Virginia, Calling Upon Congress to Reject the Annexation of Texas and Admittance of Florida to the Union as a Slave State, HR26A-H1.2, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Petition of 39 Mothers, Wives, & Daughters...abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, HR26A-H1.2, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Petition of 43 Mothers, Wives, & Daughters...traffic in slaves among the states may be prohibited, HR26A-H1.2, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Petition of 24 Women of Augusta County, Virginia, PAR 11683125, Race and Slavery Petitions Project; Petition of 63 Women of Augusta County, PAR 11683203, Race and Slavery Petitions Project; Petition of 128 Women of Augusta County, Virginia, PAR 11683205, Race and Slavery Petitions Project; Petition of the Women of Wilmington, PAR 10383903, Race and Slavery Petitions Project; Petition of 21 Citizens of Fleming County, Kentucky, March 20, 1854, HR33A-G5.1, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

and gender. In addition to being overwhelmed, white southern women also largely colluded with and worked within this paternalistic system as evidenced by their petitions to state legislatures. Most southern women referred to themselves as “Ladies,” made no claims to citizenship (or even “inhabitant”), and actually worded their petitions to local governments in order to emphasize their familial relationships to citizens and remind the male legislators’ duties as their male guardians.⁵¹

The most significant exceptions to this rule were antislavery white women. Although the equation is not a simple “antislavery sentiment equated to claims of citizenship” formula, as evidenced by the inherently timid women of Augusta County, Virginia, the majority of female petitioners who asserted a claim to citizenship in themselves were largely voicing opposition to slavery. The women of Fleming County, Kentucky, in addition to noting that their business occurred independently of their men folk, also penned their names underneath a preprinted heading that notified Congress that the petition emerged from the county’s “citizens.” The antislavery petitions of white women (and the activities of Marie Tyler-McGraw’s colonizationist women) further reinforce the argument that the southern socio-political organization, its masculine republicanism, was a structure built upon a cross-beam of race and gender, and that opposition to one of the structural supports easily led to scrutiny of the other.⁵²

Still, white women were significant contributors to the efforts of reform in the South, as competing notions of idealized womanhood were equally significant weapons in the arsenal of reformers and their antagonists. Woman as honorable guardian of masculine republican virtue was an easily employed trope, but differing perceptions of slavery ranging from a “necessary evil” to “positive good” clouded what defined morality in a slave system. When slavery was perceived as a temporary evil, women were encouraged to work towards its gradual and peaceful demise. If slavery secured benefits to the white South and protected blacks from a Hobbesian state of freedom, however, then Christian morality would demand that women work towards

⁵¹ See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Stephanie McCurry, “The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina,” *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992): 1245-1264.

⁵² This analysis is developed further in Robert P. Murray, “Commanding Requests: Women’s Petitions and the Gender Politics of the American South, 1830-1860” (working draft, Brian Bertoti Innovative Perspectives in History Conference, Blacksburg, VA, April 12, 2008). I follow Kathleen Canning’s call to examine the discourse of citizenship rather than its legal parameters. These antislavery women were not legal citizens, but by affixing their names underneath documents that declared them “Citizens of ____ County” they established an extralegal discursive claim to citizenship.

slavery's amelioration, but not its demise. The discourse was long-lasting and remained undecided up to the Civil War. The end result of this debate was not to minimize the significance of female participation in the South, but channel it into the debate on slavery's morality. The "Female Benevolent Associations" of Jamestown, Springfield, and Kennet, North Carolina, for example, petitioned their state legislators to enact legislation to ease the burden on female slaves by prohibiting the separation of mothers from infants and "restricting Master in the administration of corporal punishments from the shameful practice of stripping the black matron's back." Clearly, these southern women desired to soften slavery, but though they agreed that it was an "evil which was brought upon us by our forefathers," the petitioners never outright condemned the institution.⁵³ Northern women spring boarded their activism from a shared foundation that slavery was (generally) wrong; southern women, lacking this initial building block, internally split on whether it was right to challenge slavery and the political, social, and economic system that supported it.⁵⁴ More so than in the North, southern reformism filled its ranks with and sought support from other men. For example, in his 1836 public debate with George Thompson, an event that would have attracted scores of northern women, Robert Breckinridge, desiring a "responsible" audience, requested that "the audience shall consist of a select number of gentlemen...to be admitted by ticket only." Some women were able to enter this male-dominated discourse. "Maria" published an article in Cassius Clay's *True American* while other women formed colonization societies or benevolent associations. Unfortunately, the upper-class men who organized the publications and political campaigns were largely uninterested in their assistance.

Of course, there were some male southern reformers who sought the support of women. Senator Joseph Underwood concluded one address with a specific appeal to women as "patrons" of benevolent enterprises. Solicitations like Underwood's, however, were rare amongst southern antislavery advocates. Indeed, even this unique nod to female altruism accounted for only two paragraphs in a twenty-four page speech. The remainder of the text reflected the male-driven

⁵³ PAR 11282710, Race and Slavery Petitions Project.

⁵⁴ For excellent examinations of the roles of women and the idealized role of women in the antebellum South, see Elizabeth R. Varon, "Evangelical Womanhood and the Politics of the African Colonization Movement in Virginia," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery*, eds. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Betty Wood, "White Women, Black Slaves and the Law in Early National Georgia: The Sunbury Petition of 1791," *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (1992): 611-622; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*; Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism."

reformism of the Upper South. “Man’s proper business on earth,” Underwood reminded his audience, “is action.”⁵⁵

An emphasis on slavery curtailed much of the southern reform movement’s efforts in addition to the activism of women. In the free states of the North, religious-inspired reformism, combined with the problems arising from urbanization, immigration, and industrialization, sparked far-ranging movements. Reform-minded southerners surveyed their homelands and noticed entirely different problems, namely the lack of urbanization, immigration, and industrialization. Kentuckians stared across the Ohio River and pondered how the “wealth, mechanical, manufacturing, and commercial industry” of their northern neighbor had so outstripped their own endeavors; they wondered how Virginia could be equally outdone by Pennsylvania. Examining New Haven, Connecticut while studying at Yale, Cassius Clay contemplated how these New Englanders prospered on soil that would have led Kentuckians to “famine and the alms-house.” In the same address, Clay likewise linked the futility of creating a strong public education system with the strength of slavery. In his mind, and college president John C. Young and others concurred, the two could never peacefully cohabit.⁵⁶ Editor Clay went so far in his brief article “Slavery The Enemy of Genius” as to count and laud the number of “great” American poets while simultaneously noting their residence in free states. Clay was as equally concerned for industry. The first edition of his *True American* proclaimed the mechanic as “one of God’s noblemen.” Parodying the Know-Nothings, Missouri’s *Industrial Luminary*, the organ of reformer George S. Park, outlined the plank of the fictitious “Know Somethings” that called for renewed integrity, acknowledgement that neither nature nor the Constitution recognized slavery, and, in a creative coupling, opposed the combined aggression of Catholicism and slavery. Within these reformers’ frameworks, slavery cheapened the value of manual labor and forced hard-working white laborers to migrate to free states in order to compete; slavery cheapened the morality of labor and fostered laziness.⁵⁷ The inhabitants of these slave states

⁵⁵ Breckinridge, Thompson, and Garrison, *Discussion on American Slavery*, 4; Maria [pseudo.], “Letters to the Ladies of Kentucky, *True American*, August 5, 1845; Joseph R. Underwood, *Address Delivered Before the Colonization Society of Bowling Green, on the 4th July, 1832*, Centre College Special Collections, Digital Archives, <http://www.centre.edu/web/library/sc/digital.html>, 2, 34 (accessed July 14, 2007).

⁵⁶ See Young, *4th Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 22.

⁵⁷ S. S. Nicholas and others, *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*, 2-3; Cassius Clay, *To the People of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: 1845), 2; “The Mechanic,” *True American*, June 3, 1845; “Slavery The Enemy of Genius,” *True American*, June 3, 1845; “Know Something,” *Industrial Luminary*, March 2, 1855, 2; Breckinridge, *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: 1849), 5; Underwood, *Address Delivered before the Colonization Society of Bowling Green, on the 4th July, 1832*, 2-5.

recognized how integrated slavery was within the social fabric of southern society. The Deep South reformers of Quist's study shied away from any hints of emancipation in fear of social upheaval. However, a complete modernization of southern society, though heavily controlled and structured, was the goal of these antislavery advocates, and slavery functioned as the primary impediment to modernity.

Manufacturing, internal improvements, and reform shaped this vision of the future. Unsurprisingly then, many of these proponents of reform in the Upper South emerged from the ranks of the Whig Party. Colonization, initially presented as a solution to Jefferson's oft-cited quandary of how to safely release the wolf of slavery, emerged as a favored scheme for emancipation by the very party that rejected Jefferson's ideas for a weak central government. Unlike Jefferson, Henry Clay established a plan of gradual emancipation for all of his slaves and also dictated how the funds for their expedition to Africa should be acquired. Ironically, as Daniel Howe notes, Clay remained more faithful to Jefferson's position on slavery than Jefferson did.⁵⁸ Also reflecting many colonizationists' conclusions that whites and blacks could never peacefully coexist and that Africa was the natural home of blacks, Clay never conceived (or at least never set down precautions) that his American-born slaves might not want to "return" to Liberia. Clay likewise highlights the conservative nature of the Upper South's antislavery sentiment. Although he opposed the expansion of slavery and desired its demise to ensure tranquility and prosperity for future generations, Clay remained a slaveholder his entire life. In Kentucky, prominent Whigs like Clay's distant cousin, Cassius, Joseph Underwood, John J. Crittenden, Robert J. Breckinridge, James T. Morehead, and William Owsley joined Henry in their unease with slavery (and many of whom, like Clay, at one point in their life had been or continued to be slaveholders). Long after the Whig Party ceased to be a national factor, their continued survival in the Upper South, and in Kentucky in particular, became the source of jest for numerous observers. Many of these leading politicians joined the colonization movement; Cassius Clay evolved into a full abolitionist; Governor Owsley earned the scorn of the state's pro-slavery advocates by pardoning Delia Ann Webster, who had been convicted of helping slaves escape from the state. However, reflecting the eventual schism between pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions that would end the party, the front page of the first issue of Cassius Clay's

⁵⁸ See Howe, *What Hath god Wrought*, 261, 587; Henry Clay, *Last Will and Testament* (Lexington: The King Library Press of the University of Kentucky, 1991), 4-5.

pro-manufacturing and anti-slavery newspaper, the *True American*, included an article warning pro-slavery men that only constant vigilance would defeat abolitionism. The call to arms was signed by the penname “A Whig.”⁵⁹ Although the majority of Kentucky’s (and the Upper South’s) opponents of slavery emerged from a Whiggish background, the correlation did not ensure that all members of the Whig Party shared an unease with the peculiar institution.

Reform-minded men (and women) could remain aware of the other antislavery activities through newspapers and journals. Although many of these papers were short-lived affairs (shut down either due to lack of funds or mob activism), there could always be found at least one antislavery publication emanating from a slave state from the 1840s until the eve of civil war. The first issue of Cassius Clay’s *True American* came off its Lexington, Kentucky press on June 3, 1845. Reflecting Clay’s Whiggish roots (and his evolution as an abolitionist), the *True American* proclaimed itself dedicated to “Liberty; Gradual Emancipation in Kentucky; Literature; Agriculture; the Elevation of Labor, Morally and Politically; Commercial Intelligence, & c. & c.” After only three months of publication, a pro-slavery mob entered Clay’s well-armed publishing offices and dispatched the press out of Kentucky to Cincinnati, Ohio. Clay, who had taken ill, was unable to defend his publishing house, but the irascible emancipationist and amateur editor was not done. By October of 1845, Lexingtonians could once again pore through the *True American*, now edited in Lexington, printed in Cincinnati, and shipped back to Lexington. Clay, rightfully known for his élan, returned fire at the Lexington mob on his front page. “If... we are able to work up kindred spirits at home to a quicker sense of justice—to implant in the hearts of the people of Kentucky a greater love of virtue—so help on the spread of education and morality—to hasten the day when our countrymen shall stand up together as one man in defence of UNIVERSAL FREEDOM—gradual though the progress of all this may be, we shall be contended and count these sufferings, and wrongs, and cruelties... as the greatest of blessings for them and for us.” Dollars succeeded where mobs failed, however, and the final issue of the *True American* left Cincinnati on October 21, 1846. Although he did not support the Mexican War, Clay had volunteered his services, an act that angered many of his northern devotees who subsequently stopped supporting the paper. Clay’s brother and John C. Vaughan, temporary editors during Clay’s absence, vowed that the paper would only be

⁵⁹ “Kentucky Whigs,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 1856, 4; Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 114-115; “From the Kentucky Gazette,” *The True American*, June 3, 1845.

suspended and that an antislavery newspaper would return to Kentucky's soil in a matter of weeks. *The True American* never recovered, and it required more than a few weeks, but Kentucky's antislavery Whigs were not out of the newspaper business.⁶⁰

Borrowing from Clay's subscription list, Vaughan and Fortunatus Cosby, Jr. published the first issue of *The Examiner* on June 19, 1847. True to its Whig ancestor, the Louisville-based paper republished William F. Bullock's pro-colonization speech before the Presbyterian Church of Frankfort, Kentucky. The second page declared Massachusetts a "model state" (whose "soil is lined with railroads. Her Ships dot every sea") and advocated for the construction of a canal across the Isthmus of Panama.⁶¹ Also like its Lexington predecessor, *The Examiner* suffered financial difficulties and closed after two years of publication. Despite the apparent financial black hole (and very real threat of violence) that antislavery publications presented their proprietors, William S. Bailey took up the cause in 1850 with a string of newspapers published in northern Kentucky. The mechanic-turned publisher earned the ire of his neighbors by following in the footsteps of Cassius Clay and joining the Republican Party (Kentucky joined with New Jersey and Delaware as the only states to be able to vote against Abraham Lincoln's bid for the presidency twice, and would not give its electoral votes for a Republican presidential candidate until William McKinley). Although a Republican organ, Bailey's *Newport News*, and its later incarnations as the *Newport & Covington Daily News* and *The Free South*, represented the same manufacturing interests that had once stimulated the Whig Party. After eight years of publishing across the river from Cincinnati, Ohio, the working-class editor who employed family members as typesetters for his press summed the tenets of his publishing enterprise as "We...gave the general news of, exposed the existing evils in the community and went to encourage public improvements, industry, education & c. with now and then a good article, showing slavery to be the great curse of our general prosperity. (Newport is older than Cincinnati, but is a mere handful compared with the Queen City of FREE Ohio)." Bailey's papers targeted working-class whites by noting their disadvantaged position in a slave state; he also understood the foundation of Kentucky's antislavery establishment. During the 1856 presidential election, the first election in

⁶⁰ "Spirit of the Press," *The True American*, October 14, 1845; Cassius Clay, *Appeal of Cassius M. Clay to Kentucky and the World* (Boston: J. M. Macomber & E. L. Pratt, 1845); "The True American," *The True American*, October 21, 1846; Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*, 53.

⁶¹ "Address Before the Kentucky Colonization Society, in the Presbyterian Church, Frankfort, by Hon. W. F. Bullock," "A Model State," and "A Peace Measure, or a Ship Canal," *The Examiner*, June 19, 1847.

which the Republicans fielded a candidate, Bailey announced the “Republican Platform is a Henry Clay Platform.”⁶²

These antislavery Whigs largely based their opposition to slavery on a shared vision of modernity that emphasized manufacturing, transportation, commerce, and efficiency. Their model of agrarian economy was not the slave-based plantation, but the free-labor, family operations of the North (Massachusetts and Ohio being their favorite examples). This penchant for internal improvements led many of these reformers to frame their antislavery activities on the peculiar institution’s negative effects on the South’s white population (both in terms of moral decay through inactivity and economic stagnation). In an 1829 address before Kentucky’s Colonization Society, Henry Clay spoke for many of his compatriots when he claimed “That labour is best, if it can be commanded, in which the labourer knows that he will derive the profits of his industry, that his employment depends upon his diligence, and his reward upon his assiduity.”⁶³ However, economic consternation, moral opposition, concern for free blacks and slaves, and anxiety for white Americans were not exclusive categorizations of antislavery sentiment. In many regards, they were mutually supportive. These individuals perceived a natural association between opposition to slavery and modernity, a coupling that led propaganda like *The Examiner* to place a denunciation of the “nefarious” slave trade next to an article for an automatic water pump that promised to revolutionize agriculture, or the Maryland Colonization Society to publicly resolve its belief that that increased commerce between Liberia and Maryland would endear more free African-Americans to the project of colonization.⁶⁴

Antislavery activism (and reformism in general) in the Upper South was not solely constrained within the Whig Party. In Missouri, the followers of Jacksonian Democrat Thomas H. Benton likewise adopted their leader’s unease with slavery and penchant for internal improvements. The articles and editorials of the Benton Democrats’ organs, the *Industrial Luminary*, *Weekly Southern Democrat*, and *Weekly Missouri Democrat*, joined with the Whigs in their enthusiasm for manufacturing and internal improvements. All shared an excitement for western railroads, and the weekly *Industrial Luminary*, in addition to spotlighting manufacturing,

⁶² William S. Bailey, *A Short Sketch of Our Troubles in the Anti-Slavery Cause* (Newport, KY: Office of the Daily and Weekly News, 1858), 1; “The Republicanism of Henry Clay,” *Newport Daily News*, August 5, 1856.

⁶³ Henry Clay, *An Address, Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky, at Frankfort, December 17, 1829, by the Hon. Henry Clay, at the Request of the Board of Managers* (Lexington: Thomas Smith, 1829), 9.

⁶⁴ “Slave Trade” and ‘Self-acting Water Machine,” *The Examiner*, September 4, 1847; ‘Annual Meeting of the Maryland State Colonization Society,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* (Baltimore, February 15, 1842), 130.

also offered insight into improved agricultural techniques, often through submitted articles underonyms like “A Farmer” and purloined articles like the *New England Cultivator*’s celebration of the ideal farm in Ohio. According to this article, the beau ideal of an agriculturalist rationally managed his plot to maximize production, always received the highest prices for his produce due to their excellent quality, spent time with his family, attended church regularly, would not accept interest over six percent for loans, subscribed to one political, one religious, and two agricultural newspapers, and, perhaps most significantly, desired no more land or stock than he and his family could manage alone. The article ominously concluded by inquiring to slave-holding Missouri, “Here is a model of a man and of a farmer, and the model of a farm. Who will be happy and follow his example?” Published one year before the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the *Luminary* likewise looked to the free states for models of efficiency and visibly raised its eyebrows at the westward expansion of slavery. Like Cassius Clay’s *True American*, George S. Park’s *Industrial Luminary* soon faced the ire of a pro-slavery mob on April 14, 1855, after Park’s condemnation of pro-slavery Missourians crossing into the Kansas Territory. Unlike the Lexington gang, however, this assault on the first amendment dispatched the *Luminary*’s press to a watery grave in the Missouri River. At the time of the attack, Park was conducting business with new arrivals to one of his land claims in the Kansas Territory. While the pro-slavery mob threatened Park’s life and destroyed his press, the flood of new immigrants to Park’s settlement, Polistra, formerly changed its name to Boston in honor of the company that had helped them relocate to Kansas: the New England Emigrant Aid Company, an abolitionist organization that hoped to tip the balance of power in Kansas to free soil by bringing antislavery settlers to the territory. Boston eventually became Manhattan and home to Bluemont College, the predecessor of Kansas State University, a school promoted by Park. Surely aware of the threat, Park did not publicly disclose the nature of his business in the Kansas Territory.⁶⁵

A desire for internal improvements and improved commerce united the western Benton Democrats and Whigs. This emphasis on railroads, manufacturing, turnpikes, and agrarian modernization, however, did not create a similar shared conclusion on how such endeavors should be supported. The Democrats largely retained their preference for individual state action.

⁶⁵ “Agricultural [For the *Luminary*],” *Industrial Luminary*, April 11, 1854; “The Model Farm in Ohio,” *Industrial Luminary*, August 16, 1853; “The Parkville Mob,” *Weekly Missouri Democrat*, May 1, 1855; George S. Park, “Letter from Mr. Park, of Parkville, Mo. To the Public,” *Weekly Missouri Democrat*, May 8, 1855; Lawrence O. Christensen, William E. Foley, Gary R. Kremer, and Kenneth H. Winn, eds., “Park, George S. (1811-1890),” in *Dictionary of Missouri Biography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 594-595.

The *Weekly Missouri Democrat* actually celebrated the slave states in its denunciation of the Parkville mob, claiming that “the people of the slave states are more interested than any other people in putting down and rebuking Atchison [David Atchison was an outspoken proponent of slavery and Senator from Missouri] and his gang...because the people of the slave states have always held to the doctrine of non-intervention by the people of one State with the affairs of another...”⁶⁶ The strong general government favored by Whigs led many antislavery advocates from that party to seek a more active role for the federal government in eliminating slavery from the United States. Additionally, colonizationists who viewed emigration as a means to end slavery in America also leaned towards a more active federal government. Many members of the ACS publicly espoused their understanding that the organization was only the initial starting point in an endeavor that the federal government should either take over or fund liberally. As an organization, the ACS provided preprinted petitions to state auxiliary societies that noted the organization's desire for federal support and the role that state legislatures could play in this national enterprise by notifying the national representatives to the wishes of the state inhabitants.⁶⁷ Conversely, more state-oriented colonization advocates petitioned their local legislatures to coordinate efforts within their respective jurisdictions. To complicate matters, the federal/local perspectives were not necessarily mutually exclusive, and there were many shades of antislavery and colonizationist sentiment in the Upper South reflecting the varied “movements” (to borrow again from Harrison) in the South that covered the spectrum from those who feared slavery’s threat to the white population to individuals concerned for blacks (and the multihued gray areas that blended these two poles).

