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The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina

Stephanie McCurry

Prompted by theories about the complexities of power in modern society, a number of historians, feminists most prominent among them, have joined the recent debate over the proper definition and boundaries of "the political." The stakes are high. As one feminist philosopher put it, "this question about the limits of the political is precisely a political question."[1] In advocating an expanded approach to political history that transgresses the limits of formal politics and confounds conventional distinctions between public and private spheres, Joan Scott and others have raised the intriguing possibility of a gendered history of politics.[2]

The history of republican political ideology and culture in the antebellum South may seem a long way from the concerns of contemporary theorists, but it is not so far, perhaps, as it appears at first glance. After all, theories of government and citizenship, in modern republics as in ancient ones, have been grounded in assumptions about the relation of public and private spheres, or civic sphere and household. In Aristotle's *Politics,* for example, according to Jürgen Habermas, "Status in the *polis* was . . . based upon status as the unlimited master of an *oikos*. Moveable

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[1] Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis, 1989), 6. Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Jacques Derrida are among the most influential of these theorists. For a helpful discussion and critique of their work, see *ibid.*

[2] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), esp. 28–67. Scott's advocacy of post-structuralist language theory has inspired a passionate critical debate. See Joan Wallach Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working Class History,* 31 (Spring 1987), 1–13; Bryan Palmer, "Response to Joan Scott," *ibid.,* 14–23; Christine Stansell, "A Response to Joan Scott," *ibid.,* 24–29; Anson Rabinbach, "Rationalism and Utopia as Language of Nature: A Note," *ibid.,* 30–36; and Joan Wallach Scott, "A Reply to Criticism," *ibid.* (Fall 1987), 39–45. Studies that exemplify gender analysis of political history include Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York, 1980); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York, 1986), esp. 19–37; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, 1990); and Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988).

wealth and control over labor power were no substitute for being the master of a household and of a family."[3]

In the antebellum South, where the defense of domestic institutions and relations were matters of the utmost political significance, one finds even more compelling reason to eschew conventional historiographical boundaries, and particularly those that separate the public from the private sphere and the history of women and gender relations from that of "high" politics. In the Old South, "high" politics *was* the politics of the household, and all relations of power in what we would call the "private sphere," including those of men and women, were inevitably politicized. Indeed, the gender and class relations contained in southern households were the distinctive social conditions to which proslavery politicians pointed as permitting the South, and the South alone, to retain the proper political arrangements of republican government.

The slave South was commonly represented as the last republic loyal to the principle of government by an exclusive citizen body of independent and equal men. However inadvertently, that portrait revealed the two faces of republicanism in the antebellum South. The first gazed outward on the public sphere and countenanced a purportedly egalitarian community of enfranchised men. This is the familiar face of slavery republicanism privileged by antebellum politicans and, for the most part, by historians. But to view the political edifice solely from that perspective is to remain captive to the designs of its proslavery architects. For southern men, like other republicans, established their independence and status as citizens in the public sphere through the command of dependents in their households. The modern slave republic was defined above all else, as its defenders never tired of saying, by the boundary that separated the independent and enfranchised minority from the majority of dependent and excluded others. Republicanism had another, more conservative face that gazed inward on the private sphere and countenanced inequality and relations of power between masters and their dependents: slaves, women, and children.

Any assessment of antebellum southern political culture, and especially of the yeoman-planter relations on which it hinged, must confront the republican edifice whole. This broader perspective is most pressing with respect to the politics of the yeoman majority. As independent proprietors, yeoman farmers were (and knew themselves to be) empowered by the exclusionary boundaries of the public sphere. Their republicanism, no less than that of the planters, was centrally configured

[3] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 3. J. G. A. Pocock makes the same point in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), 68. Some of these themes have been pursued by Hannah Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley, 1984); and Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, 1988), esp. x. The debate over the republican or liberal character of nineteenth-century American political ideology rages on; for the briefest introduction, see Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1980); Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984); and Lance Banning, "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 43 (Jan. 1986), 3–19.

around the politics of the household and around the public meaning of domestic dependencies.[4]

The South Carolina low country, from which much of the material in this essay is drawn, provides a dramatic case in point. Nowhere did proslavery republicanism find more momentous expression; and nowhere was its social basis more starkly displayed in ways that confound a conventional focus on the public sphere in the interpretation of the yeomanry's politics. In that coastal region of vast rice and cotton plantations, where in 1860 more than seven of every ten people were black and enslaved, social and political inequality reached staggering proportions. Not only was the great majority of the population—slaves and women—propertyless and disfranchised, and the political culture thereby defined primarily in terms of whom it excluded; but the concentration of wealth in land and slaves was so advanced (the top 10 percent of property holders owned more than 70 percent of the real wealth in one mainland parish) that it gave decisive shape to relations between yeomen and planters as well as between masters and slaves. Even in the aristocratic low country, yeoman farmers constituted the majority of the white population, and their relations with planters formed a crucial dimension of political life.[5]

Social inequality was not comfortably confined to black and white and limited to the private sphere, as those who define slave society primarily in terms of race would argue. White society in the slave South was not a "herrenvolk" or racial "democracy," to use George Fredrickson's much-adopted term, that bound white, mostly propertied men in relations of rough equality.[6] Rather inequality and relations of power took many forms in the South Carolina low country and indeed all

[4] On the household as the constituent unit of antebellum southern society and the locus of gender relations, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Antebellum Southern Households: A New Perspective on a Familiar Question," *Review,* 7 (Fall 1983), 215–53; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988), esp. 37–99; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York, 1983); and Stephanie McCurry, "The Politics of Yeoman Households in Antebellum South Carolina," in *Divided House: Gender and the Civil War,* ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, forthcoming).