In his 1827 address before the ACS, whose presidency he would assume in 1836 and hold until his death in 1852, arch-Whig Henry Clay noted that many members of the society viewed the organization as a stepping stone. Clay claimed that from the first days of the ACS, “every member of it has...looked forward to the arrival of the period, when it would become necessary to invoke the public aid [meaning legislative support]” in capitalizing on the initial successes of the private organization. Addressing Kentucky’s auxiliary colonization society two years later, Clay again returned to the theme of governmental support by outlining roles for both the federal government in Washington, as military protector of the colony, and the respective

⁶⁶ “The Parkville Mob,” *Weekly Missouri Democrat*, May 1, 1855.

⁶⁷ PAR 11282720, Race and Slavery Petitions Project.

state legislatures. Clay did not openly advocate abolition in 1829, but he suggested that the states should relax the legal “restraints” placed against slaveholders wishing to emancipate their slaves. Tellingly, he also noted that a central task of the state legislatures would be to ascertain whether the federal government’s constitutional and general powers in the matter of colonization should be expanded. The Maryland Colonization Society echoed those sentiments in 1842 when its official journal noted that “the full fruition of a scheme so grand cannot be realized” without the support of the federal and state governments. Robert J. Breckinridge’s scheme of abolition necessitated a state plan for gradual emancipation combined with a luxury tax on slave property and financial aid from the federal government in order to defuse the cost of colonization. While noting the advantages of national support, Breckinridge recognized that the Cotton South lacked much of the antislavery sentiment that existed in the Upper South. However, the obtuseness of other states should not prevent Kentucky from acting independently in Breckinridge’s opinion. The theme of government intervention was repeated over and over in the addresses and propaganda of the colonizationists. John C. Young argued that the cost of colonization could be defrayed without taxation by using the funds generated from the sale of public lands. Daniel Mayes could not think of a worthier task for the federal government in an age of surplus and waning national debt. In the fourth edition of his *Letters on Colonization*, Mathew Carey included excerpts from twelve state legislatures and sixteen ecclesiastical bodies to demonstrate the widespread appeal of colonization and the probability of governmental aid.⁶⁸

To secure that governmental aid, the ACS published memorials outlining the origins and goals of the society and enumerating the successes of the colony of Liberia (while intentionally underplaying the high mortality rate of colonists and the gross inadequacies of the colony). Reflecting the middle and upper class members of the ACS, their propaganda often centered on wooing influential men who were in position to persuade state governments. For example, Isaac P. Shelby, the grandson of Kentucky’s first governor, received in 1849 a small package from the ACS consisting of a letter and several copies of the society’s report. The documents provided “several very strong arguments in favor of *appropriations by the State and General*

⁶⁸ Henry Clay, *Speech of the Hon. Henry Clay before the American Colonization Society* (Washington, D.C.: Columbian, 1827), 3; Henry Clay, *An Address Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky*, 22-23; “General Colonization Convention,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1, no. 12 (May 16, 1842): 177; Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*, 12; Young, *The Fourth Annual Report*, 12-13; Daniel Mayes, “Address” in *The Proceedings of the Colonization Society of Kentucky* (Frankfort: Commentator, 1831), 11; Carey, *Letters on the Colonization Society and in Its Probable Results*, 17-19.

Governments. We hope to secure such appropriations in Virginia and Ohio, the present year.” Like a pyramid scheme, the society asked Shelby to circulate the reports amongst his friends and then submit their names and addresses to the ACS’s main office in Washington, D.C. In such a manner, the ACS hoped to reach “every *influential* [emphasis mine] person in the state” to foster a supportive following amongst society’s upper crust. Additionally, the society proposed political action through a local petition drive and requested that Shelby initiate one so that a flood of memorials (with properly well-connected signatories) could arrive in the capital at the start of the legislative session.⁶⁹ Nationally, the ACS and its constituents consistently noted the constitutional demarcations for both state and federal authority in the endeavor, but some conceived that an expansion of federal authority was a possibility.

Although southern petitioners did not even come close to dispatching the same numbers of memorials to the United States Congress as their northern counterparts, some, like the representatives of North Carolina’s annual meeting of the Society of Friends, did send memorials to Congress supporting colonization. The vast majority, however, focused on issues over which Congress had clear authority like territories, interstate trade, and the District of Columbia. The male citizens of New Castle County, Delaware, noted all three in their 1839 petition that called for the “immediate abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, and in the Territory of Florida, and the immediate prohibition of the traffic in human beings between the States.” Jacob Pusey and his fellow petitioners clearly borrowed their preprinted form as they were forced to pencil in “Delaware” in the opening sentence that notified Congress that the memorial originated from the “Citizens of ___ in the State of Pennsylvania.” Outliers existed like Maryland’s Andrew B. Wilson who petitioned Congress to look into the instances of interracial sexual liaisons. Repeatedly emphasizing that his petition was not supporting abolition (in hopes of avoiding the automatically tabling that came with the gag rules), Wilson presented the unusual argument that since the northern abolitionists desired an amalgamated society and this was the ultimate effect of slavery (copulation between white male masters and black female slaves), then there “in fact exists little differences between the theory of the North and the practice of the South, on this dark subject.” Strange theories that the North and South could unify their positions on the degenerate effects of slavery based on shared assumptions of amalgamation aside, the vast majority of the

⁶⁹ PARs 11284201, 11682703, Race and Slavery Petition Project; William McLain, printed circular, 1849, Collection Number 59M56, Shelby Family Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, Kentucky.

few slave-state petitions dispatched to the Congress were limited in their goals.⁷⁰ Southerners were far more likely to petition their state legislatures than Congress regarding emancipation and colonization. Certainly, their paltry contribution to Congressional mail reflects the comparative weakness of the antislavery movement in the South. It also reflects a commitment to a shared understanding that emancipatory power lay with the states. Even devout Whigs like Henry Clay or Robert J. Breckinridge, though hoping for sizable contributions from the federal government, believed that the national government lacked the Constitutional powers to effect emancipation. It was largely to the state legislatures that the majority of the South's collection of antislavery advocates directed their attention.

The Race and Slavery Petitions Project of the University of North Carolina-Greensboro has catalogued approximately 3,000 petitions dispatched to southern legislatures dealing with issues of race and slavery. Of this sample, over two hundred petitions dated from 1825 to 1860 from the states of Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware directly address the issue of emancipation or colonization (or both). Although this sample does not stand quantitative scrutiny (the project's collection is skewed towards favoring Virginia while possessing very little from Kentucky, Maryland, or Missouri), it does offer qualitative evidence into the goals and influences of the petitioners. For example, of the two hundred and thirteen petitions voicing some form of opposition to slavery or favoring colonization, not a single one based its resistance to slavery solely on the detriment to America's black population. One-hundred and fourteen petitions, overwhelmingly from a massive drive in Tennessee in the early 1830s, argued that emancipation would produce favorable results for both whites and blacks. Seventeen petitions argued for an end to slavery based solely on its effect on the white population. Most of these originated in Virginia (fourteen) after the Nat Turner rebellion, and focused on removing the constant fear and vigilance necessitated by the threat of a servile rebellion. Virginians were also the principal petitioners favoring colonization as a beneficial endeavor for whites (twenty-six of

⁷⁰ Memorial from the Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends in the State of North Carolina, HR25A, Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Petition of the Citizens of New Castle County, Delaware, HR25A; Memorial of Andrew B. Wilson, HR26A-H1.2. See also The Petition of the Undersigned Citizens of the District of Columbia, HR29A-G3.3; Petition of the Undersigned Members of the Board of Aldermen and Common Council of the City of Washington, HR30A-G5.1; Petition of the Citizens of Lewis and Bracken Counties, Kentucky, HR33A-G5.1; Petition of the Citizens of Fleming County, Kentucky, HR33A-G5.1; Petition of the Citizens of Harford County, Maryland, HR25A; Petition of the Inhabitants of Baltimore, HR26A-H1.2; Petition of the Inhabitants of Baltimore, HR268.-H1.2; Petition of the Citizens of Baltimore, HR30A-G5.1; Petition of 45 Mothers, Wives, & Daughters of Ohio County, Virginia, HR26A-H1.2; Petition of the Citizens of Ohio County, HR26A-H1.2; Petitions of the Citizens of Ohio County, Virginia, HR25A; all in Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

thirty-three petitions), likewise largely due to Turner's 1831 revolt. Fifteen petitions (again with a Virginia majority) advocated governmental support for colonization as beneficial to both whites and blacks. Great discrepancy exists, however, from petition to petition (aside from those that were part of broader organized drives, obviously), and simply labeling them as "pro-colonization for whites" or "pro-emancipation for both races" fails to adequately convey the broad spectrum of opinions presented to the state legislatures.

The Manumission Society of North Carolina petitioned the North Carolina legislature to ban the importation of slaves into the state because, the petitioners claimed, they were "vicious characters" who negatively influenced all North Carolinians, black and white. Additionally, the petitioners advocated a *realpolitik* approach to the issue of slavery. Noting the increasing power of the non-slaveholding states, the memorialists recommended that North Carolina end slavery on its own terms and with a plan to remove "beyond the limits of our Government." A savvy political awareness apparently characterized North Carolina's Manumission Society as three years before it had petitioned North Carolina's legislature for a "softening" of slavery and its eventual abolition in a two-page document that highlighted the inconsistencies of slavery within a democratic society. Although North Carolina's Manumission Society was more concerned about the political realities of slavery rather than its effect on the black population, it was not openly hostile to African-Americans. The same cannot be said of the two hundred and fifty-two North Carolina mechanics who hoped to rid themselves of unwanted competition by asking the state government to fund the colonization of free blacks, a rival labor force, to Liberia, and recommended that the government tax goods manufactured in states that refused to uphold the fugitive slave law. Other petitioners recommended that the cost of colonization could be offset by selling free blacks who refused to emigrate back into slavery. Some colonizationists, however, viewed relocation as a blessing for the South's population of free blacks. Ninety-six citizens of Northampton County, Virginia noted that free blacks were caught between two societies: unable to secure equality with whites, but elevated above slaves. The memorialists argued that colonization offered a benevolent solution to this problem.⁷¹

Although supporters of emancipation did not ground their concerns solely in the plight of slaves, consternation about the place of slavery within a democratic society and its effect on African-Americans permeated many memorials. The petition drive that flooded Tennessee's

⁷¹ PARs 11282713, 11282405, 11284807, 11285001, 11683101, Race and Slavery Petitions Project.

legislature in the early 1830s before the state's constitutional convention of 1834 called attention to the "deplorable situation of the people of colour," and prayed that the state government enact a plan of gradual emancipation. In so doing, the petition evoked the United States Constitution and the "laws of nature" and requested that Tennessee relax the current restrictions on private emancipations, ban the separation of enslaved husbands and wives, enact a plan of gradual emancipation, and bid "those who may have the raising of such, to teach them [the slaves] some useful occupation, and learn them, if practicable, to read the scriptures, that they may be qualified to become members of civil society." Eventually, over one thousand Tennesseans, largely from the mountainous eastern counties of the state, affixed their names to at least ninety-nine petitions bearing this call. On the opposite end of the emancipatory spectrum, the petition from a group of Virginia Quakers deduced God's vengeance in Nat Turner's rebellion of 1831 and suggested that Virginia give up slavery to restore the commonwealth's white population back into the Lord's favor.⁷²

These great discrepancies in opinion, white colonizationists seeking to remove their free black economic competition to petitions calling for slavery's end as a means to elevate both whites and blacks, nominally suggests that the South may have had numerous individuals willing to sign a petition, but no real coordinated reformist movement. Senator Littleton Tazewell arrived at this conclusion in 1828 when he produced the report of the Committee on Foreign Relations that had been charged with examining the antislavery and colonizationist petitions sent to Congress and recommending a course of action. The committee members found themselves unable "to discover, in the several petitions, memorials, and resolutions, to them referred, any precise and common object, which the different applicants desire should be accomplished, by the

⁷² PARs 11481702, 11481704, 11481705, 11481706, 11481707, 11481708, 11481709, 11481710, 11481711, 11481712, 11481713, 11481714, 11481715, 11481716, 11481717, 11481718, 11481719, 11481720, 11481721, 11481722, 11481723, 11481724, 11481725, 11481726, 11481727, 11481728, 11481729, 11481730, 11481731, 11481732, 11481733, 11481734, 11481735, 11481736, 11481737, 11481738, 11481739, 11481904, 11481905, 11481906, 11481907, 11481908, 11481909, 11481910, 11481911, 11481912, 11481913, 11481914, 11481915, 11481916, 11481917, 11481918, 11481919, 11481920, 11481921, 11481922, 11481923, 11481924, 11481925, 11481926, 11481927, 11481928, 11481929, 11482507, 11482508, 11482511, 11482514, 11482518, 11482604, 11483324, 11483506, 11483508, 11483510, 11483511, 11483512, 11483513, 11483514, 11483515, 11483516, 11483517, 11483519, 11483511, 11483521, 11483522, 11483525, 11483526, 11484103, 11482510, 11482512, 11482513, 11482517, 11483322, 11483326 11483507, 11483509, 11483518, 1148352, 11483523, 11483524, 11683112, Race and Slavery Petitions Project; James W. Patton, "The Progress of Emancipation in Tennessee, 1796-1860," *Journal of Negro History* 17, no. 1 (1932): 69-70.

exertion of the legislative power of Congress.”⁷³ In addition to the wide variety of opinions, the South’s classist reformism reinforced this perception of uncoordinated individual action.

Rather than forge heterodox organizations, male southern reformers largely sought out fellow members of the white middle and upper classes and seemed largely uninterested in filling the ranks with white working class men and women.⁷⁴ Although the mechanic-turned editor William S. Bailey and women like Mrs. Stamper who donated fifty cents to the Kentucky Colonization Society forced their way into the southern reform movement, they were not welcomed and forced to overcome greater hurdles than their northern compatriots.⁷⁵ Largely, historians have also bought into this image of the lone middle-class southern abolitionist standing against the mob. Primarily, Cassius Clay has been forced to shoulder the mantle of the “quintessential southern abolitionist” (in Stanley Harrold’s words). In his broad survey of antebellum America, David Walker Howe’s only mention of Clay is a brief nod to abolitionist’s determination to remain in Kentucky and “maintain” the antislavery movement there; no other opponents of slavery are mentioned.⁷⁶ The bellicose Clay, who never grew out of his penchant for the grandiose, dueled, warded off assassins, and killed political opponents at campaign rallies. Clay clearly was a significant force in Kentucky’s antislavery movement, but he is also a poor representation of the movement as a whole. Those who voiced too radical an opinion for the locals very easily found themselves the victims of mob violence (like George S. Park and William S. Bailey).

However, the majority of the South’s antislavery leaders, reflecting their upper class backgrounds, were largely conservative individuals who commingled a racist and paternalistic concern for African-Americans (though this assuredly was not a requirement) with slavery’s negative influences on whites. Ironically, while the Breckinridges, Youngs, and Underwoods appealed to white yeoman farmers and mechanics as the beneficiaries of emancipation and actively sought their political support, they were also largely uninterested in integrating these groups within the folds of their organizations. White, upper-class men remained the core

⁷³ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Committee on Foreign Relations, to whom were referred sundry petitions and memorials, and the resolutions of several Legislatures of different States, in relations to the colonization of persons of colour, have had all the said documents under their consideration, and now beg leave to report*, 20th Congress, 1st sess., 1828.

⁷⁴ Bruce Laurie’s *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* offers a wonderful examination of the significant contributions to Massachusetts’ reform movement from working class men and women.

⁷⁵ “Rev. Geo. C. Light’s Report,” *4th Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 5.

⁷⁶ Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861*, 21; Howe, *What hath God Wrought*, 477.

constituency of the ACS, and the organization was more concerned with securing the support of members' associates than the lower economic orders who were the supposed beneficiaries of their plans. However, dissonance or the fact that the southern movement looked little like its northern counterpart should not negate the significance of the structures that propped up the southern antislavery movement (and the southern reformist movement as a whole). Perhaps the petitions examined by Tazewell's committees were diverse in opinion, but their very existence substantiates that the varied institutions and associations that helped make them a reality constituted an intellectual movement seeking social change.

First, though short-lived, the numerous antislavery and reformist publications in the Upper South offered an awareness of activities in other locales and allowed for the expression of ideas. The October 2, 1847 edition of *The Examiner* is a prime example. Its front page consisted of an article from "A Southern Kentuckian," who was, in fact, Baptist minister James M. Pendleton, arguing for the cessation of admitting new slave states and a plan for gradual emancipation based on biblical teachings and the assertion that slavery was a poor way to organize society. Additionally, a letter also appeared from John G. Fee, a radical abolitionist and American Missionary Association minister, who would eventually establish the small hamlet of Berea on Cassius Clay's land in Madison County, Kentucky. Fee, who received a solidly antislavery education while attending Augusta College (the first college established by the Methodist Church and whose charter was revoked by Kentucky's General Assembly in 1849 due to the school's antislavery leanings), the University of Miami (Ohio), and Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, established Berea College as a multiracial institution. Fee's letter related his travels across Kentucky as a minister and concurred with earlier arguments of *The Examiner* that noted the degenerative effects of slavery "upon the poor, but often worthy men of our State." Finally, wedged between Fee's letter and Pendleton's article, was the first installment of "A Colonizationist's" series of arguments supporting the colonization movement. The employment of numerous numbers to be printed over a span of several days combined with the religious and racial assertions of "A Colonizationist" suggests that the author was none other than Robert J. Breckinridge (or, minimally, a very close adherent of his views).⁷⁷ Three diverse antislavery opinions shared a common space on *The Examiner's* front page, allowing for intellectual

⁷⁷ John G. Fee, "For *The Examiner*," *The Examiner*, October 2, 1847; A Colonizationist [pseudo.], "African Colonization-No.1," *The Examiner*, October 2, 1847; A Southern Kentucky [James M. Pendleton], "Thoughts on Emancipation-No. 3," *The Examiner*, October 2, 1847.

exchange and giving the reader biblical, practical, and economic arguments for supporting emancipation and multiple systems by which that idea could become a reality. In spite of mob violence and financial woes, antislavery presses continued operating and maintaining this discourse in the Upper South until the Civil War

Second, institutions and associations across the Upper South helped cement individuals into like-minded constituencies. One significant structure was the university. Augusta College's charter was revoked for the school's antislavery leanings. John G. Fee envisioned an interracial institution in the antislavery town that he and Cassius Clay established (Berea College dates its founding to 1855, but it was not until after the Civil War that the school truly emerged). Centre College in Danville, Kentucky became a seedbed for gradual emancipationists and colonizationists. Not only did John C. Young serve as president of the school from 1830 until 1857, but the faculty also included Robert J. Breckinridge. William Breckinridge, Robert's brother, served on the Board of Trustees. Presbyterian Centre largely saved itself from the fate of the Methodist-affiliated Augusta College by espousing a more conservative tone of antislavery sentiment. It also did not hurt that the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky was affiliated with individuals of similar opinions. In 1834, the Synod of Kentucky established a ten-man committee to "digest and prepare a plan for the moral and religious instruction of our slaves, and for their future emancipation" that would be debated by the state's presbyteries. The committee consisted of John Brown, Thomas P. Smith, Charles Cunningham, James K. Burch, Nathan J. Hall, John Green, J. R. Alexander, William L. Breckinridge, Robert Stewart, and John C. Young. With the exception of Smith, Hall, and Stewart, all of these individuals served Centre as faculty members, presidents, or Board of Trustees members. The motion was heavily debated for two days, but no action was taken. After its postponement, Robert Breckinridge supposedly stormed from the building uttering that "Since God has forsaken the Synod of Kentucky, Robert J. Breckinridge will forsake it too." The strong antislavery sentiment associated with Kentucky's Presbyterians (a tradition dating to Reverend David Rice's denunciation of slavery at Kentucky's first constitution convention in 1792) was reflected in the college's personnel, but the school also reinforced that pre-existing aversion towards slavery. An 1864 history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States estimated that two-thirds of Kentucky's Presbyterian ministry had

passed through the doors of Centre College, many of them during the long presidency of John C. Young.⁷⁸

Additionally, the ACS both fostered organizations at the state and community levels (constructed like a pyramid, the auxiliary state societies that constituted the national body were in turn supported and built upon a foundation of local town-based societies) and steered concerted efforts to secure governmental aid. The published journals of the various societies and their printed convention reports also served to establish a communication network across the South. Political activism led to numerous petition drives, especially during the Virginia Assembly debates on slavery after Nat Turner's rebellion and the constitutional conventions of Tennessee and Kentucky. While Tennessee's convention sparked a drive for gradual emancipation, Kentucky's antislavery advocates actually formed a political party for their state's proposed 1849 convention.