[5] For the statistics on race, see *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Washington, 1864), 1, 452; on wealth, see Federal Manuscript Census, South Carolina, Beaufort District, [St. Peter's Parish], Schedule of Population, 1860, Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29 (National Archives); and on the yeomanry as the white majority, see Federal Manuscript Census, South Carolina, Beaufort District, [St. Peter's Parish], Schedules of Population, Agriculture, and Slaves, 1860, Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29 (National Archives). These statistics are discussed at greater length in Stephanie McCurry, "Defense of Their World: Gender, Class, and the Yeomanry of the South Carolina Low Country, 1820–1860" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1988), esp. 46, 58, 54.

[6] George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York, 1971), esp. 61. Frederickson introduced this term to southern history, where it quickly gained currency. Its adherents, from the liberal and republican camps, are united by a shared assumption that slavery is a system of racial, as opposed to class, relations and that race marks the primary social division of the Old South. In addition to Frederickson, the liberalism school includes James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York, 1982); the "republicanism" school includes J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978); J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, 1985); and Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York, 1988). Class analyses include Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Eugene D. Genovese, "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders Democracy," *Agricultural History,* 49 (April 1975), 331–42; and Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism.*

over the black belt South where similar social patterns prevailed.[7] They not only gave definitive shape to the public sphere but permeated its boundaries and infused its culture. To confront that pervasive inequality is to raise searching questions about such interpretations as those of Fredrickson and others that locate the yeomanry's politics and commitment to the slave regime in the purportedly egalitarian public sphere of the slave republic and the "democratic" culture and ideology it engendered. To confront the relations of power in yeoman households, including gender relations, and the political privileges to which they entitled male household heads is to reveal a yeoman republicanism rather more complicated and rather less distinctly egalitarian and "democratic." And it is to offer an interpretation that comports more with the manifest social and political inequality of the black belt South. Yeomen in the low country knew, better than their up-country peers, that the slave republic was defined by its exclusionary boundaries. But the patterns revealed in the low country speak nonetheless to a characteristic of republican political culture all over the South. To train our attention on it is to compel a quite different interpretation of republicanism in the antebellum South from the one that currently prevails. It might even compel another perspective on republicanism in all of its American variations.

Republican and proslavery politics already had a long and intimate relationship in South Carolina by the beginning of the antebellum period. Indeed, the vision of the slave republic around which sectional consciousness cohered in the early 1830s had been taking shape in political struggle within the state at least since the constitutional reforms of 1808, and, more alarmingly and visibly, in congressional debate over slavery in the Missouri controversy.[8] But the crucial moment was the nullification crisis; then, in the midst of the state's greatest religious revival, South Carolina's antebellum political culture and ideology was forged.

As fire-eater politicians (not a few of whom were, like Robert Barnwell Rhett, newly born again) met the challenge of an unprecedented political mobilization, they embraced the language of evangelicalism, and with it the faith of its primarily yeoman congregants.[9] Evangelicalism and popular politics were thereafter indis-

[7] In the Alabama black belt, for example, the top tenth of household heads owned more than 60% of the wealth in 1860, and in the South Carolina up-country (the heart of the cotton South), it reached 55% by 1850 and increased markedly by 1860. William L. Barney, "Toward the Civil War: The Dynamics of Change in a Black Belt County," in *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies,* ed. Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr. (Westport, 1982), 147–51; Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism,* 50, 262; Gavin Wright, *Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978), 29–36; and Randolph F. Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis: Harrison County, Texas, 1850–1880* (Austin, 1983), 15–73.

[8] Mark D. Kaplanoff, "Charles Pinckney and the American Republican Tradition," in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston,* ed. Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen (Knoxville, 1986), 85–122; Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760–1808* (Chapel Hill, 1990), esp. 238–68; and Mark D. Kaplanoff, "Making the South Solid: Politics and the Structure of Society in South Carolina, 1790–1815" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1979), esp. 265.

[9] James Petigru Carson, ed., *Life, Letters, and Speeches of James Louis Petigru, the Union Man of South Carolina* (Washington, 1920), 85–86, 103–4, 128–29; William Mumford Baker, *The Life and Labours of the Reverend*

sociable in South Carolina. As the ideological work of slavery took on new urgency in those years, so proslavery arguments, infused with evangelical references, acquired the discursive shape that they would maintain until the Civil War. While fire-eaters and moderates would continue to contest the particular political uses of proslavery ideology right down to the successful secession campaign of 1860, the representation of the Christian slave republic, forged in the fires of nullification, was beyond contestation. Proslavery republicanism had become the state religion. In 1852, in the tense aftermath of the first secession crisis, James Henley Thornwell, minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia and the state's leading Presbyterian spokesman, looked back with satisfaction on the state's struggle for a self-conscious and self-confident sectional identity. The world's condemnation of slavery, he recalled, had forced southerners into a consideration of "the nature and organization of society" and "the origin and extent of the rights of man." But they had emerged from that philosophical essay, Thornwell concluded, "feeling justified in our own consciences" and confident "that we have been eminently conservative in our influence upon the spirit of the age."[10] Proslavery ideology and republican politics were inextricably intertwined in antebellum South Carolina.