Such an action necessitated local meetings, followed by a larger antislavery convention held in the state capitol on April 25, 1849. Appropriately, the meeting was chaired by Henry Clay of Bourbon County (not to be confused with the more-famous Whig Senator), one of the largest slaveholders in the state, avid proponent of agricultural innovation, and an original subscriber to Cassius Clay's *True American*.⁷⁹ Fayette County's meeting drew up four resolutions broadly defining their opposition to slavery as based on the peculiar institution's antagonism to the rights of man and of free government, inconsistency with "sound morality," and its threat to the prosperity of the Commonwealth. Fayette County's delegates to the Frankfort Convention included Robert J. Breckinridge, Judge George R. Trotter, George P. Jouett (son of noted artist Matthew Jouett and one year shy of his election to Lexington's mayoralty), Carter H. Harrison (Chicago's famous post-Civil War mayor), Joseph Underwood (who served in the United States Senate beside Henry Clay), and John Curd (former state senator). The state convention at Frankfort adopted the Fayette Resolutions as the principal grounds for their opposition to slavery and stated further that their candidates would secure emancipation only if it was coupled with a plan for colonization. The convention reflected the

⁷⁸ John Brown and others, "An Address to the Presbyterians of Kentucky, Proposing a Plan for the Instruction and Emancipation of their Slaves," in *Anti-Slavery Records and Pamphlets* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970); "Centre College Annual Catalogs, 1832-1885," Centre College Special Collections, Digital Archives, <http://www.centre.edu/web/library/sc>; E. H. Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, 1864), II: 308-309, 522-524.

⁷⁹ "Sign of the Times," *True American*, June 17, 1845.

disparate nature of the South's antislavery movement. Amongst the one hundred and fifty-seven delegates were the radical abolitionist John G. Fee, the more conservative (though increasingly radical since his initial antislavery conversion) Cassius Clay, and the colonizationist Robert J. Breckinridge. Despite this broad spectrum of opinion (Fee, although practically alone in his radical sentiments amongst an otherwise conservative body made his presence felt by securing membership to the platform committee), the delegates agreed upon a unified platform. The compromise document declared that Kentucky's emancipationists were convinced that the people of Kentucky held in their power the constitutional right to enact a plan of gradual emancipation. The end result was overwhelming defeat for the antislavery forces, who only secured ten thousand votes and failed to elect any delegates in the twenty-nine counties in which candidates ran on the "Frankfort Plank." Despite this overwhelming defeat (Kentucky's 1849 Constitution would entrench rather than remove slavery), it is in some ways remarkable that ten thousand inhabitants in twenty-nine counties in a slave state after the rise of radical abolitionism braved a cholera epidemic to vote for a prospective end to slavery.⁸⁰ Indeed, the dramatic failures and small successes of the Kentucky's emancipationists in 1849 highlight two significant facts about the South's antislavery and reformist movements.

The first stems from the fourth proposition of the Frankfort Convention: "This Convention confines its recommendation to the question of negro slavery, and makes no expression of opinion on any other topic."⁸¹ Apparently, the delegates at Frankfort assumed that Kentucky's citizenry could interpret their convention as encompassing further designs. This is understandable considering that many of the delegates congregated within the halls of the state capitol were pivotal leaders in the state's overall reform movement. While antislavery sentiment may have been a chief goal of antebellum reform, it was by no means the sole goal of the Upper South's reformist movement. Rather, in their pursuit for morality and modernity, these reformers did not remain contented to plot slavery's end (though many of them assumed that slavery was the primary impediment to their goals), but rather attempted to enact far-ranging changes across their home states.⁸²

⁸⁰ Breckinridge, *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky*; George W. Ranck, *History of Lexington, Kentucky* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1872); Asa Earl Martin, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky Prior to 1850* (Louisville: Standard Printing Company, 1918), 124-137.

⁸¹ Breckinridge, *The Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky*, 2.

⁸² I agree with Steven Mintz's characterization that concern for moral reform and new conceptualizations of modernity drove the antebellum reform movement, North and South.

Anti-slavery Methodists and Presbyterians managed their respective institutions of higher education while Cassius Clay tackled the issue of common schools. Slave-state Kentucky became only the third state in the Union, following Massachusetts and Michigan, to create a State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction. Named to the position by Whig Governor William Owsley, Robert J. Breckinridge increased public school attendance from a little more than twenty thousand enrolled students across the commonwealth to over two-hundred thousand pupils at the time of his resignation in 1853. He is considered the “father” of public education in Kentucky. As one of the first directors of the Kentucky Agricultural and Mechanical Association, reflecting his Whiggish goals for innovative farming and manufacturing techniques, Breckinridge also left his mark on Kentucky’s education system through the establishment of a agriculture and mechanical college on Henry Clay’s former plantation that would eventually become the University of Kentucky. Breckinridge was joined in this organization by John A. Sayre, founder of an all-girls academy, ACS member Isaac Shelby, and Abram Van Meter and Edward Oldham, who joined Breckinridge as delegates from Fayette County to the Frankfort Convention. The Kentuckians, however, were not alone in their dedication to improved education.⁸³

A committee formed by the superintendent of Robeson County, North Carolina’s schools noted the inequality inherent in the state’s common school laws whereby free blacks were forced to help fund a school their children could not attend. Specifically, free blacks, who were “poor, ignorant, and vicious, & Consequently troublesome,” could benefit from an education that would allow them to read the Bible. Rather than provide educations to free African-Americans, North Carolina’s government exempted them from the tax. In addition to his financial contributions to Kansas State University’s predecessor, George S. Park founded his own Park University in Missouri. The *Industrial Luminary* shared its owner’s educational concerns and consistently voiced its advocacy of female education. The objectives of his paper, according to Park, were to “promote the principles of temperance, morality and virtue.” Cassius Clay’s *True American*, like the *Luminary*, filled its pages with agricultural innovations, praise for manufacturing, and concerns for Christian morality. These reform-minded southerners were intimately aware of the integration of slavery within the fabric society. Thus, literacy, education, industrialization,

⁸³ W. H. Vaughan, “Robert J. Breckinridge, Pioneer Educational Administrator,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 23, no. 5 (1946): 284-306; Ranck, *History of Lexington*, 277.

agricultural improvement, morality, and slavery were all inextricably linked. Citing a speech by John C. Young, the *True American* managed to title an article “Christian Spirit,” recount Young’s denunciation of outlawing slave literacy as contrary to Christianity, and include a pithy agrarian bent by proclaiming that the pro-slavery arguments could “not even hold potatoes” to Young’s eloquence. Petitioners in Tennessee, which along with Delaware became one of two slave states to pass temperance laws, recommended that tippling houses be shut down as they provided spirits to slaves, resulting in great injury to morality and fostering crime.⁸⁴

This same acknowledgement of the centrality of slavery within society caused the timidity in the Deep South reformers studied by John Quist. Moral reforms like Sunday Schools and temperance were palatable to southern tastes (indeed, Tennessee petitioners had argued that temperance reform could lead to less mischief from slaves). However, even the most conservative of antislavery ideologies, colonization, was denounced as “abolitionist” by many of Alabamian reformers, and reforms that could have improved the lot of slaves were largely ignored. Quist insists that Alabama’s education movement only “lagged” behind Michigan’s, but the body of his statistical work simply does not show much interest at all in common schools or literacy (white or slave). Quist’s sample of forty-one Sabbath-school teachers reveals only two devotees of common schools as compared to twenty-two temperance advocates. Despite the failure of emancipation, the Upper South’s reformers did score some victories in the antebellum period, especially when compared to the struggles within the Deep South. Although reform never secured the same power it held in the North (especially women’s rights), the Upper South did have its utopian communities, temperance agitators, education proponents, industrial boosters, commerce supports, religious revivalists, outspoken moralists, agrarian modernizers, and antislavery advocates. Significantly, while much of northern reformism emerged to ameliorate the negative effects of industrialization and urbanization, southern reformers hoped to institute programs to bring those revolutions south. It looked nothing like its northern counterpart and had far more failures than successes, but the Upper South disputes the claim that “the antebellum years did not constitute an ‘era of reform’ in the South.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ PARs 11284208, 11483707, 11483708, 11483709, 11483710 11483711, 11483712, 11483713, 11483714, 11483716, 11483717, 11483718, 11483720, 1148321, Race and Slavery Petition Project; Park, *Weekly Missouri Democrat*, May 8, 1885; “Christian Spirit,” *True American*, April 1, 1846.

⁸⁵ Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 60, 465; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 186-187.

The 1849 Constitutional battle in Kentucky also disputes another claim about the southern antislavery movement: that it either somehow died out after 1830 or was sabotaged by the rise of aggressive abolitionism. Eleven years before secession, Kentucky's emancipationists were both organized and confident enough to attempt a purely antislavery party platform. Throughout the antebellum period, southern opponents of slavery published pamphlets, edited newspapers, presented emancipation schemes, and provided an almost-constant denunciation of slavery. Clearly, the antislavery movement in the Upper South had its highs and lows, and differed regionally. The movement's internal dissonance was equally clear. However, opposition to slavery across the United States was also fragmented amongst free soilism, moral abolitionism, political abolitionism, and colonization. Despite these internal divisions, northerners still largely managed to overcome difference. Apparently, Kentucky's emancipationists could also overcome their internal disagreements for the greater cause. How else could radical John G. Fee and conservative Robert Breckinridge find themselves at the same convention and supporting the same document that April? Then how should we answer Kenneth Stamp's query into the "fate" of the South's emancipation movement? Simply, it just was never very popular. Until the eve of war, emancipationists turned out their newspapers, funded their schools, published their pamphlets, ran for public office, stumped across the country (and abroad), and founded their towns. And just as frequently, mobs dispatched those presses to watery graves, legislatures revoked the charters of those schools, pro-slavery advocates published counter arguments, citizens voted for pro-slavery candidates, audiences heckled speakers, and vigilantes raided those antislavery outposts. To a degree, these failures reflect the unpopularity of emancipation and the fear sparked by the possibility of a biracial America without the control mechanism of slavery. They also indicate that the male-driven, middle-class reform movement of the Upper South proved a largely ineffective strategy. The ACS dutifully noted its female donors, applauded the female auxiliaries, and claimed it only desired to elevate white workers, but in the effort to secure political support, the organization was far more interested in the friends of a governor's grandson than a broad base of support. Ultimately, these reformers failed to secure any plan of emancipation, based on a scheme of colonization or otherwise, and the increasing ferment before the Civil War ensured that these antislavery conservatives would be denounced as abolitionists by supporters of slavery and as pro-slavery agents disguised as emancipationists by northern abolitionists. The Civil War also eroded any

chance for securing the quiet and gentle social revolution that these Upper South conservatives thought possible by removing their vehicle of change: gradualism.

Gradualism

When Young and nine other members of the Synod of Kentucky framed their resolution to the question of slavery, they concurred that immediate abolition was the simplest plan for ending slavery. But immediate abolition, as they saw it, could not overcome the inadequacies of both the legal system and the stunted moral and intellectual development of the slaves. Surveying their world through paternalistic glasses, the committee recommended instead that the “full future liberty” of bonded laborers should be secured and the intervening time be filled with moral and scholastic instruction to prepare the slaves for the wilds of freedom.⁸⁶ And after the publication of the report, Young waited “patiently.” Working from Danville, Young gathered the corpus of material from northern Presbyterians who had denounced the resolution he had co-authored. Selecting as his primary targets the Reverends Samuel Steele and Samuel Crothers of Indiana and Ohio, respectively, Young reset his pen back to the assault on abolitionism.⁸⁷ The title of his pamphlet, *The Doctrine of Immediate Emancipation Unsound; In Reply to Brothers Steele and Crothers*, left little doubt as to what aspects of the abolitionists’ critiques he found most objectionable. Young’s argument against immediate emancipation is worth quoting in full.

As I before observed, I would be an abolitionist, were immediate emancipation what you sometimes represent it to be. And again: I would be an abolitionist, if immediate emancipation *such as I know it to be*, were an advantage to the liberated. There are many slaves who ought to be now freed—they give all reasonable evidence, that freedom would not be a curse to them: but there are others, whom I would feel it to be a sin to set free, under present circumstances, without giving them some previous training for their novel and hazardous sphere. The legislatures of slave states, averse to emancipation, have made the condition of free negroes as uncomfortable and degraded, as laws can well make it. They cannot raise their hand against a white man, even to defend their property or persons; nor is their oath taken against him in a court of justice. Not only is no provision made by law for their education and improvement; but they are even excluded from our schools, by the prejudices of the people. The means of education are almost inaccessible to them, even in our state, where no law debars

⁸⁶ John Brown and others, “An Address to the Presbyterians of Kentucky,” 29-31.

⁸⁷ For biographical information on the Reverends Steele and Crothers, see Gillett, 291; T. H. Ball, *Northwestern Indiana from 1800 to 1900* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1900), 197.

them from instruction. Still a moral, frugal, temperate, and industrious colored man, is far better off than the slave.⁸⁸

For Young, and many of his compatriots in the Upper South, gradual emancipation provided the perfect solution to all of the problems of abolition. These reformers hoped to create a radically different future for their slave states, one filled with manufacturing, internal improvements, and productive yeoman farmers. They also overwhelmingly envisioned a whiter tomorrow. These were dramatic hopes that contained the potential to spring forth in revolution and chaos, not an ideal situation for upper class men concerned for maintaining their control over society. Gradualism alleviated this potential threat to white society. Within this paternalistic framework, not only did gradual emancipation ensure that liberated slaves would possess all of the morality and instruction necessary to survive in their new political state, it would also guarantee a relatively painless transition for whites. Many of these Upper South reformers advocated this mixture of conservative paternalism and liberal racial ideology.

Although they surpassed most of their fellow white inhabitants of the slave states in racial altruism by arguing that slaves and blacks were capable of self-improvement and self-government (Robert J. Breckinridge publicly argued that the “mulattoes of Hayti under Petion and the blacks under Christophe have exhibited more knowledge of the principles of free government, than most white nations who have people the earth,” a claim seconded by Daniel Mayes), the members of the antislavery movement were also equally convinced that inherent racial tensions would prevent the peaceful cohabitation of whites and blacks within the same country. The Maryland Colonization Society established by vote its conviction that “the permanent and peaceful existence of two distinct races of men on the same soil, and on equal footing,” would never become a reality.⁸⁹ An agreed-upon plan for gradual emancipation would be the catholicon that saved the country from duress, “which by not materially affecting the individual rights of property, not suddenly disturbing the relation of master and slave, not injuring the great industrial pursuits of the State, and not suddenly casting upon our society at

⁸⁸ John C. Young, *The Doctrine of Immediate Emancipation Unsound; In Reply to Brothers Steele and Crothers* (Cincinnati: Taylor & Tracy, 1835), 37-38, Centre College Special Collections, Digital Archives, <https://www.centre.edu/web/library/sc/digital.html> (accessed August 5, 2007).

⁸⁹ Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*, 6; Mayes, *Proceedings of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 16-18; “The Convention,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1, no.1 (June 15, 1841): 1.

any one time a large mass of unprepared emancipated negroes, [would] secure general approval and obtain the sanction of a majority of the State.”⁹⁰

If the numerous plans of emancipation and colonization confounded Senator Tazewell’s committee, the argument that any emancipatory scheme be gradual was a near universal. It flew from the masthead of the *True American*, would make colonization cost efficient and practical (or so the arguments claimed), and united the antislavery petitioners of Tennessee with the colonizationists of Virginia. While plans for successful colonization covered a broad spectrum of removing only freed blacks to full-fledged abolition, the strategies for gradual emancipation were remarkably similar. Broadly conceived, most plans focused on a system of post-nati emancipation following legislative decree. Judge Samuel S. Nicholas and his fellow antislavery advocates from Louisville, Kentucky proposed a plan whereby all female slaves would be freed on their twenty-first birthday after a named day; the offspring of these women would likewise be free. Nicholas and his co-authors estimated that the complete eradication of slavery would require fifty years under their plan, cost little to current slaveholders, and provide no injury to unborn or young slaveholders who would know no difference. The Tennessee petition drive of the early 1830s left the mechanics of the legislation to the general assembly, though they too agreed upon a broad outline in which “all descendants of slaves, born after the passage of said law, shall be free at some age.”⁹¹

Colonizationists likewise derided abolitionists for their immediatist arguments and underscored the advantages of gradualism. Fearing an impending race war, the Maryland Colonization Society avowed that the gradual removal of America’s population of free blacks would alleviate the tension like lightning rods slowly removed electricity from storm clouds. Joseph Underwood advocated the creation of a corporation with state sponsorship (a nineteenth-century incarnation of the twentieth-century relationship shared by the federal government and the Tennessee Valley Authority) that would gradually educate emancipated slaves for their future roles as colonists. Thomas Metcalfe, a former governor of Kentucky and early president of that state’s colonization society, thought the “slow process of colonization” as the only realistic means of removing slavery from the commonwealth. Metcalfe also advocated emancipation based upon exceeding a certain age after a decreed date, but he did not share any concern for

⁹⁰ S. S. Nicholas and others *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*, 5.

⁹¹ S. S. Nicholas and others, *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*, 5; Tennessee, Race and Slavery Petitions Project.

African-Americans. While many reformers combined paternalistic anxiety for the well-being of slaves with a preference for a white America, Metcalfe was solely disturbed by the damaging effects of slavery on his fellow Caucasians. For him, gradualism was a political necessity because it alleviated the pecuniary damages to slaveholders who could sell their slaves out of state before emancipation.⁹²

Of course, gradualism was not a fantastical strategy emerging from the ether in the nineteenth-century South, but a rather old solution. If fear of a mixed society tempered potential enthusiasm for emancipation, the Upper South's antislavery advocates asserted that gradualism would serve as their augur. For them, what had happened in the North could also happen in the slave South, it was only a matter of recreating the same laws. "Incognito," a pseudonym that does not attest to the popularity of espousing antislavery rhetoric, dedicated a series of articles over the summer of 1845 explaining that post-nati emancipation was the most common emancipatory plan and a "good example" for Kentucky. Wise orators like Henry Clay also knew which names and phrases to sprinkle in their allocutions on gradual emancipation. Clay was most satisfied with his early legislative work to secure "a system of gradual emancipation, similar to that which the illustrious Franklin had mainly contributed to introduce, in the year 1779, in the state founded by the benevolent Penn." Clay also noted the emancipation plan of New York as another example worthy of emulation, if it could be done "safely and justly" (thinly veiled language meaning emancipation without insurrection, the creation of a large free black population, or violating the property rights of slaveholders). Breckinridge assumed the termination of slavery inevitable. The only decision to be made was how that end would occur: in revolution, amalgamation, or the displacement of blacks with a more "congenial race." To prove that the particularly "American scheme" of gradual emancipation was preferable, Breckinridge only nodded to the relative condition of New York and Virginia. The northern examples proved gradual emancipation "effectual" and "full of wisdom." *The Examiner* selected the same states in its June 26, 1847 comparison. Virginia lay crippled with slavery; New York "marched" to greater wealth and national prominence on the legs of free labor.⁹³

⁹² "The Convention," *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 8; Underwood, *Address delivered before the Colonization Society of Bowling Green*, 19-24; Thomas Metcalfe, "The Missouri Restriction-Abolition-Slavery-Emancipation," *True American*, June 17, 1845.

⁹³ Incognito, "No. III," *True American*, July 1, 1845; Henry Clay, *An Address Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky*, 7-8, 23; Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*, 26; Robert J. Breckinridge, *An Address Delivered Before the*

This was societal upheaval on its grandest scale. These southern reformers were casting covetous eyes on the industry, commerce, agriculture, public education, and wealth of the North and hoped to employ the exact same methods to secure that bounty.⁹⁴ In many of these reformers' writings, gradualism acquired nearly mystical powers to completely alter the economic and racial fabric of society with such gentility that apparently few would even notice. "We have much confidence," wrote Louisville emancipationists in 1849, "in the belief that a plan can be devised, which by not materially affecting the individual rights of property, not suddenly disturbing the relation of master and slave, not injuring the great industrial pursuits of the State, and not suddenly casting upon our society at any one time a large mass of unprepared emancipated negroes, will secure general approval and obtain the sanction of a majority of the State."⁹⁵ Clearly, these southerners underestimated the trials and tribulations undertaken by the northeastern states, and equally overestimated the curative powers of gradualism to heal all of white society's potential woes from relinquishing the control mechanism of slavery. Pre-Civil War reform was filled with paradoxes; they serve as the analytical framework (and title) for Steven Mintz's *Moralists and Modernizers*. The vast majority of Upper South reformers were conservatives seeking to stabilize a future white society constructed on the foundation of modernity. Gradualism provided the bridge between their contradictory hopes for control and revolution, and also emphasized their faith in "rational," measured plans.

Gradualism also afforded the opportunity to make both emancipation and colonization cost efficient. Support for compensated emancipation was particularly strong in Kentucky where the General Assembly had "no power to pass laws for the emancipation of slaves without the consent of their owners, or without paying their owners previous to such emancipation, a full equivalent in money for the slaves so emancipated." The conclusion drawn by most of the state's antislavery advocates from this clause and the all-important conjunction "or" was that the state could emancipate as many slaves as it pleased so long as it afforded compensation. As such, Breckinridge filled his writings with cost-efficient schemes on emancipating potential children of slaves, while John C. Young asserted that the sale of public lands could cover the expense.

Colonization Society of Kentucky, at Frankfort, on the 6th Day of January, 1831 (Frankfort: A. G. Hodges, 1831), 24; "Kentucky," *The Examiner*, June 26, 1847.

⁹⁴ For an excellent examination of New England's emancipatory scheme and subsequent construction of the landscape as a significantly "white" environment, the goal for many of the subjects of this study, see Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁹⁵ S.S. Nicholas and others, *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*, 5.

Joseph Underwood gave a small wink to his other reform initiatives when he argued that the small cost of colonizing a few thousand young slave women every year (and thus cheaply remove the source of slavery) could be achieved simply by “a moderate curtailment in our consumption of wines and ardent spirits.”⁹⁶ Clearly, this emphasis on compensation had its roots in the peculiarities of Kentucky’s legal system and white southerners’ love for property rights. It also reflected a growing economic concern for the source of a nation’s wealth. Building from the moral economy of Adam Smith, the political economy theories of the nineteenth-century increasingly rejected physiocratic arguments that land was the true source of wealth and relocated it in the individual prosperity and labor of a nation’s inhabitants. Armed with such a rubric to gauge their economic fortunes, beads of sweat formed on the foreheads of those antislavery reformers who resided in states where a sizeable population could neither accrue private wealth nor own their own labor.

Political Economy

At the heart of the matter were evolving ideas about “value” and what constituted wealth. At the end of the eighteenth century, the “Scottish Moral Sense” writers, primarily David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith, contested the immutable nature of wealth. Nineteenth-century men of means could peruse Benjamin Franklin’s *Essays on General Politics, Commerce and Political Economy*, conveniently republished in 1836, in which Franklin argued that the surplus material originating from labor equaled wealth.⁹⁷ Both Jeffersonian and Jacksonian ideologues, favoring independent enterprise, condemned large corporations and mercantilist activity as encroaching upon liberty. Whigs, though more congenial towards larger capitalist interests, shared in their preference for small producers and manufacturers, but displayed greater faith in government’s ability to regulate the economy and ensure fairness. Daniel Raymond, a political economist whose ideas were associated with Whiggism, supported “public” corporations that advocated internal improvements. Differences aside, independent producers were the primary shakers and movers of both Whig and Democrat economic ideology, and most

⁹⁶ Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*, 14; Young, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 12-13; Underwood, *An Address Delivered to the Colonization Society*, 15.

⁹⁷ See Jose R. Torre, *The Political Economy of Sentiment: Paper Credit and the Scottish Enlightenment in Early Republic Boston, 1780-1820* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006); Benjamin Franklin, *Essays on General Politics, Commerce and Political Economy*, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston: Hillard & Gray, 1836; repr., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971), 374.

nineteenth-century Americans subscribed to the labor theory of value whereby producers should be the true recipients of the wealth they created. In so doing, nineteenth-century Americans built upon Adam Smith's foundational differentiation between the "productive" and "unproductive" classes. Non-productivity was defined as basing one's means solely upon the exchange of capital; such ownership of capital strengthened the desire for monopolies that damaged the free market. Within this intellectual framework, wealthy merchants, farmers, and industrialists could maintain their position in the producer class by investing in their trades. Henry Clay staunchly advocated internal improvements and the national bank, heavily invested in a hemp factory and various turnpike stocks (one of those "public" corporations favored by Raymond), and acquired great wealth and enormous debt simultaneously, but his agricultural produce secured his place in the producing ranks.⁹⁸ Clearly, there was significant disagreement amongst nineteenth-century economists, and many slaveholders worked through the theoretical difficulties between the practice of slavery and evolving definitions of wealth and value. But for the small collection of Upper South reformers, equating the wealth of a nation with the individual wealth and labor of its citizenry presented significant challenges to the institution of slavery. As Robert J. Breckinridge noted, "Every slave that is brought here [Kentucky], must create a market for what he produces, which he never does."⁹⁹ And these reformers knew exactly how to prove that slavery was an economic albatross around the South's neck.

If one wanted to discover the economic prowess of the free states before the Civil War, any antislavery address emanating from the South would be an excellent starting point. Comparisons between slave and free states fill antislavery propaganda *ad nauseam*. The eleven authors of *Slave Emancipation of Kentucky*, whose ranks included James Speed, a friend and future Attorney General of Abraham Lincoln's, advocated an examination of Kentucky with Ohio and Virginia with New York or Pennsylvania. They not only recommended the action, but filled pages with statistical data comparing population growth, wealth, and mechanical interests. The authors exceeded their own suggestions and threw Indiana, Tennessee, and the Southwest into the mix as well. Their language reflected a perceived antagonism amongst the states.

⁹⁸ Tony A. Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists: Constitutional Conflict in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 1-12; Henry Clay, *Last Will and Testament*; see also Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991).

⁹⁹ Breckinridge, *Question of Negro Slavery and the New Constitution of Kentucky*, 5.

In 1800, 45,000 people in Ohio, started on a career of competition against 220,000 people in Kentucky for populating and enriching the most rapidly, their respective States. Ohio rejected the institution of negro slavery, whilst it was retained and nourished by Kentucky. The result has been, in less than fifty years, that the 45,000 of Ohio have grown to the amount of two millions, and the 220,000 of Kentucky have grown to the amount of only some 800,000, whilst the aggregate wealth, mechanical, manufacturing and commercial industry of the two States are in about the same disproportion.¹⁰⁰

John C. Young likewise employed Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Kentucky, but also noted the value of land in addition to population growth (he also suggested that Maryland might prove an illustrative case study, but did not do the statistical grunt work himself). Unsurprisingly, he concluded that the great discrepancy in land value must come from differences in the “character of the cultivator.” Pennsylvanians were thrifty and industrious; Virginians, hounded by the negative influence of slavery, were indolent, lazy, and lackadaisical. Young also refocused his comparative lens outward and ironically proclaimed the Edict of Nantes a cautionary tale whereby France removed a productive class from its border, much to its misfortune and other nations’ gain. “The prosperity of a people depends greatly on the accumulation of capital, and increase of productive laborers. Any cause that retards these, injures a nation.”¹⁰¹ Clearly, the colonizationist Young was more concerned about importing laboring whites than exporting freed slaves. Joseph Underwood continued with the Ohio/Kentucky comparisons, adding to the sizeable mountain of material highlighting just how many more (white) people had come to live north of the Ohio River rather than south of it. He added an envious lamentation of the Buckeye state’s extensive internal improvements, particularly its canal system. His words drip with repugnance when he mentions the “immense sums” of money sent out of Kentucky for “Yankee clocks.” Additionally the value of New York’s land exceeded the worth of all of Virginia’s slaves, and the Old Dominion should be forever shamed that it was the benevolence of New Yorker Silas E. Burrows that placed a monument over the grave of George Washington’s mother. The precise calculations were repeated in pamphlets, speeches, newspapers, and institutional reports. Placed next to the article inquiring “Where is our Mechanic’s Institute?” by a sly editor of *The Examiner* were the calculations that slavery caused

¹⁰⁰ S.S. Nicholas and Others, *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*, 2.

¹⁰¹ Young, *Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 21, 23.

losses in population, political power (measure in Congressional representation), annual income, and land value.¹⁰²

The most famous (or infamous) proponent of this economical calculus was North Carolinian Hinton Rowan Helper. While most writers and speakers contended themselves with a few crucial comparisons, selecting a choice smattering of states and then examining a small number of economic factors, Helper's 1857 work, *The Impending Crisis of the South*, was an magnum opus of comparative political economy. Helper introduced his work with comparisons of Virginia and New York, Massachusetts and North Carolina, and Pennsylvania and South Carolina. *The Impending Crisis of the South* argued that at the time of the Constitutional Convention, the South and North met largely on equal terms, but this egalitarianism had been disrupted in only a few short decades by the North's growing economic might. Helper maintained that slavery was the main impediment to southern industrialism, and he had the tables to back his claim. The book contains fifty-eight tables, statistically comparing the free and slaves states in categories ranging from their agriculture production of potatoes to the financial contributions of inhabitants to Bible tract associations. Through prodigious use of statistics (based on contemporaneous understandings of political economy that understood the monetary donations of individual citizens to charitable organizations as indicators of state wealth), Helper made his case for abolition without ever arguing that slavery's end would also benefit the slaves. Indeed, Helper's racism was well-established and growing. After the Civil War, Helper developed a phobia of African-Americans and would refuse to patronize establishments that employed blacks for fear of encountering one. Unsurprisingly, *The Impending Crisis of the South* was dedicated to the "non-slaveholding whites of the South." New models of political economy framed southern reformers' intellectual understanding of slavery's effects on the South. They also established a paradigm in which southern reformers could simultaneously launch vehement assaults on the institution of slavery while maintaining an equally vehement racism.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Underwood, *Address Delivered Before the Colonization Society of Bowling Green*, 12-14; "Summing Up," *The Examiner*, October 2, 1847. For additional sources equating slavery with southern economic backwardness, see "Slavery as Retarding the Accumulation of Wealth and Increase of Population in the Southern States," *True American*, August 5, 1846; "Wake Up," *True American*, August 5, 1846; "Hogs Going from Tennessee to Cincinnati," *True American*, December 16, 1845;

¹⁰³ Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York: Burdick Brothers, 1857); see also Hugh C. Bailey, *Hinton Rowan Helper: Abolitionist-Racist* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1965); David Brown, *Southern Outcast: Hinton Rowan Helper and "The Impending Crisis of the South"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

Population and potatoes do not necessarily seem to be critical factors in determining national wealth (or how else could someone explain the prosperity of the Netherlands?), but largely basing their computations on the assumption that state wealth equated to individual wealth, these southerners clearly desired to have more citizens capable of accumulating wealth and efficiently farming their land. Nineteenth-century Protestants' religious critiques of economics also reinforced many of these already religiously-inspired reformers' criticisms of slavery. Though interpretational differences emerged from denomination to denomination, and all were contextual and temporally grounded, a general consensus emerged in the antebellum period. As one historian has described it, "Industry, thrift, frugality, sobriety, honesty, charitableness—these were the qualities that brought distinction to a man in the workplace and readied him for success. Their opposites—idleness, intemperance, prodigality, sloth, extravagance—led to economic ruin and poverty."¹⁰⁴ Slavery steered the occupants of slaves states toward the path of idleness; the benevolence of gradual emancipation and colonization rewarded industry by ensuring a place for working-class whites, guaranteeing that all emancipated slaves were prepared to take their place as productive members of America's civil society (as advocated by the Tennessee petitioners of the early 1830s) or as leaders along the coast of Africa. That these largely upper-class, reform-minded men would also be spreading Christianity to Africa through their colonial endeavors only iced their collective cakes and reassured them that they produced with their wealth and that they were not included amongst Franklin's "millions employed in doing nothing, or in something that amounts to nothing."¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

The antislavery movement in the South was not betrayed by the rise of northern aggressive abolition, though southern reformers often claimed that any potential for success had been squandered by those zealots. The southern antislavery did suffer from internal dissonance, but no more so than other more successful nineteenth-century reform movements. When the time came for Kentucky's Constitutional Convention in 1849, radical John G. Fee stood with conservative Robert J. Breckinridge to form a united antislavery political party. Presbyterian Fee

¹⁰⁴ Richard W. Pointer, "Philadelphia Presbyterians, Capitalism, and the Morality of Economic Success," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1780-1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 176.

¹⁰⁵ Franklin, *Essays on General Politics, Commerce and Political Economy*, 451.

shared newspaper space with Baptist and gradual emancipationist Pendleton, separated only by the column of a colonizationist. Simply, the southern antislavery movement, composed of well-to-do men grounded in a nineteenth-century liberalism that placed them as the true agents of societal change, was never truly popular. Despite repeated claims that they worked for the advancement of white laborers, these upper class men were largely uninterested in integrating those workers within their associations. They were equally uninterested in incorporating white women. The reader can almost hear the polite applause in the reports of auxiliary colonization societies at the mention of new female societies. Aside from charitable donations, however, little energy was exerted to bring women fully into the fold. This male-driven reformism may have incorporated some of the leading men of the nation, but it was too hopelessly undemocratic to secure widespread support at times of elections.

Although a failure, the southern antislavery movement was not insignificant. It survived until the eve of Civil War and represented a significant arm of the overarching southern reform movement. As John Quist has noted, there were meaningful similarities between northern and southern reformism. Emerging at the same time and engaging with similar religious, economic, and social questions, the reform movements of the North and South naturally had much in common. Of course, there were also significant differences in the projected aims of each movement. Northerners sought to ease the hardships and moral perils associated with cramped urban living and unsafe industrial employment; southerners, in contrast, were simply trying to secure population growth and manufacturing interests. Likewise, the different constituencies and aims of these respective movements suggest greater discordance than resonance between northerners and southerners. The southerners largely hoped to transform their territory into a more successful and whiter version of the North, and the promise of gradualism ensured that they would not suffer the same problems as their northern compatriots. Most men, North or South, who sought the end of slavery also engaged in other nineteenth-century reformist initiatives. They advocated temperance, presided over and founded universities, urged greater public education, and supported missionaries. Slavery did not come to a peaceful end in the South, but many of these other reforms had lasting impacts.

Ultimately, their reformism was broadly based on a shared vision of a prosperous white future filled with hard-working laborers, grateful mechanics, and industrious farmers who happily toiled in a world free from the threat of racial conflict. And many of them

paternalistically wished the same luck for the coast of Africa and the small American outpost there. As these advocates of internal improvements watched the North increasingly surpass the South in economic output, they sought economic models to explain how their homeland, once the land of milk and honey, could be so easily overtaken by places like Connecticut, whose “iron-bound” soil would drive southerners to the poor house.¹⁰⁶ Utilizing new definitions of state wealth based upon individual value and labor, these reformers had little difficulty in determining how Ohio had become so much more than Kentucky. These hybridized reformers, seeking enormous societal changes but fearing losing control, placed an almost fanatical (and probably delusional) faith in gradualism. They could envision their single-race and modernized future, and assumed that everyone would gladly concede to decades of transition without unrest. It seems an unlikely scenario.

The Upper South reformers occupied a unique position in American society. Overwhelmingly, they were conservative elites, often landed, intellectuals, or members of the clergy, who sought spectacular societal changes without disrupting the community. That alone does not make them particularly unusual. The central paradox of antebellum reform noted by Steven Mintz is the internal conflict between conservative moralists and innovative modernizers. Southern reformers *were* unique in their specific goals. While northerners struggled with the negative effects of industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and burgeoning populations, these southerners simply hoped to foster those developments. As such, the antebellum period did constitute an “age of reform” for the South, but southern reformers perceived their region as inhabiting a different stage of development and desired to follow in northerners footsteps (while rationally planning a smoother transition). Although both northern and southern reformers emerged from similar epistemological backgrounds, they understood the needs of society differently. The reformers of the Upper South may have been in an unusual position for nineteenth-century Americans, but from a global context their predicament was not the least bit extraordinary.

¹⁰⁶ Young, *Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 22.

Chapter 2

“The Greatest Liberal of all Europe:” Russia and the Dilemmas of Gradual Landed Emancipation

Roughly five thousand miles distant from the southern United States, another inward-looking minority struggled with similar anxieties over economic, political, and moral backwardness. The absorption of Western European ideologies in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars signaled to a small intellectual corps that Russia was falling farther and farther behind its western cousins. Unlike many of their counterparts in the America who highlighted slavery as the predominant cause of the South’s malaise, these reform-minded Russians highlighted a litany of evils within autocratic Russia. However, all of their proposed reforms were heavily indebted to what W. Bruce Lincoln called a renewed nineteenth-century “quest for liberation,” and none more so than the repeated calls for the end of serfdom.¹⁰⁷ Like the American South, Russia’s efforts to join the ranks of other western free-labor societies would be characterized by trepidation, impediments, hesitation, resistance, and a well-placed minority of reformer agitators driving the decades-long process.

From 1861 to 1865, the Southern Confederacy militarily organized to defend the legal right of nearly four hundred thousand individuals to own four million slaves. In Russia, the irregularity of the census (which did not include all the territories of the Russian empire) and the practice of only counting male “souls” lead to greater ambiguity in population statistics. Out of a population of roughly sixty million people, Russia at the time of emancipation contained one-hundred thousand noble estate owners, approximately twenty-five million state peasants (peasants bound to state lands without intervening noble or church management) and between twenty-two and twenty-three million serfs (those tied to the estates of noblemen). The remaining population constituted free men and women: townspeople, Cossacks, and the clergy.¹⁰⁸ Despite Russia’s greater disparity in wealth, autocratic government ensured that the gradual emancipation of millions of bonded laborers occurred without significant bloodshed, either as peasant revolt or rebellion by the beneficiaries of that servitude as in the United States.¹⁰⁹ The inadequacies of the Emancipation Acts signed by Tsar Alexander II on February 19, 1861 have

¹⁰⁷ W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy, and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), 61.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Scribner, 1974), 144; David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* (London: Longman, 2001), 20; Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Russia’s Age of Serfdom, 1649-1861* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 170.

¹⁰⁹ Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, 51-58; Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* (London: Longman, 2001), 3-18.

been well documented by historians. Authors based in Western Europe and North America tend to emphasize the mind-numbingly slow process of emancipation and the plan's complexity as indicative of the overarching problems of bureaucratic autocracy. Russian historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries typically viewed the Great Reforms as one great missed opportunity, while their later Soviet counterparts, who were conceptually yoked to the writings of Karl Marx and Vladimir Ilich Lenin, highlighted the economic tensions that spurred reform, the insufficient provisions for peasant landownership, and derisory financial burdens placed on peasants to purchase their plots.¹¹⁰ Even Peter A. Zaionchkovsky, one of the greatest Soviet specialists on nineteenth-century Russia and a historian who employed political, social, and intellectual lenses to view the reform era, began his *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* with the statement that "The abolition of serfdom was necessary for the consolidation of capitalism in Russia."¹¹¹

Indeed, the Emancipation Act was astoundingly complex, ponderously slow, and economically burdensome to peasants and the state. Twenty-two enactments published on three-hundred and sixty-one oversized pages constituted the act. The proclamation immediately freed serfs to marry as they pleased, accumulate property, and engage in their choice of trades. Conversely, the serfs would continue for two more years much as they had before, abiding by their previously arranged rent payments in either *barshchina* (agrarian labor obligations to their estate owners) or *obrok* (payments in lieu of labor that could either be in the form of monetary annuities or vendible goods). After this initial two-year period, the peasants could engage their former masters in negotiations for the price of the land that they would have to purchase; legally, this process could take up to seven years and had to be officially reviewed by the government mediators, *mirovye posredniki*, before the final transfer of lands could take place. With the approval of all parties, the government would then advance the landholder roughly eighty percent of the land's surveyed value. The individual peasants would then be responsible for

¹¹⁰ See Lincoln, *The Great Reforms*, xii-xvii, 87-90; Abbott Gleason, "The Great Reforms and the Historians Since Stalin" in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*, eds. Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1-16; Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 180-182; Steven L. Hoch, "The Serf Economy, the Peasant Family, and the Social Order" in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, ed. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 199-209; Adam B. Ulam, *Russia's Failed Revolutions: From the Decembrists to the Dissidents* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 66-128.

¹¹¹ Peter A. Zaionchkovsky, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, trans. Susan Wobst (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1978), 1.

securing the remaining twenty percent of their allotment's worth. Technically, the former serfs could accept a "beggar's allotment" that carried no redemption requirements, but the size of the land accorded through this option amounted to a quarter of the norm established by the Emancipation Act. Control of all other peasant lands were transferred to the *mir*, the peasant commune, which through mutual responsibility guaranteed that the community would repay the government's initial advance to the landholders within forty-nine years. Such an arrangement ensured the survival of the medieval commune that maintained older practices like the three-field system and periodic redistribution of peasant lands, and retarded Russia's agricultural development into the twentieth-century (broadly speaking, this outcome was not entirely dissimilar from the American South's adoption of inefficient share-cropping to replace its plantation economy).¹¹²

However, for all of its shortcomings, Russia's version of emancipation had its contemporary admirers across the Atlantic Ocean. Kentucky abolitionist and Minister to Russia, Cassius Clay, in an 1863 oration in which he ironically proclaimed that "Gradual emancipation always proved a failure and abolition a success," also named Tsar Alexander II "the greatest liberal of all Europe... who is more worthy of the name of 'the Great,' for the millions he has made free, than Alexander Macedon was for the millions he made slaves!"¹¹³ Not every citizen of the Upper South viewed the Russian emancipation through the same rose-colored lenses as Clay. In Milford, Delaware, the *Peninsular News and Advertiser*, ran a series of articles in 1861 and 1862 criticizing the "incomplete" nature of Russia's emancipation because it created a "monetary crisis," muddled landownership, and failed to answer where Russia's labor supply would originate without bonded labor. Reflecting the common Upper South belief that abolition must be founded on education for the soon-to-be-former slaves to ensure "proper" post-emancipation behavior (and also delay the date of abolition), the Delaware paper asserted that "It

¹¹² For more complete examinations of the Emancipation Act, see Lincoln, *The Great Reforms*; Eklof, Bushnell, and Zakharova, eds., *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*; Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*; Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*; Raeff, *Transformation of Imperial Russia, 177-186*; Gregory L. Freeze, ed., *Russia: A History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 170-199.