Evangelical ministers did the main work of the proslavery argument, contributing more than half of the tracts ever written on the subject in the United States and leaving their imprint clearly on the more secular remainder. Indeed, the Biblical defense of slavery was the centerpiece of an organic or familial ideology that encompassed far more than the relation of master and slave.[11] Thornwell, among others, insisted that the central tenet of that conservative social theory, that "the relation of master and slave stands on the same foot with the other relations of life," was grounded in scriptural proof. "We find masters exhorted in the same connection with husbands, parents, magistrates," and "slaves exhorted in the same connection with wives, children and subjects."[12] Such stitching together of all social relations

Daniel Baker . . . Prepared by his Son (1858; reprint, Louisville, 1961), 133, 155–57, 160–66, 180; William John Grayson, "The Autobiography of William John Grayson," ed. Samuel Gaillard Stoney, *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine,* 49 (Jan. 1948), 33–40. Robert Barnwell Rhett's conversion is noted in Baker, *Life of Baker,* 188–89. Beech Branch Baptist Church, Beaufort District, Church Book, Sept. 2, 1833, in Baptist Church, Hampton County, Beech Branch, Records, 1814–1918 (South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, S.C.); William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816–1836* (New York, 1965), 73–74.

[10] James Henley Thornwell, "Slavery and the Religious Instruction of the Coloured Population," *Southern Presbyterian Review,* 4 (July 1850), 110–11.

[11] Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens, Ga., 1987), esp. xvii. For a good introduction to the literature on the biblical defense of slavery, see, William S. Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (1935; reprint, Gloucester, 1960); Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made* (New York, 1969); Eugene D. Genovese, *'Slavery Ordained of God': The Southern Slaveholders' View of Biblical History and Modern Politics* (Gettysburg, 1985); Drew G. Faust, "Evangelicalism and the Meaning of the Proslavery Argument: The Reverend Thornton Stringfellow of Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* 85 (Jan. 1977), 3–17; Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1982); and Jack P. Maddex, "'The Southern Apostasy' Revisited: The Significance of Proslavery Christianity," *Marxist Perspectives,* 2 (Fall 1979), 132–41.

[12] James Henley Thornwell, "Report on Slavery," *Southern Presbyterian Review,* 5 (Jan. 1852), 383–84; Iveson L. Brookes, *A Defence of the South Against the Reproaches and Encroachments of the North* (Hamburg, S.C., 1850), esp. 28; see also Iveson L. Brookes, *A Defence of Southern Slavery: Against the Attacks of Henry Clay and Alexander Campbell . . .* (Hamburg, S.C., 1851), 19–20; Thomas Smyth, *The Sin and the Curse: or, The Union,*

into the seamless fabric of southern society became the mainstay of the proslavery argument, and it drew proslavery advocates inexorably into a struggle with abolitionists in which the stakes were no less than the nature of society and the republic itself. Thornwell characteristically minced no words: "The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders," he railed from the heated perspective of the 1850s. "They are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, Jacobins on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other." His view of the conflict was widely shared by ministers of every denomination and politicians of both radical and moderate stripe.[13]

Throughout the antebellum period in South Carolina, ministers and politicians scored the philosophy of natural rights and universal equality as "well-sounding but unmeaning verbiage." "Is it not palpably nearer the truth to say that no man was ever born free and that no two men were ever born equal?" low-country politician William Harper asked in what became a famous contribution to proslavery literature. His answer was already, by 1838, a predictable one: "Wealth and poverty, . . . strength or weakness, . . . ease or labor, power or subjection, make the endless diversity in the condition of man."[14]

Instead of natural rights and universal equality, Harper, Thornwell, and others offered an elaborate theory of providential relations and particularistic rights. As Charleston minister John B. Adger explained, all human beings did not have the same rights, but only the specific ones that attached to their role. In the Christian republic, wives did not have the rights of husbands, or slaves the rights of masters: a husband had "the rights of a husband . . . a father the rights of a father; and a slave, only the rights of a slave." Slavery thus occupied no anomalous category in low-country social thought, and its defense became inseparable from that of Christian and conservative social order.[15]

The real measure of the effectiveness of proslavery arguments, as politicians were acutely aware, was their social breadth. For the ideological work of slavery assumed

The True Source of Disunion, and Our Duty in the Present Crisis (Nov. 1860), reprinted in *Complete Works of Rev. Thomas Smyth, D.D.*, ed. J. William Flinn (10 vols., Columbia, S.C., 1908–1912), VII, 544. Similar arguments were used by politicians: see William Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," *Southern Literary Journal,* 3 (Jan. 1838), 65–75, esp. 68–69; *ibid.* (Feb. 1838), 81–97, esp. 89–90; *ibid.* (March 1838), 161–75; *ibid.* (April 1838), 241–51; *ibid.* (May 1838), 321–28; James Henry Hammond, "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," in *The Proslavery Argument as Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States* (Philadelphia, 1853), 125–26, 154–55, 161–63.

[13] Thornwell, "Report on Slavery," 391. For radical politicians' views, see Hammond, "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," esp. 174; Robert Barnwell Rhett, "Address to the People of Beaufort and Colleton Districts Upon the Subject of Abolition," Jan. 15, 1838, Robert Barnwell Rhett Papers (South Caroliniana Library), esp. 6–7. For moderates' views, see Robert Nicholas Olsberg, "A Government of Class and Race: William Henry Trescot and the South Carolina Chivalry, 1860–1865" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1972), 100–104, 115, 122–23; John Townsend, *The South Alone Should Govern the South* (Charleston, 1860), 9–10.

[14] Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," esp. 71, 68; see also Whitemarsh B. Seabrook, *An Essay on the Management of Slaves and Especially on Their Religious Instruction* (Charleston, 1834), 6; John B. Adger, "The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and Slavery," *Southern Presbyterian Review,* 11 (March 1849), esp. 570–71; Whitefoord Smith, *National Sins: A Call to Repentance . . .* (Charleston, 1849), 18; Thornwell, "Slavery and Religious Instruction," 108–9, 130, 133–36, 140–41; Thornwell, "Report on Slavery," 387–88, 390–91; Brooks, *Defence of the South,* 8, 19–22, 30, 34; Hammond, "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," 109–10; and James Henry Hammond, *Are Working Men Slaves? The Question Discussed by Senators Hammond, Broderick and Wilson* (n.p., 1858), 3.

[15] Adger, "Christian Doctrine," esp. 573; see also Benjamin Morgan Palmer, "Thanksgiving Sermon" (1860), quoted in Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer* (Richmond, Va., 1906), 212–13.

the greatest significance precisely where it confronted the greatest challenge: in binding nonslaveholders and small slaveholders to planters within a common system of meanings and values. In reaching beyond masters and slaves to all relations of southern households, proslavery ideologues bid for the loyalties of all white male adults. They repeatedly reminded white southerners of all classes that slavery could not be disentangled from other relations of power and privilege and that it represented simply the most extreme and absolute form of the legal and customary dependencies that characterized the Old South—and their own households.

The conjoining of all domestic relations of domination and subordination enabled proslavery spokesmen to tap beliefs about the legitimacy of inequality that went and, sadly, still go so deep in the individual psyche and social structure that for most historians they are still unrecognizable as the subject of history. In the dual task of painting both the abolitionist image of social disorder and their own benevolent and peaceful social order, proslavery spokesmen returned repeatedly to gender relations, exploiting assumptions about the "natural" relations of men and women. On the common ground of gender they sought to ensure that every white man recognized his own investment in the struggle over slavery.

William Harper demonstrated the power of that approach, playing the trump card of gender inequality to give conclusive lie to the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence. "What is the foundation of the bold dogma so confidently announced?" he asked. "Females are human and rational beings. They may be found . . . better qualified to exercise political privileges and to attain the distinctions of society than many men; yet who complains of the order of society by which they are excluded from them?"[16] The transhistorical subordination of women was presented as incontestable proof that social and political inequality were natural.

In the lexicon of metaphors for slavery, marriage took pride of place, a discursive construction historians have rarely recognized.[17] No other relation was more universally embraced as both natural and divine, and none so readily evoked the stake of enfranchised white men, yeomen and planters alike, in the defense of slave society. By equating the subordination of women and that of slaves, proslavery ideologues and politicians attempted to endow slavery with the legitimacy of the family and especially marriage and, not incidentally, to invest the defense of slavery with the survival of customary gender relations.[18] In this sense, the subordination of women

[16] Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," 68–69.

[17] Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," 68–69, 89–90, 165; L. S. M. [Louisa Susannah McCord], "Enfranchisement of Woman" (1852), reprinted in *All Clever Men Who Make Their Way: Critical Discourse in the Old South*, ed. Michael O'Brien (Fayetteville, 1982), 337–56; Richard Fuller, quoted in J. H. Cuthbert, *Life of Richard Fuller, D.D.* (New York, 1879), 194–96; Hammond, "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," 125–26, 154–55; Thornwell, "Report on Slavery," 383–85; William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D.D.* (Nashville, 1859), 296. Thornton Stringfellow, "A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery," in *Ideology of Slavery*, ed. Faust, 156–57, 144–45; Henry Hughes, "Treatise on Sociology," in *ibid.*, 262–63; George Fitzhugh, "Southern Thought," in *ibid.*, 291–95; and George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!: Or, Slaves Without Masters* (1857; reprint, Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 95–97.

[18] I mean the analogy of women and slaves to be understood specifically as an ideological construction. I do not mean to suggest that free women's legal or social position was analogous to that of slaves. Different interpretations have been offered by Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Chicago, 1970), esp. 45–79; and Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South* (New York, 1982), esp. 16–35.

bore a great deal of the ideological weight of slavery, providing the most concrete example of how public and private distinctions were confounded in political discourse and culture.