¹¹³ Cassius Clay, *Speech of Cassius M. Clay, Before the Law Department of the University of Albany, N.Y., February 3, 1863*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wynkoop, Hallenbeck, & Thomas, 1863), 18, 21.

is no wonder, moreover, that the newly emancipated serfs should indulge in excuses in their first transports of joy at their liberation from the brutal knout and lash....”¹¹⁴

Despite criticism for the plan from both contemporaries and historians decades afterward, the Emancipation Act, when viewed from a war-ravaged United States with newly-freed but landless American slaves, had some remarkable strengths that many southern antislavery advocates like Clay envied.¹¹⁵ Obviously, it ensured a “revolution from above” that avoided a Haiti-style slave revolt. Historians differ on peasant unrest and disappointment with the emancipation. While some calculations of serf protests numbers as low as two-hundred and fifty instances in 1861, others have identified nearly two thousand. The discrepancies largely result from the discontented serfs’ propensity for civil unrest even before emancipation. Although another source of quantitative contention amongst historians, nineteenth-century pre-emancipation peasant rebellions minimally number in the hundreds, if not in the thousands. With a population already prone to unrest, it is impossible to determine the exact number of serf revolts based upon the inadequacy of the emancipation decree. There *is* general agreement that the massacre of roughly two-hundred unarmed peasants in Bezdna, in the Kazan province, was one of the worst instances of bloodshed. The slaughter at Bezdna clearly highlights that the Russian Emancipation certainly was not bloodless, but the body count never approached the price of abolition in the United States or Haiti. Indeed, the 1861 rebellions even failed to equal the size or organization of the late eighteenth-century Pugachev Rebellion in which tens of thousands of peasants militarily opposed Catherine the Great’s government. While peasant protests in 1861 (regardless of their actual number) did hint at greater rural unrest and hastened confrontation between Russia’s disenchanting radicals and the Tsarist regime, particularly the street riots by students of the University of St. Petersburg, the overarching turbulence increasingly subsided throughout 1862 and 1863 (when new problems like the 1862 St. Petersburg fire and the 1863 Polish Rebellion captured center stage).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ “Singular Disturbance in Russia,” *Peninsula News and Advertiser*, November 15, 1861; “Affairs in Russia,” *Peninsula News and Advertiser*, November 28, 1861; “Political Movements in Russia,” *Peninsula News and Advertiser*, March 14, 1862.

¹¹⁵ Reevaluating Russia’s Emancipation Act through a comparative lens has been advocated by Esther Kingston-Mann in *In Search of the True West: Culture, Economics and Problems of Russian Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and Susan P. McCaffray who quotes Kingston-Mann’s “musings” in “Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution: Projects for Serf Reform in the Time of Alexander I,” *The Russian Review* 64 (January 2005): 1-21.

¹¹⁶ Lincoln, *The Great Reforms*, 164-168; Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 176-177; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 369-370.

Stephen P. Frank notes in his study of rural crime and justice that for every blatant act of peasant resistance “resolution in other forums frequently preceded such conflicts.” Thus, peasants utilized Russia’s courts and bureaucratic systems in addition to acts of violent resistance to secure greater rights and material benefits in the post-emancipation decades.¹¹⁷ The opposition of many authors like Nicholas Karamzin, who stated that “Serfs can be liberated as soon as it is possible for wolves to be fully fed while sheep remain uninjured,” was also quite prevalent.¹¹⁸ There were, however, noblemen like those in the Tver Assembly who requested a more radical plan of emancipation as the moderation and timetables of the Emancipation Act produced confusion (“Sovereign! We sincerely admit that we ourselves do not understand the Statute”). The act “improved the peasants’ material welfare somewhat, but did not free them from servile dependency; nor did it eliminate all the lawlessness caused by serfdom.”¹¹⁹

Despite the disdain of Delaware’s *Peninsula News and Advertiser*, many features of Russia’s road to emancipation would have been familiar to southern antislavery advocates. State-sponsored emancipation was advocated by a comparatively small cadre of elite intellectuals as part of a larger reformist response to perceived notions of Russian backwardness. The dramatic failure of the Crimean War may have been the immediate trigger that highlighted Russia’s degraded position juxtaposed against Western Europe, and numerous historians examining the abolition of serfdom in a purely Russian framework have singled out the failed military venture as a primary factor. However, in a transatlantic analytical framework, notes Peter Kolchin, abolitionism’s roots are not so easily distinguished. While the Crimean War did not lead to slavery’s demise in America, South America, or the Caribbean, few would argue that the nearly simultaneous abolitions of bonded labor within those geographic locales were coincidental.¹²⁰

Rather, these Russian intellectuals and elites were responding to broader questions of reform raised by the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Russia’s involvement in the Napoleonic Wars introduced its noble military officers to Western Europe’s *mélange* of

¹¹⁷ Stephen P. Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 10-11.

¹¹⁸ Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia: From the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 569-570; For examinations of noble resistance to emancipation, see Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, 169-171; Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, 575-600.

¹¹⁹ Tver Noble Assembly, “Address of the Tver Noble Assembly: February 1862,” in *From Supplication to Revolution: A Documentary Social History of Imperial Russia*, trans. and ed. Gregory L. Freeze (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 104-105.

¹²⁰ Peter Kolchin, “Some Controversial Questions Concerning Nineteenth-Century Emancipation from Slavery and Serfdom,” in *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, ed. M. L. Bush (New York: Longman, 1996), 42-67.

intellectual responses sparked by French rejection of absolutism and feudalism. Despite this acceptance for the need for reform, these liberals advanced a wide range of answers to the perceived questions of Russian backwardness; the abolition of serfdom was the most dramatic and far-reaching proposal amongst broader economic, political, and social reforms. Most, but not all, of these intellectual and reformist elites feared the dramatic social upheaval that enveloped France in the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As such, most Russian reforms, emancipation included, were advocated in gradualist terms to ensure smoother transitional periods. Conceptualizations of Russian backwardness and economic stagnation were often viewed through the lens of nineteenth-century interpretations of political economy. Russia, with its enormous population of bonded laborers, troubled political economists. Additionally, political economists' emphasis on labor as the source of personal wealth yoked means of labor with national identities. Like slavery, serfdom proved a troubling model as an institution that simultaneously robbed a large percentage of the population of their economic income from labor and lined the pockets of a few who did not till the soil. Those American reformers who worried about the effects of slavery on the South's economy and her people had kindred spirits in Imperial Russia's vast empire.

Nineteenth-century Russia looked very little like the American South. Politically, autocracy and republicanism existed on different planes. Socially, communal serfdom organized the serfs' daily lives, and their obligations to their masters would have been almost unrecognizable to an American slave. Questions of race and the serfs' "proper home" never entered into the Russian discourse. In early nineteenth-century tsarist Russia, where constitutional plans for intentionally limited and politically weak legislative assemblies failed to materialize, citizenship did not constitute the intellectual lightning rod that it did in the United States. Despite these significant dissimilarities, the Russian emancipation plan bore striking similarities to the schemes of the American South's antislavery reformers due to their shared understandings of backwardness. This chapter examines the government's plan to secure a western-defined modernity while hoping to simultaneously maintain the established hierarchies of power within the state. It was a dream, dramatic change without disturbing the relationships of power, shared by the reformers of the southern United States.

Reformism

The intelligentsia and nobility have an awkward relationship in Russian history. Historian Marc Raeff distinguished the two by demarcating the nobility as the “seedbed” of the intelligentsia.¹²¹ Although Raeff never explicitly defined what constituted membership in this elite group, he suggested that their nineteenth-century emergence reflected the convergence of the eighteenth-century nobility’s commitment to service and intellectual pursuits with the post-Napoleonic fervor embodied in the Decembrists. Westernization, however, is a complex and indistinct term in which intellectuals may reject, adopt, or transform certain characteristics simultaneously. Engagement with Enlightenment principles fostered an activism within Russia’s service-oriented nobility largely absent from the movement’s Western Europe roots where the simple removal of obstacles sufficed. However, Raeff does not examine the intellectual responses to the arrival of Enlightenment ideologies that entrenched serfdom by casting the peasant as unprepared and inherently ill-suited for freedom and molding the serf owner into a paternalistic figure.¹²² For Raeff, “concentric circles” of the aristocracy, noblemen, those favoring westernization and modernization, and, finally, the apogee of those western-facing men who eloquently and pain-stakingly sought to restructure the entirety of Russian society along western lines, constituted the foundation upon which the nineteenth-century’s zealous reformers established themselves. In many ways, the Decembrists were an obvious and romantic choice to serve as nineteenth-century archetypes for the intelligentsia’s “fervor.”

Often called the “First Russian Revolution,” the Decembrist Revolt originated from the Western European experiences of army officers who had assisted in the defeat of Napoleon and the failed political reforms that many had hoped Tsar Alexander I would bring. The 1801 coronation of Alexander I coincided with a state seemingly ripe for change. Enlightenment and French ideologies had reached Russia, leading many intellectuals to question the continuation of serfdom, while the inefficient state bureaucracy struggled under tremendous national debt. Further hopes of reform were flamed by the rise of liberal Mikhail Speransky within the tsar’s circle of advisors. Beginning as a secretary to a well-placed aristocrat, Speransky was named State Secretary in 1808 armed with plans for dramatic changes in state organization based on the separation of powers advocated by Montesquieu. The liberal agenda of Alexander I seemed so

¹²¹ Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 3-13, 148-171.

¹²² Roger Bartlett, “Defenses of Serfdom in Eighteenth-Century Russia,” (Fifth Annual Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia, Gargnano, La Fenice Edizioni, 1996), 67-74.

certain to produce reform and a new state structure that English political theorist, philosopher, and opponent of slavery Jeremy Bentham offered his services to the Russian tsar in 1814 to restructure the Russian state. However, Speransky's crackdown on incompetent and inefficient noble administrators and his financial reforms, which were not conducive to the nobility's economic interests, made him unpopular with the majority of the nobility, a crucial demographic with the approach of war with France. Speransky was sacked and exiled to Siberia in 1812, Bentham's services went unused, and Alexander largely turned away from his reformist agenda to prosecute the war.¹²³

Thus, the Decembrist plot emerged from the frustrations of unfulfilled promises. Though described as a movement consisting of secret societies within the Russian military, the Decembrists were not an ideologically homogeneous group. Generally united by a liberal reformist agenda that constituted some notion of political reform and the abolition of serfdom, individual Decembrists varied widely on their vision of a westernized Russia. Nikita Muraviev advocated a rather conservative constitutional monarchy model; Pavel Pestel, in his program entitled *Russian Justice*, envisioned a strictly centralized republic based on the French Jacobin model that guaranteed civil rights to all Russian citizens, and also presented a dramatic redistribution of land into public and private sectors to ensure land for everyone. These internal disagreements, which by no means were agreeable to hot-headed radicals like Pestel, went unresolved through the multiple manifestations of the secret organizations. This largely stemmed from the society's initial desire to work with the government to secure reform, an emerging emphasis on securing reform through philanthropic and education work, and the fact that membership oaths required only generic reassurances that the would-be member would maintain the society's secrets and support the end of serfdom and liberal reform.¹²⁴

The Decembrists were heavily indebted to western ideologies and revolutionary movements. While in Paris, M. S. Lunin encountered Russian translations of Adam Smith, Benjamin Franklin, Beccaria, and Filangieri, and noted within his personal journal that he was

¹²³ Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772-1839*, 2nd ed. (The Hague: Martinusnijhoff, 1969); Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 149-157; Anatole G. Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825: The Decembrist Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1937).

¹²⁴ Patrick O'Meara, *The Decembrist Pavel Pestel: Russia's First Republican* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution*; Mikhail Zetlin, *The Decembrists*, trans. George Panin (New York: International Universities Press, 1958); Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 153-157; Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 319-322; Ulam, *Russia's Failed Revolutions* 3-65.

acquainted with some of the writings of George Washington.¹²⁵ Engagement with western ideologies characterized reformers like the Decembrists, but the encounter with western ideals also fostered a nativist response that rejected westernization as a model and instead called for a return to the “natural” evolution of the seventeenth-century tsardom characterized by paternalism, Orthodox piety, familial attachment to the royal family, and a shared sense of community. These Slavophiles, however, shared westernizers’ disdain for serfdom as an institution, governmental censorship and control over intellectual and cultural pursuits, and viewed the contemporary manifestation of the government as a western aberration artificially grafted onto Russian society by Peter the Great. These westward-looking and inward-gazing reformers shared a common rejection of the present, and instead battled for control over Russia’s future.¹²⁶

Reformists in the western style were in a relatively unique position. The striking weakness of Russia’s middle class, the engine of Western Europe’s assault on feudalism and absolutism, necessitated that the majority of reformers emerged from the ranks of the nobility. With its long-standing relationship and service to the tsar, the nobility were not the most revolutionary of reformers (of course, there were also numerous exceptions like Pestel). Also, the odd place of Russia’s civil society channeled Russia’s western-inspired reformist impulses to largely working within the confines of the state to orchestrate a “revolution from above.” Historian Joseph Bradley argues that Western European definitions of civil society have led to premature conclusions that Imperial Russia lacked such a society. Conceptualizations of civil society as necessarily a check to governmental power, an adversarial relationship advocated by Jürgen Habermas, assumes a level of official transparency found within western-style democracies but largely absent from the Russian context. Bradley’s trajectory examines civil society within an ambiguous relationship to the state (capable of being oppressive, subversive, or cooperative). Voluntary associations were always under the watchful eye of the tsarist regime, but the intermingling of state and voluntary association necessitates that the two not be so easily demarcated. Bradley notes that institutional voluntary associations often predated the rise of constitutions and nationalist assemblies, due to the power granted to members to choose their own identities and governance, and consequently the growing ranks of voluntary associations

¹²⁵ Glynn Barratt, *M. S. Lunin: Catholic Decembrist* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 44.

¹²⁶ Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 162-169; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801-1855* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

after the Great Reformers concerned a decidedly authoritarian regime. “Thus,” for Bradley, “associations demonstrated what public life could be, even under autocracy, and why this public life was threatening to the authorities.”¹²⁷ While I disagree with Bradley’s characterization of civil society as an inherently positive development (for example, the Geographical Society that Bradley notes was filled with nineteenth-century reformers also spawned ethnographical interest that would have dire consequences for twentieth-century ethnicities that found themselves outside the pale of acceptable national identities), this more complex conceptualization of civil society advances our understanding of nineteenth-century reformist strategies.¹²⁸

The Decembrist secret societies, although obviously operating outside of governmental approval, employed surprisingly similar tactics. Albeit with minimal success, the Decembrists attempted to mobilize philanthropic and educational structures in an attempt to spread reformist impulses before their ill-fated uprising. “Russia’s first revolution” looked more like a palace coup than a revolution as it lacked popular support (in fact, the Decembrists for all of their Napoleonic experience did not seriously attempt to organize the people). Ironically, the plan involved less an overthrow of the government than an attempted interjection between governments. The sudden death of childless Alexander I produced confusion in the order of succession as his next oldest brother, Constantine, had privately renounced his right to the throne, leaving Nicholas as the apparent heir. The Decembrist officers, as leaders of the Guards regiments, planned to refuse swearing allegiance to Nicholas in a feigned attempt to uphold the right of Constantine. However, the rebels were less revolutionary (and even less organized) as various members argued that they should name Nicholas’ son (the eventual Alexander II) regent or declare Alexander’s widow as Empress and then force her to abdicate. The ring leaders broadly conceived that once they had interjected into the royal succession, a manifesto would abolish serfdom, establish trials by juries, declare all citizens equal before the law, and shorten the terms of military service before summoning a national assembly to reorganize the Russian state into some western-inspired form of government.¹²⁹ Conceptually, the Decembrist platform followed Speransky’s original plan for reform in 1809: “The general object of the transformation

¹²⁷ Joseph Bradley, “Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy in Tsarist Russia,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1094-1123.

¹²⁸ See Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) for a discussion of twentieth-century Soviet ethnography.

¹²⁹ Ulam, *Russia’s Failed Revolutions*, 3-65; Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 319-322; Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution*, Zetlin, *The Decembrists*.

is to set up and base on immutable laws the government which, heretofore, has been autocratic. Administration cannot be based on law if the sovereign power alone makes the law and executes it.”¹³⁰ Although the Decembrist revolt was as ideologically cohesive as the secret societies that enacted the plan, there was an interesting underlying assumption that change could only occur when funneled through state action reminiscent of the early years of the French Revolution. Rather than tapping into the peasantry’s discord with the autocratic regime, the Decembrists settled on a well-timed strategic strike (made possible by Russia’s lack of free press which prevented widespread knowledge of whether Constantine or Nicholas was the rightful heir) to essentially blackmail the tsar into altering his own government.

The Decembrist secret societies are illustrative, but associations like the Free Economic Society are more reflective of the civil society presented in Bradley’s study. Russia’s first officially recognized association, the Free Economic Society was founded in 1765 under the Enlightenment-infused reign of Catharine II. Its advocacy of science and agricultural improvement along western lines earned the support of the autocracy. The society displayed the ambiguous relationship between state and civil society in Imperial Russia. The charter was written by the founders, and the society’s associates elected their own officers from a pool of voluntary members. Thus, the society offered members those opportunities of independence, self-identity, self-governance, and self-organization, that so threatened the tsarist regime. Conversely, the Free Economic Society enjoyed a privileged position in the government: it did not need governmental approval to explore new avenues of scientific pursuit, its publications escaped censorship, and it was allowed to import western printed material without governmental editing. Close relationships with the government would be the benchmark for much of Russian civil society until the close of the long nineteenth century.¹³¹

Echoing Bradley’s conceptualization of the Free Economic Society while adding his own twist, Colum Leckey argues that the society’s public policy was structured on older patron-client relationships that mirrored Russia’s service-models for the nobility. The society provided the government and the nobility with economic advice gleaned from the reservoir of Western Europe and the “satisfaction that derived from participating in the promotion of ‘useful’ knowledge.” In

¹³⁰ Mikhail Speransky, “Introduction to the Codification of State Laws by M. M. Speransky (1809)” in *Plans for Political Reform in Imperial Russia, 1730-1905*, ed. and trans. Marc Raeff (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 92-109.

¹³¹ Bradley, “Subjects into Citizens,” 1107-1110.; Joan Klobe Pratt, “The Russian Free Economic Society, 1765-1915” (dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1983), 1-6.

return, the Russian autocracy provided the society with the aforementioned privileges and financial support.¹³² To these benefits, Bradley would add that the association provided the government with a mouthpiece to float reformist plans and judge reactions without giving the schemes the aura of government legitimacy.

The Free Economic Society promised the modernization and greater success of Russian agricultural pursuits through the propagation of science and reasoned land use.¹³³ The over-produced *Trudy*, the main literary vehicle of the society, published scholarly articles designed to foster better management of estates, but the scholastic nature of the writing and heavy use of foreign correspondents made the organ unappealing for all but the most intellectual of Russia's estate managers and owners.¹³⁴ In addition to its own publications, the Free Economic Society also launched essay competitions to answer difficult questions. Its first query, prompted by Catherine II herself, was "What is more useful to society, that the peasant should own land or merely movable property, and how far should this right extend?" Clearly, the question centered on the issue of emancipation. Unsurprisingly for such a controversial question in an autocratic state, of the one-hundred and sixty-two responses, only seven were from Russians. Equally unsurprisingly, the winning essay advocated a limited and gradual form of peasant landownership in which holdings would be limited and rents still charged. Additionally, the author, Bearde de l'Abbaye, maintained that the "peasant question" had to be answered by the landholders themselves rather than the government. All of these initiatives would have been received favorably by the conservative reformists of the late eighteenth century.¹³⁵

While the overwhelming defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856) undoubtedly served as the spark that finally initiated the era of Great Reforms, including emancipation, it is also abundantly clear that the spark ignited a powder keg long established by decades of internal questioning of serfdom, angst over aborted reforms, enlightenment ideologies, and reactions to direct experience in Western Europe in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. Despite the repeated calls for abolition since Catherine II's reign, the challenges of emancipation were immense. Institutional taxation, military conscription, and rural justice were funneled through the nobility's

¹³² Colum Leckey, "Patronage and Public Culture in the Russian Free Economic Society, 1765-1796," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 2. (2005): 355-379.

¹³³ Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming), 12-13, 18-20.

¹³⁴ John H. Brown, "The Publication and Distribution of the *Trudy* of the Free Economic Society, 1765-1796," *Russian Review*, 36, no. 3 (1977): 341-350.

¹³⁵ Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society*, 32.

estates. The Russian state with its notoriously inefficient bureaucracy, an ineptitude ably highlighted by the disastrous military effort, would have to assume those responsibilities.¹³⁶ However, Tsar Alexander II soon recognized the spirit of the era was increasingly hostile to bonded labor. In an 1856 speech before the marshals of the nobility, Alexander II purportedly noted that “I will not say to you that I am completely against [emancipation]; we live in such an age that it must come about in time. I think that you are of the same opinion as I am: therefore it is much better that this happens from above than from below.”¹³⁷

The Emancipation Act may have been the most prominent reform to emerge from the early years of Alexander II’s reign, but it was but a single act in a larger series of state and social reforms. Indeed, the demise of serfdom had been a long-standing lightning rod for the reformist nobility, but Russia’s early attempts at reformation had never settled solely for emancipation. The mottled Decembrist reforms restructured the Russian state into some constitutional manifestation while promising reforms in taxation and military service. The Free Economic Society envisioned a westernization of Russia’s entire agricultural system, crop rotation, scientific practices, and alterations to serf-based agrarian labor. Thus, it was within a familiar framework that Alexander II enacted the Great Reforms that revised judicial procedures (mirroring the infusion of western ideology, the new Russian judiciary reflected France’s legal system), rehabilitated the army and navy, altered taxation, simplified the penal code, ameliorated capital punishment, established new rural and municipal police forces, and enacted an elaborate scheme of rural self-government (the *zemstvo*).¹³⁸

Reformers in nineteenth-century Russia owed much to the autocracy they hoped to change. While reform-minded individuals established associations to voice their concern, the Free Economic Society being only the most obvious example, civil society in Russia, lacking a middle-class backbone, never developed to the strength and complexity of Western Europe or North America. The benevolent societies that dotted the landscape of Great Britain or the northern half of the United States were largely absent from the Russian context. Lacking extra-state organizations in which to function, and thus agitate from without, reformist noblemen clustered within state-sanctioned organs or (in the case of the Decembrists) within their own

¹³⁶ Lincoln, *The Great Reforms*, 36-60.