Women's nature and appropriate social role became, perhaps as never before, a matter of political concern all over the country in the antebellum period. But they assumed added political significance in the South where their fate was shackled to that of slavery. While southern republican discourse, like its northern variants, had long depended on gendered language and images, the specific analogy of slaves with women, masters with husbands, and slavery with marriage appears, in the late 1830s, to have replaced an older emphasis on the family in general and fathers and children in particular.[19] Perhaps the shift marked the need to put a more modern and benevolent face on familial authority (marriage was, after all, voluntary) as evangelical reformers urged masters to conform the institution to its Christian ideal; and it almost certainly reflected a new self-consciousness about gender relations and ideology that was provoked by the heated contestations of the antebellum period. But there can be no doubt that it reflected as well the need to put proslavery on the broadest possible social basis and the utility of the metaphor of marriage in that unceasing effort.

Although ministers continued to use the familial metaphor generally defined, insisting, for example, that "a Christian slave must be submissive, faithful, and obedient for reasons of the same authority with those which oblige husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, to fulfill the duties of those relations," they increasingly focused specifically on the relation of husbands and wives. For in the family, that "model state," Benjamin Morgan Palmer explained, "subjection to law" originated with the authority of man "as the head of the woman." By the time dutiful subjection was prescribed to the "servant," it had "already been exemplified to the child, not only in the headship of the husband, but in the wifely obedience which is its commentary."[20]

The metaphor of marriage had much to recommend it to southern ideologues. But it was not without its problems, as they admitted; the most obvious was that the submission of wives was voluntary while that of slaves was not. Nevertheless, the problem of the analogy of husband and wife was more easily negotiated than that of parent and child. After all, male children grew up to lay claim in adulthood to the prerogatives of husbands, fathers, and masters. Female children, on the other hand, became wives; they remained, like slaves, as perpetual children, at least in

[19] See the familial metaphors in Richard Furman, *Exposition of the Views of the Baptists Relative to the Coloured Population of the United States* (Charleston, 1833), 10; Kerber, *Women of the Republic;* Ruth H. Bloch, 'The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs,* 13 (Autumn 1987), 37–58; Jean Gunderson, 'Independence, Citizenship, and the American Revolution," 59–77; Stansell, *City of Women,* 20–30.

[20] Wightman, *Life of Capers,* 296; Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Family in its Civil and Churchly Aspects* Richmond, 1876), 15, 10–11. Although published after the war, Palmer's book was based on sermons delivered n the antebellum period and contains such chapters as "Authority of Masters" and "The Subjection of Slaves." The relevant secondary literature on paternalism is extensive, but see especially Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll.*

relation to masters. Rice planter and one-time governor R. F. W. Allston literally inscribed this planter model of romantic love in letters to his wife by addressing them to "my dear child," while one plantation mistress, for her part, thanked the "Heavenly Father" for a husband who had "just such a master will as suits my woman's nature." Females thus provided the only constant point of reference for naturalizing subordination.[21]

At another level, though, one cannot help but speculate that ideologues found a great deal more psychological satisfaction in likening slaves to women than to children. For the rebelliousness of women, like that of slaves, was a specter only summoned to be banished. By insisting that women *chose* to submit (a suspect formulation when one considers the options), men were, in effect, denying the personal power they knew women to have over them, however temporarily, in romantic and sexual love. Dependence on women was unmanly; manhood orbited around the display of independence. Hence, arguments about female submission not only naturalized slavery; they confirmed masculinity.[22] Little wonder that proslavery ideologues went to such lengths to prove that women's subordination was grounded in nature and sanctioned by God. Their heart was surely in the job.

In their efforts to prove the "natural" subordination of women, ideologues faced no shortage of materials. Assumptions about "the different mental and moral organization of the sexes" infused southern society and culture and, as a result, it was not difficult to "prove" that the subordination of women followed nature's directives. Each sex "is the best in its place," Palmer reasoned. "The distinction of sex runs through the entire nature of both" and "forbids the comparison between the two."[23] The question of equality was thereby answered in the usual particularistic fashion.

Notions about the different physiological, psychological, and moral constitution of the sexes were clearly not peculiar to the slave South; they had steadily gained currency throughout the Western world since at least the late eighteenth century.[24]

[21] R. F. W. Allston to Mrs. Allston, March 11, June 2, 1850, quoted in William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York, 1990), 52; Gertrude Thomas Diary, July 9, 1852, April 11, 1856, quoted in *ibid.*, 53. On the education of planter sons for masterhood, see Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore, 1987).

[22] For an interesting discussion of the psychological dimensions of manhood and independence in republican discourse, see Elizabeth Colwill, "Transforming Women's Empire: Representations of Women in French Political Culture, 1770–1807" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990).

[23] Palmer, *The Family,* 55, 36; see also Charles Colcock Jones, *The Glory of Woman is the Fear of the Lord* (Philadelphia, 1847); Thomas Smyth, *Mary Not a Perpetual Virgin . . .* (Charleston, 1846); George Howe, *The Endowments, Position and Education of Women . . .* (Columbia, S.C., 1850); William Porcher Miles, *Women "Nobly Planned": How to Educate Our Girls,* in *South Carolina Education Pamphlets, College Addresses,* 1 (Columbia, S.C., n.d.); John Belton O'Neall, *An Address on Female Education Delivered at the Request of the Trustees of the Johnson Female Seminary . . .* (Anderson, S.C., 1849); and Thomas R. Dew, "On the Characteristic Differences between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Women in Society," *Southern Literary Messenger,* 1 (May 1835), 493–512; *ibid.* (July 1835), 621–32; *ibid.* (Aug. 1835), 675–91.