¹³⁷ Alexander II, “Alexander II’s Speech to the Marshals of the Nobility of Moscow Province, 30 March 1856” in Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 147-148.

¹³⁸ Eklof, Bushnell, and Zakharova, *Russia’s Great Reforms, 1855-1881*; Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914*; Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 368-390; Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 170-191.

secret organizations. Almost by default, the reformers of immense, rural, and agrarian Russia, deprived of a large middle class, were clustered amongst a small circle of noblemen and intellectuals in the highest crust of society. While this “seedbed” (to use Marc Raeff’s terminology) could produce a radical like Pavel Pestel (a relative newcomer to the ranks, his grandfather had been ennobled in 1781) or the “Father of Russian Socialism,” Alexander Herzen (illegitimate son of Ivan Alexeevich Iakovlev, a family that could trace their origins to a boyar of Ivan III in the fifteenth century), it was not the most fertile soil in which to grow liberalism.¹³⁹

As both the agent and object of change, the autocracy had a complex relationship with Russian reformism. After decades of ambivalence, secret meetings, and unfulfilled promises, it was ultimately the undemocratic and autocratic nature of the tsardom that allowed Alexander II to push through the Great Reforms over the objections of many of the nobility. Despite, the reformist tsar’s claim that his trust in the nobility was justified by their zeal in creating the final statutes of the Emancipation Act, most noblemen opposed the legislation.¹⁴⁰ However, it was also the unintended consequences of the reforms and their inadequacy that sparked increasing radicalization amongst the Russian population. This revolutionary ferment led to the government’s enactment of reactionary counter-reforms. Even this conservative “revolution from above” nurtured an environment in which the taste of liberty was insufficient for the population. Once the government stopped waffling and adopted serious reforms, it opened the Pandora’s Box that all of Alexander II’s “hope in the common sense of OUR people” could not close.¹⁴¹

Gradualism

As Gregory L. Freeze has noted, “The Great Reforms sought to permit *some* social change, but it also endeavored to ensure that it was slow and gradual.”¹⁴² The reformist nobility displayed an overwhelming sense of trepidation when discussing emancipation. Their ultimate goal may have been dramatic reorganization of Russia’s political, economic, and social spheres, but these individuals also enjoyed the benefits of the anachronistic system they hoped to overturn. Partly, this anxiety was the result of the infiltration and mobilization of enlightenment

¹³⁹ O’Meara, *The Decembrist Pavel Pestel*, 9; Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 9-10.

¹⁴⁰ Alexander II, “Alexander II’s Proclamation Announcing the Abolition of Serfdom, 19 February 1861,” in Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 155-160.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 159.

¹⁴² Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 185.

ideology in Russia. Ivan Petrovich Pnin reflected this approach in “An Essay on Enlightenment with Reference to Russia,” in which he simultaneously advocated gradualism, education, and continued governmental leadership.

Enlightenment, in the present meaning, consists in every member of society, whatever his status, fully knowing and discharging his obligations; that is, in the authorities, for their part, piously fulfilling the obligations of the power entrusted to them, while the people of lower rank consistently carry out the duties of obedience incumbent upon them. When neither of these two estates exceeds its limits and they maintain the proper balance in their relationship, then enlightenment has attained its goal.¹⁴³

The goal then was to alter the institutions and structures of the state to modernize Russia along Western European lines without disrupting this delicate balance in which all parties understood their “obligations.” Clearly, the intrinsic difficulties in these two diametric goals (social, economic, and political reengineering and maintenance of position within society) presented reformers with complex problems. For decades, the result of these self-imposed restrictions was much hand-wringing and waffling. However, this emphasis on a government-led, noble revolution also predicated that the reforms themselves would be gradual in nature. The Emancipation Act signed by Alexander II in 1861 both breathtakingly altered the foundations of the Russian empire and changed very little for at least two years (similarly, President Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation also seemed to change everything and nothing with the stroke of his pen). Enacting multi-year and multi-stage plans would be a near-constant characteristic of Russian reformist plans.

Gradualism also characterized that peculiar organization in Russian civil society: the Free Economic Society. The society’s noble members, throughout its one-hundred and fifty year history, advocated plans that would ensure a gradual modernization of Russia’s countryside along western European models. One scholar has summed the organization’s proceedings for its entire history as “patient... accumulating and analyzing statistical data, urging tax relief and credit reforms, supporting small-scale cooperative ventures and agricultural education, promoting public health, parenting a literacy committee and a soil commission, arguing against high tariffs, and pushing continually for better coordination of the intellectual and economic

¹⁴³ Ivan Petrovich Pnin, “An Essay on Enlightenment with Reference to Russia,” in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. Marc Raeff (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), 126-158.

resources of urban and rural institutions.”¹⁴⁴ Although a minority amongst the nobility, these modernizers argued for immediate plans to secure gradual results. Unfortunately, Russia lacked sufficient infrastructure until the Great Reforms to ensure any large-scale success on the part of the Free Economic Society’s initiatives.

The government’s consistent hemming and hawing have led Susan McCaffray to argue that Russian emancipation reflected a sixty-year process dating to Alexander I rather than the twenty-year endeavor highlighted by most historians.¹⁴⁵ Joseph Bradley pushed the “peasant question” back to the reign of Catharine II, and noted that one of the primary reasons for the government support of the Free Economic Society was its usefulness in floating reformist agendas without the hint of governmental approval or promise.¹⁴⁶ McCaffray notes that the Baltic emancipation of the peasants of Livland and Estland under Alexander I provided Russians with practical experience in the art of abolition. Illuminating for his understandings of emancipation, the young Alexander apparently requested assistance from his tutor in achieving greater understanding of Thomas Jefferson. Gradualism was a common cornerstone of Jefferson’s otherwise generally capricious writings. Fundamentally, the problem as viewed by McCaffray was the Enlightenment concept that liberty was based on property, or at least the base societal material required to support a living. Without the capacity to create personal wealth (which, by the nineteenth century, came to be recognized as the source of national wealth), an individual was reliant on another and remained in a state of slavery. Serfdom’s gradual evolution over several centuries had created a system in which both serf and landowners held certain rights and entitlements to the same land. Thus, just as the government refused to tread upon the rights of the landed nobility, it likewise shied away from revoking the peasantry’s claims to the land. Two different approaches to emancipation occurred in the Baltic provinces. The Livland decree provided land for the peasantry and established a hereditary right to that property. In Estland, noblemen who benefited from the landless Prussian emancipation, advocated emancipation that offered no land to the recently-freed peasantry.¹⁴⁷ Although neither of these emancipation plans were particularly effective (the Livland nobility eventually requested and received permission to enact a landless emancipation akin to Estland’s), they did hint that Alexander I’s regime would

¹⁴⁴ Pratt, “The Russian Free Economic Society, 1765-1915,” 465.

¹⁴⁵ Susan McCaffray, “Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution,” 2.

¹⁴⁶ Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society*, 18-20.

¹⁴⁷ McCaffray, “Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution,” 4-10.

institute some measure of reform. This earlier reformist shell and subsequent unfulfilled promise led to the disenchantment of the Decembrists. It also accentuates the constant probing into the “peasant question” by the government and the nobility. By the time of the actual Emancipation Act, the inquiry into abolition had become “as familiar as an old rug in the family’s drawing room.”¹⁴⁸

Much of the official discussion occurred behind closed doors within the security of the administration, but this did not prevent decades of rumors in the countryside that emancipation was imminent. The 1839 annual report by the head of the secret police to Tsar Nicholas I noted that every change and major occurrence within the administration fostered rural rumors. Thus, this administrator provided the unsolicited advice that “It is necessary to start some time and with something, and is better to start gradually, carefully, than to wait until it starts from below, from the people. A measure [of reform] will be successful only if undertaken by the government itself...that it is necessary and that the peasantry is a powder keg, is agreed by all.”¹⁴⁹ The conservative Nicholas I, who began his reign with the Decembrist revolt, stated three years later that while “Freedom must not be given,” the “present situation” made it “necessary at least to prepare the way for *gradual transition* to a different order.”¹⁵⁰ McCaffray did not exaggerate when she metaphorically referred to the question of emancipation as the “old rug.” Indeed, when reform did eventually come, there was a five-year delay between Alexander II’s decision to emancipate and the statutes that made this a reality. This delay emerged from the desire to secure as many opinions and ideas from the nobility and the constant rewriting of drafts. As an indication of the popularity of emancipation amongst the nobility, the 1856 call for noblemen to submit plans for abolition produced only one response, from the tsar’s aunt. It would be simplistic to portray emancipation as a two-sided affair between the tsar and a few enlightened bureaucrats and noblemen and the rest of the land-holding estate. Alexander II’s “Secret Committee on the Peasant Question” that eventually produced the statutes for emancipation, was largely populated by conservative noblemen. As such, it is unsurprising that the committee’s first proposal claimed that emancipation was impossible and instead suggested a gradualist approach founded on the 1803 free farmers statute, which permitted nobles to sell land and freedom to

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹⁴⁹ “The Annual Report of the Chief of Third Section (The Secret Police) to Nicholas I for 1839,” in Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 139-141.

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas I, “Nicholas I’s Speech to the State Council, 30 March 1842,” in Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 142-143.

serfs, and the 1842 law on obligated peasants, which allowed noblemen to create contracts to regulate relations amongst serfs and landholders. Alexander responded by naming his brother to the committee to promote a more active plan.¹⁵¹

Thus, the eventual plan for emancipation relied heavily on gradualism to secure radical change with as little disruption as possible. As noted, the final Emancipation Act reflected this gradualist approach and provided landed property to the peasantry in line with the initial plans for the Livland emancipation. However, in his official proclamation, Alexander II did not couch gradualism in the same terms as all of the previous secret memorandums or closed-door meetings. That is, a gradualism necessary to ensure comparative peace and maintain the social hierarchy in what the examples of France, Haiti, and the United States demonstrated was a reform that instigated upheaval. Rather, in his proclamation read to peasants at church services, Alexander claimed that “given the inescapable complexity of the changes required by [emancipation]...needs time...to avoid confusion and to maintain the public and private good.”¹⁵² As evidenced by the responses of both nobility and peasants (who continued to assume that the tsar would enact a “real” freedom soon), the allotted time did not ensure comprehension, while the maintenance of “public and private good” presented a rather thin veil to conceal noble apprehension at their post-emancipation place within society.¹⁵³

While noting that gradualism was the “essence” of Russian emancipation, Susan McCaffray is more struck by the government’s simultaneous desire to guarantee both peasant and noble land rights through the course of emancipation.¹⁵⁴ Even more than an “essence,” gradualism presented reform-minded Russian noblemen with an intriguing panacea. The inadequacies of the Russian state became increasingly apparent as more Russians engaged with western ideologies in the wake of the Napoleonic War, and as Russia found itself within a shrinking circle of slave states. By the conclusion of the Crimean War, a global survey placed only the United States, Cuba, Brazil, and a few African and Asian colonies with Russia as employers of bonded labor, not auspicious company for reformers who looked to Western Europe for guidance. The transatlantic climate of liberty coupled with the dramatic defeat at the

¹⁵¹ Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 56-69.

¹⁵² Alexander II, “Alexander II’s Proclamation Announcing the Abolition of Serfdom, 19 February 1861,” 157.

¹⁵³ For examples of peasant angst, see “Reports From the Provinces on the reception of the Proclamation on the Abolition of Serfdom,” “Memoirs of Peace Mediator, Nicholas Krylov,” and “Speech by Alexander II to Township and Village Peasant Elders of Moscow Province, 25 November 1862” in Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*.

¹⁵⁴ McCaffray, “Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution,” 9.

hands of a debilitated empire of non-believers (the Ottoman Empire and “sick man of Europe”) and their western allies made the need for dramatic change alarmingly clear, but most reformist noblemen clung to the notion the revolution, once begun, could be stopped. In Alexander II’s words before the peasant elders of Moscow province, “I gave you freedom...lawful freedom...Therefore, above all, I demand from you precise fulfillment of the prescribed obligations.”¹⁵⁵ Gradualism would ensure that the parameters of “lawful freedom” were not exceeded and that social unrest would be kept at a minimum. Gradualism would somehow ensure domestic tranquility as Russia completely reengineered the foundations of its state, economy, and society. Gradualism functioned as the bridge between trepidation and enactment after initially justifying so much inaction (in the name of gradualism, Nicholas I would not bestow freedom but seed its garden). Once the inadequacies of the Russian state were undeniably exposed in Crimea, gradualism, although ultimately proven to be ineffective at securing social tranquility, provided the conservative nobility, along with their reform-minded cousins, with the needed security blanket to redesign the Russian state and live in a post-emancipation world.

Political Economy

The establishment of the Free Economic Society in 1765 was neither coincidental nor peculiarly Russian (beyond its complex association with the autocracy). Western Europe’s culture of Enlightenment sparked the creation of economic societies in practically all major centers of learning. Throughout the continent, these societies espoused a myriad of associated programs calling for economic and political reform, education for the lower classes coupled with economic education for the upper classes, promotion of technical and industrial innovations, and scientific modernization in agriculture. Emerging in the nineteenth century, political economy developed from this enlightenment study of moral economy (Adam Smith held the Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow). Although it increasingly focused on the technical and practical aspects of a state economics, political economy’s roots remained in the morality of Aristotelian *oikonomí*. The political economy societies of the nineteenth century were remarkably transnational enterprises both in terms of foreign membership and the sharing of publications. One of the repeated complaints of the Free Economic Society’s *Trudy* was its

¹⁵⁵ Alexander II, “Speech by Alexander II to Township and Village Peasant Elders of Moscow Province,” 167.

copious use of German authors; the *Trudy* was also dispatched to other western economic societies in this European empire of letters.¹⁵⁶

Susan McCaffray places the rise of political economy in Russia as one of the three key developments that led to the eventual abolition of serfdom. Through the doorway of rational, western economics, reformists and organizations like the Free Economic Society could advance ideas that the government would otherwise find dangerous. Western economics freed the *Trudy* from direct government censorship and allowed the Free Economic Society to import otherwise banned materials. McCaffray's notation that Russia's preeminence in adopting political economy is largely ignored by historians is confirmed by Massimo Augello and Marco Guidi's anthology in the Routledge Studies in the History of Economics Series. Although the work is solely dedicated to the nineteenth-century rise of political economy societies in Europe, America, and Japan, the only mention of Russia in the entire work is an offhand comment that St. Petersburg had an active society in 1856.¹⁵⁷ However, the study of political economy was popular in Russia and offered more avenues to attack serfdom. Central to nineteenth-century political economic studies was the acceptance of personal wealth (the wealth of subjects) as the benchmark for measuring the wealth of a state. Clearly, a state with twenty-two million bonded laborers largely incapable of securing financial well-being was not an efficient organization.

Court tutor Heinrich Storch's *Cours d'économie politique*, published in 1815, is but one example of the ways in which political economy offered reformers a means to criticize serfdom (additionally, written in French by a German living in Russia, it also highlights the international appeal of political economy). In Storch's treatise, serfdom was unproductive because it offered no incentive for personal gain, undermined industry by preventing the relocation of rural labor to urban factories, necessitated greater upkeep and state surveillance, and generally weakened the production of personal wealth. Building upon this foundation, chairman of the Department of State Economy, Nikolay Semyonovich Mordvinov (unsurprisingly a seventeen-year president of the Free Economic Society) presented a plan for abolition based on self-redemption in which

¹⁵⁶ See Leckey, "Patronage and Public Culture in the Russian Free Economic Society," and Brown, "The Publication and Distribution of the *Trudy* of the Free Economic Society." For a fuller discussion of eighteenth and nineteenth century economic societies in a global perspective, see Massimo M. Augello and Marco E. L. Guidi, "Nineteenth-century economic societies in a comparative approach: The emergence of professional economists" in *The Spread of Political Economy and the Professionalisation of Economists: Economic Societies in Europe, America and Japan in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Massimo M. Augello and Marco E. L. Guidi (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1-31.

¹⁵⁷ McCaffray, "Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution," 1, 12; Augello and Guidi, "Nineteenth-century economic societies in a comparative approach," 9.

serfs would purchase their freedom. This plan rewarded capitalist peasants savvy enough to accrue enough wealth to purchase their freedom, placed capital in the hands of landholders, and still supported the paternalistic argument by guaranteeing that landholders would continue to care for weaker serfs incapable of self-improvement.¹⁵⁸ Pavel Dmitrievich Kiselev, army general, hero of the Napoleonic wars, and patron of Decembrist Pavel Pestel, was another nineteenth-century reformer who submitted a plan like Mordvinov's that called for self-redemption.¹⁵⁹ Kiselev, however, went one step further than Mordvinov, declaring that "civic freedom is the foundation of popular welfare."¹⁶⁰ This understanding of wealth as based on individual freedom to pursue personal prosperity certainly fell in line with the arguments of Adam Smith, a leading advocate of personal liberty, but it was unusual amongst a nobility that largely continued to define wealth by the ownership of "souls." This nominal conundrum, however, was rectified through the malleability of ideas and indicates that the rise of political economy alone could not foment reformism. Many Russian noblemen interpreted *laissez faire* as an argument for government absence in the relationship between master and serf.¹⁶¹ This conceptualization actually allowed many noblemen to make a case for maintenance of the *status quo* without necessarily arguing for the continuation or entrenchment of serfdom. Interestingly, the number of pro-serfdom arguments, common in the eighteenth century, decrease with the rise of nineteenth century economics. Thus, Prince Constantine's private notes detailing the Committee on the Peasant Question often revolve around questions of what aspects of the *status quo* to maintain (particularly in the discussions for the size of peasant allotments).¹⁶²

This question of land highlights the interrelated nature of reformism, gradualism, and political economy. By the mid-nineteenth century, most upper-class Russians had accepted some form of political economy's theoretical axiom that individual effort was far superior to collective endeavors. Industrialized and affluent Great Britain was the beau ideal state in this economic model.¹⁶³ However, reformist fears for social upheaval and an emphasis on gradual transition

¹⁵⁸ McCaffray, "Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution," 13-15.

¹⁵⁹ O'Meara, *The Decembrist Pavel Pestel*, 20-31.

¹⁶⁰ McCaffray, "Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution," 15-16.

¹⁶¹ Kingston-Mann, *In Search of the True West*, 64-66.

¹⁶² Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, 178-179; Constantine Nikolaevich, "The Diary of the Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich, Chairman of the Main Committee on the Peasant Question, 10 October 1860 – 7 January 1861" in Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 153-155.

¹⁶³ Esther Kingston-Mann, "Peasant Communes and Economic Innovation: A preliminary Inquiry" in *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921*, ed. Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 23-26.

guided those drafting the Emancipation Act to maintain the privileged position of the peasant commune to ensure the repayment of the government's loans. Here, anxiety over revolutionary fervor trumped western economics in the reformist agenda, but the rise of political economy had helped ensure that emancipation would become a reality beyond the numerous fanciful liberal schemes that had made the "peasant question" the rug of Russia's living room.

Conclusion

The Emancipation Act was the culmination of decades of western-inspired liberal foment amongst a small corps of the Russian nobility. Russian reformism, propelled by these landed elites, reflected the peculiarities of "reform from above." Russian reformism's unique, but not completely unexceptional, combination of liberalism and conservatism stems from its origins in the aristocracy. These intellectuals engaged with the Enlightenment thought filtering into Russia and directly experienced the ideologies emerging from the French Revolution through their experience in the Napoleonic Wars. Despite obvious exceptions like Pavel Pestel or Alexander Herzen, the noble ranks were not exceptional breeding grounds for radicalism. Rather, increasing globalization through international travel, transnational organizations, and the availability of Western European philosophical, intellectual, and economic treatises sparked general unease with perceived Russian backwardness in relation to the rest of Europe. The debacle of the Crimean War was only the exclamation point added to the end of this growing anxiety. Discontent with the present did not, however, equate to a shared vision of the future. The failed Decembrist coup never solidified into a unified reformist plank despite years of underground organization and plotting. Political economists could rectify Adam Smith and serfdom through creative interpretation. The Slavophiles shared the westernizers' refutation of the present, but rejected their vision of the future.

Through this ambiguity, however, certain interlocking trends emerged. First, emancipation, although the most dramatic, was but a single plank in a larger reformist agenda. The contradictions of autocratic government were so profound and pervasive, few reformers settled solely on emancipation, and instead advocated a wide range of political, economic, and social changes. Second, their privileged position within society and the marriage of reform to the state induced reformers to adopt gradualist approaches. Fearing that their tidy reorganization of society would spark revolution, the same fervor that the reforms were designed to ameliorate,

Russian reformers and rulers grasped for the cure-all of gradualism as the means by which their revolution would be kept within its neatly defined borders. Finally, the nineteenth-century creation of professional economics through the promulgation of political economy armed reformers with a means to challenge serfdom without evoking the state's wrath and a theoretical model on which to plan future society. Of course, like all ideas, western economics were malleable enough to permit their acceptance of many without the accompanying necessity for emancipation. The autocracy, which bore the brunt of most reformist critiques of Russia, was conversely most responsible for the implementation of the Great Reforms. Although Russia did not entirely lack a civil society through which to implement reformist agendas, the vast rural empire lacking a large middle class was ill-structured to promote the formation of such associations (like the American Sanitation Commission or British National Trust). Russian reformism was more thoroughly harnessed to the state than its western manifestations because of these conditions and the requirement that civil institutions be recognized by the state. All of these factors channeled Russia's reformers into a contradictory movement, simultaneously liberal and conservative, led by the owners of souls that sought state power in order to reorganize state power through emancipation and the total reorganization of Russian society; a reengineering that would arrest revolutionary fervor while radically altering the foundation of the Russian state and its relationship with all of its citizens.