[24] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), esp. 149–92. The literature on the antebellum North is now daunting, but see Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven, 1977); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, 1973); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985); Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, eds., *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill, 1988).

And while there is always reason for skepticism about separate-but-equal constructions, arguments about the complementarity of the sexes in the South put at best a transparent gloss on relations of domination. "Submission . . . will yield all that is incumbent upon the wife," Palmer insisted, as if to prove the point. "Dependence . . . is not her degradation but her glory," and man must learn to distinguish "betwixt subordination and inferiority." The distinction was a handy one for proslavery ideologues. As George Fitzhugh noted in characteristically direct fashion, "marriage is too much like slavery not to be involved in its fate."[25]

Marriage did lend itself nicely to comparison with slavery, or rather the proslavery view of marriage did, and ideologues were quick to exploit it. God had ordained a position for slaves in the inevitable hierarchy of society, they argued, with particular rights and duties attached to it. Slaves, like women, were fitted by nature to conform comfortably to their place, and slavery, like marriage, was a relationship of "reciprocal interest" which ensured that a "due subordination is preserved between the classes which would otherwise be thrown into sharp antagonism." From their perspective, though not, perhaps, from that of white southern women, marriage was a benign metaphor for slavery. For while the metaphor enshrined male dominance and female subordination, it attempted to cast both in a benevolent light.[26]

Yet the likeness of women and slaves, despite ideological claims, did not ultimately reside in the subjects' natural fitness for subordination, but rather in the masters' power to command it. "Is it not natural that a man should be attached to that which is his own?" William Harper queried, wresting benevolence from the self-interest that allegedly secured for women and slaves protection from their masters' brutality. "Do not men everywhere contract kind feelings to their dependents?" If women found this an imperfect protection, as Harper inadvertently admitted, slaves found it worse than none at all. But the striking feature of the analogy was their common status as "his," as "dependents" who lacked, as Harper said repeatedly, self-ownership. A "freeman" was one who was "master of his own time and action. . . . To submit to a blow would be degrading to a freeman," he wrote, "because he is the protector of himself." But it was "not degrading to a slave—neither is it . . . to a woman."[27] Thus in proslavery discourse the metaphor of marriage worked in complex ways. It did not, in the last analysis, constrain the masters' boundless power; rather it confirmed that power by locating the only restraint on the exercise of it exclusively in the hands of masters themselves. The metaphor's multivalence, and particularly its manipulation of benevolence and power, explains its political efficacy.

In their efforts to impress on ordinary southerners the seamlessness of the social fabric, proslavery ideologues were afforded assistance from the most unlikely of

[25] Palmer, *The Family,* 17, 36–37, 45, 49–52, 55, 70–71, esp. 49, 36; George Fitzhugh quoted in Dorothy Ann Gay, "The Tangled Skein of Romanticism and Violence in the Old South: The Southern Response to Abolitionism and Feminism, 1830–1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1975), 126.

[26] Palmer, *The Family,* 35–37, 45, 125, 147–68. For one yeoman woman's heroic struggle for a submissiveness supposedly instinctual, see Mary Davis Brown Diary, Mary Davis Brown Papers (South Caroliniana Library).

[27] Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," 94, 89–90, 163–68.

quarters. In the 1830s, a handful of Garrisonian abolitionists also came to the conviction that the fate of dependents, slavery, and the subordination of women were inseparable, and that conventional gender relations were at stake in the national struggle over slavery. As that radical minority of abolitionists forged their own position in struggle and, indeed, in schism with the mainstream of the antislavery movement, they forever changed the meaning of the analogy of women and slaves by mounting a progressive challenge to its emergent reactionary proslavery construction. Abby Kelley, a committed Garrisonian and a leading figure in the antebellum women's rights movement, articulated the radical meaning most concretely in acknowledging a debt of gratitude to slaves: "In striving to strike his irons off, we found most surely that we were manacled ourselves." Garrisonians' yoking of the subordination of women and slaves and their public commitment to a dual emancipation proved a perfect foil for proslavery politicians.[28]

If all men should have "equal rights," more than one South Carolinian worried, "then why not women?" That some northern women abolitionists, and some male ones too, asked the same question lent credibility to proslavery threats.[29] The Garrisonians' radical actions in the late 1830s and 1840s lent new fervor and detail to standard comparisons of the natural, divine, and benevolent social order of the slave South and the chaos of the revolutionary North, now embodied in the dual specter of abolitionism and feminism. No more dramatic illustration of the political significance of domestic, and especially gender, relations could have been imagined. South Carolinian politicians exploited it for all it was worth.