Chapter 3

“They knew a great deal about the movements in this country:” Reformism and the Transatlantic Exchange of Ideas

The site was specially chosen by Peter the Great himself. What once was a small farm twenty-nine kilometers outside of St. Petersburg steadily grew into a palatial country estate for the Imperial family—a Russian Versailles. By the time Alexander II came to occupy Peterhof, the palace and park complex spread across 2,500 acres encompassing multiple palaces, fountains, gardens, grottoes, and included such wonders as the delightfully contradictory “Cottage Palace.” Of course, none of these spectacles made it in the first letter from William Cassius Goodloe, nephew and personal secretary to newly-minted Minister Plenipotentiary Cassius Clay, to his father. What this young Kentuckian did find worthy of a side note from his narrative of Clay’s introduction to the Tsar and his Minister for Foreign Affairs were the carriage horses: “fine bay horses...proud movers, and fast trotters.”¹⁶⁴

Minister Clay found himself at Peterhof in the summer of 1861 through the peculiarities of the diplomatic carousel and the rewards granted political supporters. Clay, who had campaigned for Abraham Lincoln in 1860, had originally been slated for the mission to Spain, but fellow Lincoln supporter Carl Schurz likewise lacked a diplomatic post. The German-born Schurz had been active in revolutionary politics and supported the Revolution of 1848 before his emigration to the United States. Schurz clearly was not a match for the Tsar’s court in St. Petersburg. Biographer James Rood Robertson claims that Clay diligently accepted the advice to accept the Russian post offered in a March 27 telegraph from Lincoln-confidant (and Kentuckian by birth) Francis Preston Blair, Sr. However, pasted in Cassius Clay’s personal scrapbook is a brief March 14 clipping from New York’s *Semi-Weekly Tribune* stating that “Cassius M. Clay refuses to accept the mission to Spain. He prefers that to Russia, and will probably be granted his choice.”¹⁶⁵ Regardless of whether by gentle persuasion or brash refusal, Clay found himself that summer in a country that had just peacefully and legally abolished bonded labor based upon a

¹⁶⁴ James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 135, 140-141, 151-152; Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 218, 225, 266; William Cassius Goodloe to David S. Goodloe, 19 July 1861, quoted in James Rood Robertson, *A Kentuckian at the Court of the Tsars: The Ministry of Cassius Marcellus Clay to Russia, 1861-1862 and 1863-1869* (Berea, KY: Berea College Press, 1935), 44-47. I have been unable to locate the original version of this letter. Robertson states in his text that the letter continued to be held by Goodloe’s descendants.

¹⁶⁵ Robertson, *A Kentuckian at the Court of the Tsars*, 35; Cassius Marcellus Clay Scrapbook, 1835-1861, 2002SC16, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort.

system of gradualism and compensation uncannily similar to the plans advocated by him and his antislavery compatriots in the Upper South. Simultaneously, Clay's homeland geared for war over the same issue. Thirty years later, increasingly grandiloquent as he struggled to retain his once formidable place in public affairs, Clay spoke about his time in Russia.

When I reached my post of duty at St. Petersburg I found the Russians as well acquainted with my public life as the English [an initial stopping point in Clay's European travels], and almost as well as the Americans themselves. In the family of hereditary royalty I found a purpose of liberation of the serfs similar to the work I was engaged in at home. They knew a great deal about the movements in this country, and my history, and therefore we were in immediate sympathy.¹⁶⁶

Braggadocio on his notoriety aside, it is completely believable that Clay recognized the similarities between the American abolitionist movement and the Russian push to end serfdom. Numerous addresses and comparisons would have already trained his mind to see emancipation as one united global drive. It is also likely that the Russians would have had some knowledge of the emancipatory schemes of the Americans (even if Clay did perhaps embellish his fame amongst the Russians) for the Americans were keeping an eye on Russian developments as well in the first half of the nineteenth century. Clay reflected in the flesh what ideas and news had been doing for decades with the improved transportation and communication networks: a transatlantic community increasingly aware of developments in other nations that nurtured a growing engagement with the intellectual developments of those communities. It is likely that the Russians were aware of Clay's political activities for the abolition of slavery. What Clay did not mention in his embellished address decades after he left St. Petersburg was that at some point during the antebellum period, he found an English translation of French nobleman Marquis of Custine's description of Russian serfdom intriguing enough to clip and paste the article in a scrapbook reserved for pieces either written by or about him or American slavery in general.¹⁶⁷ The Russians may have been interested in Clay, but Clay and his fellow antislavery activists were equally interested in the Russians.

Separated by an ocean, language, and fundamentally different political systems, the antislavery advocates of the Upper South advanced emancipatory plans conceptually similar as

¹⁶⁶ Cassius Clay, *Oration of Cassius Marcellus Clay Before Students and Historical Class of Berea College, Berea, KY. October 16, 1895* (Richmond, KY: Pantagraph Job Works, 1896), 4-5.

¹⁶⁷ Cassius Marcellus Clay Scrapbook, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort.

the proposal ultimately adopted by the Russians to end serfdom. Of course, there were contextual differences. The Russians never contemplated a colonization movement. Instead, the exact opposite occurred as Alexander II's government determined that social stability would be better served by having the newly freed serfs remain where they were and complete their obligations for freedom; the Russian government subsequently ceased its previous support for relocation to the sparsely populated steppe. The reasons for this are fairly obvious. America's race-based slavery provided colonizationists with a point of origin for African-Americans to "return to" that never existed in Russia. Additionally, while America's slave population reached nearly four million bonded individuals by 1860, Russia's population of serfs and state peasants numbered roughly forty-eight million. It would have been unrealistic and unwise to attempt the removal of such an overwhelming majority of the empire's inhabitants (peasants constituted eighty to ninety percent of a state's population). As Peter Kolchin notes in the preface of *Unfree Labor*, the "South was a slaveowner's world; rural Russia was a peasant world."¹⁶⁸

American slavery was built upon a legal foundation. Much of the Upper South's antislavery political rhetoric was geared towards establishing constitutional or legislative alterations that would have secured slavery's end. Though complicated by extralegal paternalistic arguments and supposedly benevolent affection, the master/slave dynamic in America was firmly established and legally defined in the slave states. Thus, the scenes of numerous battles between the southern antislavery movement and proslavery advocates occurred within the political arena of general assemblies and constitutional conventions. The slow development of Russian serfdom combined with its feudal origins, fostered a system built largely on custom. In autocratic Russia, altering the law of the land required but the command of the tsar, but mercurial customs that differed from estate to estate posed entirely different problems. Local practices dictated inheritance rights, access to and distribution of resources, and the everyday rights of living claimed by the peasants. It was a central concern highlighted in Alexander II's emancipation edict: "Hitherto the rights of estate owners were broad and not precisely defined in law, wherefore tradition, custom, and the estate owners' good will prevailed."¹⁶⁹ The wording of the proclamation explicitly underscored that legislative decree trumped tradition, but within

¹⁶⁸ Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, xii, 52-53; Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 152-153; Wirtschafter, *Russia's Age of Serfdom*, 9.

¹⁶⁹ Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 156.

localized civil disputes, custom retained its former role as societal organizer.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, Russia lacked the Protestant religious fervor that gripped America in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was at this unique intersection of religion, politics, and economics that many reformers in the Upper South developed their particular brand of antislavery sentiment.

For all these contextual differences, the Russian solution to serfdom reflected the very characteristics advocated by southerners ranging from the imminently influential Henry Clay to the comparatively unknown John Morrison who signed a Tennessee petition in 1833. The Russian emancipation of 1861 was gradual, afforded compensation to the nobility, framed its action based upon patriarchal concern for the serfs' well-being, and hoped to revolutionize society without violence.

How did two radically different groups in dramatically different contexts end up advocating such similar solutions to the question of bonded labor? Both groups constituted the conservative elite within their respective societies (but one must keep in mind the dramatic differences between a well-to-do southerner and an autocratic Russian nobleman), and both shared a growing awareness of where Atlantic world societies were progressing after the American and French Revolutions and the rise of industrialization. And each were presented with grand reminders of the inadequacies of their bonded-labor systems. The Russians suffered ignominious defeat at the hands of the French and British in the Crimean War; the Upper South reformers could only stare across the Ohio, Susquehanna, and Delaware Rivers and calculate the growing population, industrialism, and wealth of the free states. These Russian and American elites were grounded in the same nineteenth-century liberalism that reaffirmed themselves as the true agents of rational and moderate reform. Beginning with the Decembrists, the Russians were much more willing to concede their intellectual debt to Western Europe than were the Americans, but the southerners also engaged in the same questions of citizenship and rights that plagued Europeans. Though they did not openly profess their ideological debt to this transatlantic exchange of ideas increasingly made possible through steam, telegraph, and newspapers, the reformers of the Upper South kept an eye on the transatlantic world and Europeans in particular. When the *True American* discussed the “public opinion” of slavery, it meant the opinion of this

¹⁷⁰ Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia*, 41-42.

transatlantic community and rejoiced in the power of the people to compel responses from Europe's monarchies (even the "Russian despot").¹⁷¹

Most American newspapers maintained a daily column dedicated to European news. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that Americans were obsessed with news from Russia, but the Russians did fill a niche for news from strangely distant locales with a culture significantly different than America's. Russian backwardness and despotism were also easy tropes and ones employed by numerous antislavery advocates who publicly worried that the ranks of nations that utilized bonded labor were shrinking to just the United States and Russia. The near-constant Polish insurrections were also popular with the American print media who were sympathetic to the Poles since, as the *True American* claimed, "they know not how to submit to despotism. But the chains are upon them, and they struggle in vain against their destiny."¹⁷² John C. Young surprisingly exceeded the bluster of a Cassius Clay publication when speaking on Poland. The acquisition of that nation by Russia accentuated America's benevolence in Liberia. Compared to the liberty and missionary spirit that brought forth Liberia, Russian expansion was a practical bloodbath.

The barbarous hordes of Russia crowded the plains of Poland, drenching them in the blood of the brave. The few and scattered children of a once mighty nation, rallied around her in a last struggle for freedom—they threw their bodies as a rampart between their country and the bayonets of the despot—but, overborne and crushed by his endless legions, the spear was shivered in their hands, the fire of their hearths was extinguished in blood, their bodies were left on the battlefield to fatten the vulture and the wolf, or dragged to the wilds of Siberia to be incarcerated in a frozen desert.¹⁷³

The great size of Russia and its enormous population that would supposedly descend upon the unsuspecting like ants was another common theme of this discourse. Several American newspapers in 1831 saw fit to report that the population of Russia was "greatly overrated." Of course, these conclusions did not dissuade the Reverend John S. C. Abbott from turning his pen toward the "Present Aspect of Russia" and painting a picture of a vast and hungry empire ready

¹⁷¹ "Public Opinion," *True American*, April 15, 1846.

¹⁷² This article was printed in several newspapers. For example, see "Population in Russia," *Rhode Island Republican*, August 30, 1831; *The Pittsfield Sun*, August 25, 1831; *Vermont Gazette*, August 30, 1831; "The Poles," *True American*, April 22, 1846.

¹⁷³ Young, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 31-32

to dispatch its “eighteen millions well armed and respectably disciplined men” westward for territorial conquest.¹⁷⁴

Of course, the Russians were not the only barbarians employed as examples for the Americans. The *True American* exalted the “semi-barbarian” Bey of Tunis when the ruler issued his decree for gradual emancipation. The editors jealously eyed the autocratic power enjoyed by the Bey. “Oh, that like the Bey of Tunis we could send forth our proclamation that every slave entering our dominion, whether by land or by sea, is at that moment free, and make glad the heart of humanity by a deed so noble and great.” In another address, Cassius Clay employed Turkey as the nation of slave-drivers and Austria as the proverbial warning of what occurs when states displace liberty with protection of property as the primary aim of the government.¹⁷⁵ This conceptualization of authoritarian power as the mere whims of a despot was a common assumption amongst Americans, and Russia was the popular example for a European nation “groaning under despotism.”¹⁷⁶ So, in what would ultimately become an ironic question, Cassius Clay wondered if the defenders of slavery were “in love with despotism...Will you fraternise with Russia?” After spending a year at the Russian court post emancipation, Clay would not only be fraternizing with the Russians, but publicly calling Alexander II “the greatest liberal of all Europe,” certainly a stretch, but at least an indicator that Clay did not consider Russia’s great emancipator a despot. This framing construction of Russia as the ultimate despot crept into the public debate between John C. Young and the free state Presbyterians whereby the power of the Tsar (the power-hungry, land-greedy despot) was equated to the power of slaveholders. Young’s response typified southern antislavery activists’ concern for property rights by conceding that the Tsar and slaveholders, discursively functioning as parallel positions that had very little foundation in reality, should concede that power which is unjust. “What is unlawful or unjust in his authority, he ought to relinquish at once, but the guardian authority which the law confers and which is naturally just and lawful, as even the *Emancipator* [a more conservative newspaper than Garrison’s *The Liberator* associated with the American Anti-Slavery Society] concedes, *that* would I have him for a time retain.” By equating the Tsar and peasants to American slaveholders

¹⁷⁴ John S. C. Abbott, “Present Aspect of Russia,” *True American*, February 4, 1846.

¹⁷⁵ “Slavery in Tunis,” *True American*, April 1, 1846; Cassius Clay, *Speech of C. M. Clay, at Lexington, KY. Delivered August 1, 1851* (1851), 18-19, Samuel Wilson Collection, Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

¹⁷⁶ Although popular, the Russians certainly did not have a monopoly on despotism. The rulers of African and eastern empires were also commonly employed as archetypical “despots.” Other writers preferred examples from antiquity. For example, see Cassius Clay, “Letter from Cassius M. Clay,” *Palladium of Liberty*, May 29, 1844.

and slaves, Young strengthened his argument for gradualism by utilizing his countrymen's assumptions on Russian backwardness. While many northern abolitionists desired immediate emancipation for slaves, few Americans believed that the Russian peasantry was ready to immediately create a republican government in Russia. Evidently, this was popular comparative tool for Young as he footnoted that his opponent "takes a fling at my using it so frequently."¹⁷⁷

Obviously, references to Russia's continued employment of serfdom were designed to evoke the economic backwardness that many of these Upper South antislavery activists envisioned was the fate of the slave states. How could two nations standing for two such radically different ideals, tsarist autocracy versus American liberty, be two of the last remaining outposts of slave labor? Sharing the same principles as a land-hungry, despotic European empire was not a flattering comparison for Americans (momentary fantasies of newspaper editors who hoped to hold that sort of power aside). Occasionally, the Russians provided illustrative comparisons for antislavery advocates. Henry Clay argued that as the population of American slaves continued to expand, their market value would significantly decrease. Serf-filled Russia served as Clay's case-study. Inaccurately, Clay asserted that Russian landholders lacked American paternalistic concern, an ideology fully interwoven into Russian pro-serfdom ideology, but certainly a rarely realized ideal due to the absentee nature of Russian land ownership.¹⁷⁸ John C. Young advanced the same argument before Kentucky's Colonization Society (although without addressing paternalism).¹⁷⁹ But Clay and Young's largely constructive (though somewhat misinformed) comparison was a rarity, and most reformers found Russia more useful

¹⁷⁷ Cassius Clay, *Speech of C. M. Clay, at Lexington, KY. Delivered August 1, 1851*; Cassius Clay, *Speech of Cassius M. Clay, Before the Law Department of the University of Albany, N.Y.*, 21; Young, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 30, 42, 44-45.

¹⁷⁸ Paternalistic arguments appear to have been a tool of nineteenth-century landed elites around the globe. In addition to the southerners and Russians of this study, Shearer Davis Bowman has noted similar arguments emanating from Prussian Junkers. Much like their American and Russian cousins, these German landed elites felt pressure from above, in the form of Prussia's strong bureaucratic state, and from the peasantry's social unrest. Once again, despite a radically different context, the Prussian conservative landed elite forged an argument for maintenance of the *status quo* based on their benevolent protection over and paternalistic guidance of their peasants. See Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-19th Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁷⁹ Henry Clay, *An Address Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky*, 10; Young, *Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 26. For examinations of Russian paternalism, pro-serfdom arguments, and absenteeism, see Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, 58-61, 140-149; Roger Bartlett, "Defenses of Serfdom in Eighteenth-Century Russia," 67-74. Aleksandr Nikitenko's autobiography offers a rare glimpse of serf life in early nineteenth-century Russia, including descriptions of paternalistic, benevolent noblemen alongside those who employed their power abusively, see Aleksandr Nikitenko, *Up From Serfdom: My Childhood and Youth in Russia, 1804-1824*, trans. Helen Saltz Jacobson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

as a one-dimensional caricature to contrast with America (or ponder how the South had come to find itself alongside these haters of liberty). Like the Bey of Tunis, however, the Russian despots were members of an economy developing around the edges of the Atlantic Ocean and capable of recognizing, much like the southern reformers, that the new economic order was organized around free labor.

“The world is waking up,” proclaimed *The Examiner* in 1847, before highlighting the fringe, non-European nations of the world that were following Western Europe’s lead in emancipation. The list included Turkey, Egypt, the aforementioned Tunis, Wallachia (Romania), and Uruguay; each were given their salutatory sentences in the article. But the article concluded with its final paragraph dedicated solely to the figurehead of despotism.

Nor can despotism withstand the wide-world movement. Russia feels it. Prince Woronzoff, Count Protasof, M. Kologrivoff, have set free their bond. M. Rummin gave liberty to eight thousand serfs of both sexes who he owned; he is one of the wealthiest men in Russia. These serfs gathered round him; and with them fathered twenty thousand of the citizens of Niji [*sic*] and Riazan, to give thanks for this deed of humanity. He was called, Liberator! Father!

It is said the Czar favors this action. If his mind is given for freedom, serfdom will fall quickly in Russia.¹⁸⁰

American reformers scrutinized the Atlantic world for indications of the future to come. They noted the means by which the British emancipated the slaves in the West Indies Colonies. Breckinridge determined that domestic slavery could not survive forever in any state regardless of social, political, or geographic context. “It may terminate in various ways; but terminate it must. It may end in revolution; bear witness San Domingo.” American newspapers likewise examined the modernization efforts of Russia and its reliance on foreign expertise. This proved a mixed message for many southerners. While *The Examiner* found the account of American manufacturers constructing Russian engines and rail road cars “interesting” and extraordinarily lucrative, this Whig paper also underscored for its southern readership that the mechanical works were the product of “enterprising Yankees.” Nor did this heavy reliance on foreign expertise change dramatically in pre-reform Russia. In 1855, the country still imported roughly seventy percent of its machinery from foreign manufacturers. This was a burgeoning transatlantic era in

¹⁸⁰ “Emancipation,” *The Examiner*, July 24, 1847.

which Robert J. Breckinridge debated the merits of colonization with an agent of the British and Foreign Society for the Abolition of Slavery Throughout the World in Glasgow with the published transcript entering into multiple American editions that included commentary by William Lloyd Garrison.¹⁸¹

The first half of the nineteenth-century in this transatlantic world was dominated by the new economic order unleashed by Great Britain's industrial revolution and the political democratization of the French Revolution (and its foundation in the American Revolution). The Russians were far more generous in acknowledging their intellectual debt to the French Revolution, thus making them a useful counterpoint, but reform-minded southerners engaged the questions raised in late eighteenth-century France (which had sparked an abolitionist movement of its own). The Russian experience with revolutionary France provided its elite military officers an unparalleled opportunity to explore and engage Western Europe (at the price of facing cannon and musket fire). The young men who would fill the Decembrist ranks viewed this arousal of the people through the prism of state authority. While the revolution in France offered a dramatically unstable model for this popular awakening, many reform-minded Russians envisioned the Russian state taking the lead in rationally guiding the peasantry towards limited self-awareness.¹⁸² More so than the autocratic Russians, despite the Decembrists' desire for a limited constitution, the Americans particularly engaged in the question of citizenship.

The early constitutions and bills of rights in revolutionary America demarcated citizenship as the purview of propertied white men. Challenges to this strict definition arose almost immediately, largely fueled by the unstable nature and increasing radicalization of the French Revolution whereby previously ostracized groups—women, free blacks, non-propertied men—began establishing their claims to the title of “citizen.” In the United States, the position of free blacks within a nation that permitted domestic slavery highlighted their precarious position between slavery and citizenship. Benevolence and racism went hand in hand with the creation of the ACS. The removal of free blacks from America did not meet much opposition from white

¹⁸¹ John S. C. Abbott, “Emancipation of the Slaves in the British West Indies,” *True American*, August 5, 1846; Cassius Clay, *To the People of Kentucky*, 6; Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*, 26; see also Breckinridge, *Hints on Colonization*, 294-295; “American Mechanics Abroad,” *The Examiner*, June 19, 1847; Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 183; Breckinridge, Thompson, and Garrison, *Discussion on American Slavery*.

¹⁸² Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia*, 169; For the significance of the French Revolution within the Atlantic world, see Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

southerners, and the enterprise was cloaked in the altruistic clause that it offered free African-Americans the opportunity to relocate to where they could reap “what they can never enjoy here, that is, all the advantages of society, self-government, eligibility to office, and freedom from the degradation arising from an inferiority of caste.”¹⁸³ This Janus-faced goal fostered an organization that incorporated supporters who favored colonization as beneficial to whites and those who viewed funded migration as a genuinely benevolent alternative to the hardships of American non-citizenship (as well as individuals who straddled both camps).