It was not difficult for ministers and politicians to convince low-country yeomen, among others, that abolitionists really threatened a violent end to Christian society as they knew it. By the late 1830s, the connection between Garrisonian abolitionism and women's rights had already found firm root in the American political imagination, planted there by the uncompromising actions of such women as Angelina Grimké. And if Grimké's appearance before a committee of the Massachusetts legislature in 1838 sent shock waves throughout the South, then the impression was nowhere so intense as in South Carolina, her native state.[30] But the outraged and fearful response to Garrisonian feminism was not confined to South Carolina, nor even below the Mason-Dixon line; it was mirrored north of slavery, providing com-

[28] Abby Kelley quoted in Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America* (Urbana, 1978), 20–21. Use of the analogy by first-generation women's rights activists is exemplified in the writings of Sarah Grimké and Angelina Grimké. See Elizabeth Ann Bartlett, ed., *Sarah Grimké: Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays* (New Haven, 1988); and Angelina Grimké, *Letters to Catherine Beecher,* reprinted in *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir,* ed. Alice S. Rossi (New York, 1973), 319–22. The literature on abolitionism and women's rights is now vast, but see Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina* (New York, 1967); Ellen C. DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America* (Ithaca, 1978); Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (Ithaca, 1984); Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven, 1989); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence* (New Haven, 1990).

[29] Quotation from Gay, "Tangled Skein," 131; Dew, "On the Characteristic Differences between the Sexes." The best evidence is the commonplace yoking of abolitionism and feminism, often through ridicule and humor. See *Orangeburg Southron,* June 11, 1856, Feb. 13, 1860; *Beaufort Enterprise,* Oct. 10, 1860; John L. Manning to his wife, May 29, 1860, Box V, Folder 172, Williams-Chesnut-Manning Families Papers (South Caroliniana Library).

[30] Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina,* 226–42; Yellin, *Women and Sisters,* esp. 29–52.

pelling evidence of how deeply gender undergirded conceptions of social and political order.

William Lloyd Garrison was no doubt right that "the proslavery heads and tails of society know not what to do when WOMAN stands forth to plead the cause of her degraded, chain-bound sex." His exultant tone, though, was surely misplaced; he soon discovered, if he did not already know, that similar resistance to female emancipation cut deeply into his political support in the North. Indeed there was a striking, even suspicious resemblance between some of the anti–women's rights, anti-Garrisonian formulations of conservative northern clergy and the proslavery southern versions. Resistance to Garrisonians was by no means limited to the ranks of conservative clergymen, though; in the early 1840s, conflict over the issue of women's rights provoked a split within the ranks of the broader antislavery movement as well.[31]

Although their radicalism may have found its limits in the prerogatives of capital, Garrisonian abolitionists and women's rights advocates nonetheless issued ringing challenges, as their proslavery adversaries charged, to traditional authority and privilege—to chattel property, the church, and most threatening of all, it would seem, to male supremacy.[32]

The radical and emancipatory analogy of women and slaves, the one embraced by Abby Kelley and her abolitionist–women's rights allies, is the one with which we are now most familiar, but it is perhaps the conservative power of the analogy, in its different northern and southern uses, that best captures antebellum meanings. In the South, where the household gave palpable form to the common dependency of women and slaves, the analogy buttressed an aggressive proslavery republicanism. In the North, by contrast, a commitment to customary gender relations did not sustain a proslavery politics, but it did work to conservative effect. The Free-Soil direction of mainstream antislavery activity in the 1850s appears to have been due, at least in part, to a social conservatism, particularly marked on matters of gender, and a general reluctance to envision the reconstruction of social relations according to liberal principles of equal rights as Garrisonians envisioned them.[33] At the very least, the contestation over gender relations and ideology within even the progres-

[31] William Lloyd Garrison, quoted in Yellin, *Women and Sisters,* 189n34, 44–51; see also Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (New York, 1978), 3–18; Tise, *Proslavery,* esp. 261–85. To compare northern and southern indictments, see Howe, *Endowments of Women,* esp. 11; "From a Pastoral Letter, 'The General Association of Massachusetts (Orthodox) to the Churches Under Their Care'" (1837), reprinted in *Feminist Papers,* ed. Rossi, 305–6; and Leonard Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolitionist Mobs in the North* (New York, 1970), 56–61.

[32] Jonathan A. Glickstein, "'Poverty is not Slavery': American Abolitionists and the Competitive Labor Market," in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists,* ed. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge, 1979); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, 1975), esp. 435–68.

[33] The problem with the analogy of women and slaves, in both its feminist and proslavery uses, is that it worked to occlude class differences between women (by which both camps invariably meant free white women) and slaves (by which they meant male slaves). Given the centrality of the analogy in antebellum history and its enduring political appeal to liberal feminists, the problem deserves a separate treatment. On the antislavery platform of the Republican party, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970).

sive ranks of northern republicanism helps to explain the centrality of gender to proslavery republicanism.

It is not so surprising, then, that one of the most powerful and coherent proslavery tracts to come out of South Carolina, a virtual model of conservative reasoning, was written to meet the challenge of the woman suffrage movement. Louisa Susannah Cheves McCord argued in her 1852 article that "The Enfranchisement of Women" was "but a piece with negro emancipation." Advocates of women's rights such as Harriett Martineau ("the Wilberforce of women") do southerners a favor, McCord claimed, in standing "exactly where they should be, cheek by jowl with the abolitionists. We thank them, at least, for saving us the trouble of proving this position." Yet prove it she did attempt to do, and the evidence she adduced was an amalgam of by then classic proslavery positions. She began with the usual mocking references to natural rights: "Mounted on Cuffee's shoulders, in rides the Lady. The genius of communism bows them both in, mouthing over Mr. Jefferson's free and equal sentence"; and moved to the inevitable contrast of northern and southern society. Whereas southerners were "conservatives" who had accepted God-given "distinctions of sex and race" and sought reform by working with "Nature's Laws," northerners, she explained, held unnatural principles that inevitably produced unnatural spectacles. Here McCord took an old genre to new depths, calling suffragists those "petticoated despisers of their sex . . . would-be men . . . moral monsters . . . things which nature disclaims." Women on top, the world indeed turned upside down, McCord conjured up the most fundamental image of social disorder to demonstrate that reform threatened nothing less than revolution and to remind southerners that where all relations of power were connected, the assault on privilege would not stop short of anarchy or the threshold of their own households.[34]