Most Upper South antislavery activists racially viewed the American landscape as a white world in which the races could never peacefully co-habitat in equality. Simply, the United States was a nation for whites. This racism was usually tempered, however, by legitimate beliefs in the elevation of blacks outside of America and arguments that former slaves could enjoy the full rights of citizenship in their own nation. Conceptualizing America as a white landscape while conceding the rights of blacks to democratic citizenship elsewhere, led many southern reformers to argue that while most free blacks were a degraded lot, the fault was not with them or their race *per se*, but rather with their awkward position within society. Breckinridge viewed the Republic of Haiti as a testament to the capability of blacks for self-government, and considered Liberia a model colony. The degradation of blacks in America emerged from their place in society as either slave or non-citizen. “Free negroes are very seldom good citizens,” Breckinridge opined, “and for a reason sufficiently evident; they are not citizens at all.” Henry Clay considered free African-Americans, as a class, “the most corrupt, depraved and abandoned” within the boundaries of the United States, though he personally knew many “honorable exceptions.” These defects, though, were not inherent, but rather “as the consequence of their anomalous condition.” Clay went one step further and suggested that any one of his audience of elite, free, and white men would fall into the same depravity if placed in the same position.¹⁸⁴ This question of citizenship and the place of free African-Americans peppered the writings of the politically powerful and the supplicating petitioners.¹⁸⁵ The Tennessee petition drive of the early 1830s, one of the more liberal memorials to emerge from the South, asked that African-

¹⁸³ Carey, *Letters on the Colonization Society*, 1.

¹⁸⁴ Breckinridge, *Hints on Slavery*, 6; Henry Clay, *An Address Before the Colonization Society of Kentucky*, 13.

¹⁸⁵ See Underwood, *Address Delivered Before the Colonization Society of Bowling Green*, 8; Young, *The Doctrine of Immediate Emancipation Unsound*, 43-45; Young, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society*, 15-17; “An Important Subject Mooted;,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, April 15, 1842; “General Colonization Convention,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, May 16, 1842.

Americans become “members of civil society,” but never citizens. The petitioners also joined with most white southerners in agreement that citizenship (or membership in civil society) was a status necessitating preparedness, and gradual emancipation would ensure that the former slaves would either be prepared to be productive members of American society (as advocated by the Tennesseans and assumed to be “no great grievance” by the authors of *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*) or citizens within their own African nation.¹⁸⁶

The English-born industrial revolution provided the other lens by which denizens of the first half of the nineteenth century framed their world. The French Revolution opened a political Pandora’s Box upon the transatlantic community; the industrial revolution opened its economic mate (and in the American context especially, a third box of Protestant religious fervor was opened). The reformist impulse that transcended the Atlantic Ocean was born from the chaos unleashed. At the very moment in which the “people” were beginning to flex their political muscle and assert their place within society, industrialization reorganized the means by which that society structured itself economically. Industrialization rapidly increased the rate of urbanization, which fostered a host of political, social, and medical ills, and deeper stratification of society along class lines. But manufacturing and commerce reaped financial rewards unparalleled on the globe, a fact certainly noted by westward-looking Russians, particularly after the military debacle of the Crimean War, and northward-watching southerners who could only lament the enormous growth of the non-slaveholding states. Both the Russians and Americans tested whether slave labor was profitable in the factories. Some of these endeavors proved financially successful, but the dramatic retardation of manufacturing in the American South and Russia left reformers on both sides of the Atlantic with few questions about the economic relationship between bonded labor and industrialization.¹⁸⁷

Despite sharing similar contextual circumstances as two slaveholding nations on the fringe of Western Europe’s sphere of influence, Russia and the United States faced dissimilar problems due to the internal division within America between slave state and free. There were

¹⁸⁶ S.S. Nicholas and others, *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*, 5.

¹⁸⁷ For studies of industrial slavery and serfdom, see Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Charles B. Dew, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994); Reginald E. Zelnik, *Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia: The Factory Workers of St. Petersburg, 1855-1870* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971); Joseph Bradley, *Guns for the Tsar: American Technology and the Small Arms Industry in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990).

plenty of white laborers in America, but reformist southerners watched them populate the free states unwilling or unable to compete with slavery. The frustration of southern reformers with poor free whites was palpable. Even the ex-mechanic Bailey published a diatribe against his former compatriots in the working class. “The whites create their own competitor and force themselves to work cheaper than the slaves or go idle—Hence their low condition, their wants, lack of learning and contention.”¹⁸⁸ The Tsar faced nearly the opposite condition, lacking a large population of freemen, but having near-total control over his state. The problem was custom and tradition that tied serfs to particular plots of earth. Although industrialization was not an immediate determining factor in the decision to emancipate (since Alexander II’s proclamation continued to tie serfs to their communities for at least another two years), it was viewed as a substantial roadblock to a new definition of modernity that encompassed industry, commerce, communication, banking, and agricultural improvements.

A shared fear of economic backwardness motivated Russian and southern reformers to advocate the abolition of slave labor (the Americans conveniently employing the Russians as the apogee of backwardness). Again, the confluence of new economic and political orders, combined with the growth of nationalism, paved the way for both sets of reformers to evaluate their place within the Atlantic community. The nineteenth century marked the professionalization of political economists and their incorporation within the European and American university systems, and it marked, too, the formation of economic societies structured around three main pillars identified by economic historians Massimo M. Augello and Marco E. L. Guidi as “enlightenment, patriotism and progress.”¹⁸⁹ One of Russia’s leading professional economists, Ivan P. Vernadskii, a professor at Moscow University, both admired and translated August Comte, who argued that Western European economic principles were universally applicable due to their inherent reason. The arguments of Henry Carey, primary scholar of the “American School” of political economy, for free labor became increasingly popular in 1850s Russia as well. The “American School” developed as a counter-argument against the “English School” of Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo due to their emphasis on class conflict. Of course, this oppositional relationship to an English model led Carey and his associates to deemphasize their intellectual debt to other stands of British thought dating to Adam Smith who argued for a

¹⁸⁸ “How the Great Productive and Physical Power of the South is Ruled by the Non producing and Physically Weak Man—owners,—the Administration, & c.,” *The Free South*, December 31, 1858.

¹⁸⁹ Augello and Guidi, “Nineteenth-Century Economic Societies in a Comparative Approach,” 1-31.

positive relationship between financial success, high wages, and worker output.¹⁹⁰ In the evolving nineteenth-century, the harsh realities of working-class living conditions forced a reevaluation of classical liberalism's emphasis on individual liberty. For many thinkers, like utopian Robert Owen and John Stuart Mill who eventually rejected his own views on the necessity of private property to the security of liberty, collective activity remedied the horrors of industrialization.¹⁹¹

Locally-oriented southerners and state-oriented Russians could agree on an emphasis for private property rights. But the underlying message of the nineteenth century's political economists was that the wealth of a nation emerged from the wealth of its people. While this vision of wealth made the working-class poor worrisome (in addition to legitimate concerns for health and social relationships), it made slave-based economies archaic and doomed to the "dustbin of history." Whether they perused Carey, Franklin, Comte, Smith, Owen, Mill, or Vernadskii, the readers of nineteenth-century political economy theories examined arguments that assumed Great Britain to be the model economic state and spelled the end of bonded labor.

Despite their respective differences, both the white southerners and the Russian reformers of this study represented the elite of their nation. While they hoped to modernize their societies dramatically, they were also concerned for the safety of their elite status (a lesson of the French Revolution). As conservatives, they worried about social control and the effects of liberty on the supposedly ill-prepared bonded laborers. These privileged reformers in the South and Russia shared a common belief in the power of gradual action to reorganize society gently and without disturbance. As outlined in Alexander II's proclamation, the cool rationality of gradualism would ensure that the peasants maintained their agrarian labors without disruption: "The authorities who prepared the new way of life for the peasants and will manage its implementation must be vigilant that this done legally, calmly, and in a timely way, so that the peasants are not distracted from their indispensable agricultural labours."¹⁹² Surprisingly, the Russian plan of gradual action does offer some support to the southern reformers who placed such fantastical hopes in the curative powers of gradualism. As Gregory L. Freeze notes, the Russian emancipation was not

¹⁹⁰ See Kingston-Mann, *In Search of the True West*, 93-99; Jonathan A. Glickstein, *American Exceptionalism, American Anxiety: Wages, Competition, and Degraded Labor in the Antebellum United States* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 193.

¹⁹¹ Kingston-Mann, *In Search of the True West*, 112-114; John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Robert Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World* (London: E. Wilson, 1836).

¹⁹² Alexander II, "Alexander II's Proclamation Announcing the Abolition of Serfdom," 159.

without its violence and peasant revolts. He lists nearly two thousand “disorders” in 1861 (with a decline in incidents thereafter), one of the worst involving a massacre of hundreds of unarmed peasants. These are significant indicators that not all peasants were undistracted and going about their farm chores. Comparatively speaking, however, Russian emancipation certainly did not lead to the same sort of prolonged slaughter endured by the United States for four years to secure its emancipation. Additionally, the pre-reform era had also witnessed increasing peasant unrest, although not in the same numbers as in 1861. And no nineteenth-century rebellion ever came close to Pugachev’s late eighteenth-century revolt that incorporated tens of thousands of inflamed serfs.¹⁹³

While gradualism ultimately proved unsuccessful to erect a completely westernized Russian economy and society, the wide-sweeping reforms of Alexander II remarkably altered the landscape. In only a few decades, a previously under-governed empire that utilized bonded labor developed into a free-labor state that had initiated judicial, political, educational, economic, legal, social, and military reforms to serve as foundations for a modern state constructed along Western European lines. However, Russia’s slow but steady evolution increasingly came under fire by revolutionary movements and unrest amongst the intelligentsia. These disturbances resulted in the assassination of Alexander II and sparked a period of counter-reform. All of which suggests that the gradualism advocated by southern reformers may have staved off civil war, but the Louisville emancipationists’ planned fifty years of peaceful transition was entirely fanciful.¹⁹⁴

Pipe dreams for peaceful revolution from above aside, in both Russia and the American South, emancipation was but the largest linchpin in a series of remarkably similar reforms. Here, the Russians honed their energies on judicial, economic, and political reforms while the Americans focused on morality (reflecting the Protestant religious motivation of American reformism). This underscores the underlying assumptions by many southern reformers regarding the beneficial effects of emancipation. With slavery removed, manufacturing and commercial interests would flourish, and other necessary alterations in society could proceed smoothly without that single great interference. The democratization and industrialization of the nineteenth century left the Russians much farther behind Western Europe. As such, the Russians

¹⁹³ See Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).

¹⁹⁴ S. S. Nicholas and Others, *Slave Emancipation in Kentucky*, 5.

restructured their military, reorganized local government, attempted to reinsert justice into their notoriously inefficient and corrupt judicial system, and modernized their system of taxation. However, there were areas of overlap between Russia and the American South. In particular, both sets of reformers attempted to modernize their respective educational systems. While Breckinridge and other Superintendents of Public Instruction struggled to secure funding, teachers, and students, the Russian Elementary School Statute of 1864 formally established a multi-tiered educational system, but left funding to local communities. The year before, Russian universities had been established as self-governing corporations.

Censorship was another shared reform between tsarist Russia and the American South, although the problems differed somewhat. Censorship remained in Russia throughout the period of reforms, but was officially relaxed by the government after 1865.¹⁹⁵ In the United States, censorship emerged from two sources: elected legislative bodies and the mob. Between 1836 and 1844, the anti-slavery gag rule of the House of Representatives automatically tabled all abolitionist petitions. It was this rule that forced Marylander Andrew B. Wilson into an awkward argument that his petition did not favor abolition so much as request an investigation into slavery. Additionally, southern legislatures banned the delivery of abolitionist material in public mails due to their supposed threat to public order. Outside of legal parameters, as Cassius Clay, George S. Park, and William S. Bailey could attest, the pro-slavery mob had its ways of stopping publication of a particularly offensive material. Of course, this extra-legal sort of negotiation could work both ways as Bailey noted in his brief autobiographical account of his publishing career. Always the champion of working-class men, Bailey could not help but contrast their gruff exteriors with the softness of a potential mob of slaveholders. “The next thing was to try the law of *might* against *right*; but in this they soon found their match. They discovered that Anti-slavery mechanics, (then at work in the shop who thought it no disgrace to labor) could play ‘fist and club argument’ with *iron shillalahs* as well as pro-slavery mob-ocrats; so they received a little better than they gave and went away satisfied as to Anti-Slavery pluck.”¹⁹⁶ Bailey’s victory over the mob aside, most pro-slavery factions found ways to remove unwanted presses. But most offended publishers faulted “slavocracy” with the destruction, and appealed to public respect for

¹⁹⁵ Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 178-180. See also Lincoln, *The Great Reforms*.

¹⁹⁶ Memorial of Andrew B. Wilson; Bailey, *A Short Sketch of Our Troubles in the Anti-Slavery Cause*, 1.

their first amendment right to speech and the press.¹⁹⁷ Like industrialization, these southern reformers assumed that once slavery was removed from their midst, there would no longer be a need to appeal to the public in order to defend the Constitution.

What then is the place of these Upper South reformers in American and transatlantic history? What light do their ideological compatriots thousands of miles away in Russia provide on their role? Clearly, older arguments that the South was but a few years away from solving its slavery question fail to hold muster. Historians Carl N. Degler and William W. Freehling have examined southern antislavery advocates as evidence that the South was not a monolithic entity. This is a fair point, though it is not particularly illuminating as to the significance of the southern antislavery movement. Ira Berlin joins Freehling in asserting that the importance of southern emancipationists is their role as small parts of a grander assault on slavery. Eva Sheppard Wolf's examination of race and liberty in Virginia provides a balanced account of the ACS and its unusually "chimerical" nature. Depending on one's opinion of slavery, the ACS provided a means to reinforce the institution or a vehicle to abolish slavery and secure a white America. Like this study, Stanley Harrold in *The Abolitionist and the South* argues that southern emancipationists were heavily influenced by and integrated with the northern reformist movement.¹⁹⁸ Harrold is unusual in his integration of the southern antislavery movement with the spheres of northern abolitionism and reformism.

Comparing the southern reformist movement with its contemporaneous counterpart in Russia advances Harrold's argument further. Not only were these southerners a part of the same spirit of reform that swept the North (though organized around different principles), but it also was integrated within a transatlantic intellectual network.¹⁹⁹ As Russian reformers read translations of American economists, the Americans lamented the fate of the Poles and contemplated what it all meant for the institution of slavery. This broadens both our historical

¹⁹⁷ See Cassius Clay, *To the People of Kentucky*; Park, "Letter from Mr. Park, of Parkville, Mo. to the Public."

¹⁹⁸ See Degler, *The Other South*; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 170-171; Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South*, 1-44.

¹⁹⁹ The integration of the South within the European intellectual community is a significant goal of Michael O'Brien's *Conjectures of Order*. While I agree with O'Brien's argument that southerners engaged in this transatlantic exchange of ideas fare more than is usually thought, the complete lack of reformism from the work limits its usefulness for this study. See O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*.

understanding of the southern reform movement and its usefulness for scholarship beyond Degler's notation that the antislavery activists were "losers."²⁰⁰

In terms of securing a peaceful resolution to slavery and their hopes for a uniracial society, the southern antislavery activists were most certainly losers. More significantly, they were liminal figures straddling multiple fissure points within the United States and the Atlantic world. Even their preferred method of migration, African colonization, was a vehicle for transatlantic exchange from which they hoped to reap the benefits through increased commerce and the spread of Christianity.²⁰¹ The Cape Palmas colony, the personal Liberian fiefdom of the Maryland Colonization Society, established a mission station for the Catholic Church. Commercially, the society was exceedingly interested in the agricultural goods, particularly cotton and sugar, which the colony could produce.²⁰² As metaphorical (and occasionally literal) drifters across this transatlantic world, Upper South reformers straddled Africa, South America and the West Indies, Europe, the American North, and the South. As conservative revolutionaries, they were not unique in a global context, a fact highlighted by the Russians. But they were surprisingly transient in their writings and speeches. Rarely content to remain anchored to the South, these reformers dispatched their readers and audiences on in-depth comparisons with free states, long examinations of Caribbean emancipations, the nature of black citizenship in the United States and Africa, the climate of Liberia, the emancipations of the Mediterranean, and of course the barbaric Russians in whose uneasy company they found themselves. They may not have enjoyed their association with the barbarians, but as noted by Cassius Clay, the Russians were treading a remarkably similar path. It is unsurprising that Russia emerged as one of the United States' firmest allies during the secession crisis and Civil War.

By incorporating so many disparate ideas within their movement, these white southern reformers offer a prism through which to view the ideological fissures of the nineteenth-century. Ultimately, this proved to be their greatest undoing. As reformers with ideological groundings in the North, South, and transatlantic, they found few friends and numerous enemies. This struck Joseph Underwood as odd. "Neither the abolitionist, nor the slaveholder, seems to have a correct

²⁰⁰ Degler, *The Other South*, 1.

²⁰¹ For additional examinations of the transatlantic nature of the ACS, see Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*.

²⁰² "Cape Palmas as a Mission Station," *Maryland Colonization Journal*, November 15, 1841; "Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society," *Maryland Colonization Journal*, February 15, 1842.

view of our motives or objectives.”²⁰³ Advocating the industrialism of the North to southerners while advancing the right of private property to northerners, and selectively choosing reformist ideas from the transatlantic world, proved a tough sale. And so Robert Breckinridge debated slaveholders at home, confronted English abolitionists abroad, and was scorned by liberal northerners simultaneously. Obviously, this was not a movement with many external friends. But however unusual this exceptionally transitional and transnational movement was in the context of nineteenth century America, there were other movements like it on the globe tucked thousands of miles away. Unfortunately for these upper class, male reformers of the Upper South and Russia, as intriguing and useful their incorporation of such disparate ideological foundations is for scholars, it failed in both contexts. One group hoped for a peaceful, gradual, and rational transformation from above, but their dream ended in civil war and decades of economic stagnation and racial conflict; the other successfully began restructuring their state, but that spirit of reform proved insufficient and shriveled until supplanted by the radicalism of Bolshevism.

²⁰³ Underwood, *An Address Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky*, 8.

Epilogue

Once a relatively obscure and eccentric Supreme Court justice, the civil rights movement of the 1960s renewed interest in John Marshall Harlan, known as the “Great Dissenter” for his solitary voice of opposition in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. It was Harlan who in 1896 pronounced that the United States Constitution was “color blind.” Although numerous biographies of Harlan have emerged, the work of Linda Przybyszewski is particularly innovative. Rather than content herself with a traditional legal history of an illustrious judicial career, Przybyszewski explores the intellectual foundations that formed Harlan’s legal thinking. In particular, she strikes upon a peculiar paternalism, a “romantic racialist” argument, that led him to simultaneously uphold Anglo-Saxon identity as the pinnacle achievement and support the elevation of African-Americans as humans capable of attaining similar advancement. Przybyszewski’s Harlan is a complex figure who in other instances ruled against his own “color blind” creed. Przybyszewski concludes that Harlan’s particular brand of paternalism, a coupling of racial and masculine identity, developed from his own personal history as “the paternalism he had learned in his father’s house.”²⁰⁴ The underlying message of this enlightening biography is that Harlan’s judicial, racial, and political identity emerged from the particularities of his upbringing. Although never explicitly stated, this emphasis on the “father’s house” bestows an exceptionality upon Harlan’s ideas. If they were not necessarily singular, they were minimally unique. Perhaps.

Harlan’s father was firm Whig and supporter of Henry Clay; the son adopted his father’s Whiggish politics. Harlan was a devout Presbyterian who attended the church in Frankfort that hosted William F. Bullock’s address on colonization. Reflecting his committed religiosity, Harlan attended Centre College and came under the instruction of John C. Young who preached a mandatory sermon for all students every Sunday. While at Centre he would have read Francis Wayland’s *The Elements of Political Economy* during his junior year. Both he and his brother (the Harlans were faithful patrons of Centre) were chosen to provide orations at their 1850 commencement. Harlan worked with Robert J. Breckinridge following the Civil War to defeat a church property lawsuit from pro-southern Presbyterians.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Linda Przybyszewski, *The Republic According to John Marshall Harlan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 21-27, 86.

²⁰⁵ Centre College, *1850 Commencement Program*, Centre College Special Collections, Digital Archives, <http://www.centre.edu/web/library/sc/digital.html> (accessed April 8, 2008); Centre College, *Catalogue of the*

The antislavery advocates of the South did not peacefully end slavery; the bloodshed of the Civil War shattered that dream. However, the institutions they created—colleges, societies, social networks—survived the crucible of war and continued to shape minds after slavery ended in a manner utterly antithetical to their desires. The American Colonization Society did not give up its dream of a white America until 1964. Park University maintains the reformist spirit of its founder through its commitment to non-traditional education. Berea College honors its roots with an innovative tuition plan that reaches out to impoverished students. And students on Centre College's Danville, Kentucky campus continue to traipse out of Breckinridge Hall on their way to classes in Young Hall. Although a minority, the white male elites of the Upper South utilized their wealth wisely in long-lasting and far-reaching organizations. Harlan was but a single pupil in an entire generation that went to school, attended church, or joined the societies of these white male elites. The reformers of the Upper South never secured a majoritarian platform with which to enact most of their reforms, but their ideas and beliefs outlived the antebellum era safely ensconced in the structures and institutions they erected.

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