In the most literal sense, the subordination of women was at issue in the struggle over slavery; in another sense, however, the larger question was the social and political status of dependents, men and women alike, and thus the proper parameters of the republican polity. Although the debate was a national one, the conservative South clearly had more to gain than the North from the politicization of gender relations in the antebellum period.

Nationally the debate over women's emancipation strengthened conservative resolve on a whole range of social and political issues, the most important of which was slavery. In the North, however, it caused division within antislavery ranks, marking for the majority the limits of democratic republican commitment to the rights of man. But in the South, in the absence of any women's movement, ideas about the natural subordination of women contributed not a little to the ideological and political cohesion of the proslavery cause.

[34] [McCord], "Enfranchisement of Woman," 344, 347, 342; Howe, *Endowments of Women,* 10–12. Scholarly treatments of McCord include Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 242–89; and Richard Lounsberry, "Ludibria Rerum Mortalium: Charlestonian Intellectuals and Their Classics," in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston,* ed. O'Brien and Moltke-Hansen, 325–69. On gender reversal as the classic representation of the world turned upside down, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1965), 124–51.

No social relation has ever had such difficulty shedding its apparently "natural" character as that between man and woman. Then as now, unexamined assumptions about natural gender differences and conventions were invoked through language to naturalize other social relations—class and race, for example—organizing difference hierarchically and lending it the cast of immutability and inevitability.[35] That was precisely what proslavery ideologues attempted to do in their association of women and slaves. The philosophy of natural rights foundered everywhere in the western world in the Age of Revolution on the shoals of women's right to the status of individual and citizen.[36] By engaging their adversaries at that point, proslavery politicians put their claims about natural inequality on unshakable ground, or more precisely, on ground few wanted to see move. Their success, however, ultimately depended on the social breadth and depth of the commitment to the ideas and conventions they invoked. Here lies the real contribution of a gender analysis of the proslavery argument. For the recognition that the social relations of the private sphere profoundly shaped political ideas and actions in the public sphere has important and largely unexamined implications for the political ideology and culture of the South Carolina low country and, especially, for the position of the yeoman majority within it.

Low-country yeoman farmers may never have read a sermon by Thornwell or a tract by Harper, but they almost certainly heard a sermon at their local Baptist church by the likes of Reverend Iveson Brookes or a speech at a July Fourth barbecue by a prominent politician such as Robert Barnwell Rhett. The gulf between high and low culture was just not that great; evangelical values played a central role in both. Moreover, despite the paucity of evidence testifying directly to their political ideology, there is little reason to assume that yeomen were an insurgent majority within plantation regions. To the contrary, in evangelical churches, whose extant records give us a rare glimpse of their communities, male yeomen demonstrated an unequivocal commitment to hierarchical social order and to conservative Christian republicanism. Unlike intellectuals and planter politicians, these low-country farmers articulated their world view piecemeal, in framing covenants to govern admission, fellowship, and representation and in the dispensation of gospel discipline. And they did so in the colloquial language of familialism. They represented Christian society most commonly as an extended family replete with paternal head and fixed ranks of dependents, a formulation that bore striking resemblance to the organic ideology of published proslavery ministers and politicians. In their Baptist, Methodist, and, less often, Presbyterian congregations, the yeoman majority, or rather its enfranchised male members, eschewed any attempt to interpret equality in social

[35] Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History,* esp. 53–68, and the series of articles in n. 2 above.

[36] Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere;* Pateman, *Sexual Contract;* Colwill, "Transforming Women's Empire"; Kerber, *Women of the Republic;* Linda Kerber, "'History Can Do It No Justice': Women and the Reinterpretation of the American Revolution," in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution,* ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville, 1989), 3–42.

terms. Instead they assigned privileges and duties and meted out discipline according to secular rank, station, and status.[37]

This should come as no surprise, despite historians' usual insistence on the egalitarian impulses of southern yeomen. In their churches as in their households, marketplaces, and electoral districts, black belt yeomen moved as independent and enfranchised men amid a sea of dependent and disenfranchised people. Whether slaveholders or not, yeoman household heads were, as they proudly claimed, masters themselves. Politicians acknowledged and confirmed this identity in representing the defense of slavery as the defense of all kinds of power and privilege, domestic and public. Masterhood is thereby revealed as a complex identity, literally engendered in all those independent "freeman" by virtue of personal domination over dependents in their own households. It was moreover ritually confirmed in the exercise of the political rights to which masterhood entitled them. Out of that same social matrix, located resolutely in the household and the private sphere, the yeomanry's commitment to slavery was similarly engendered. For the hidden assumptions and values that underlay their political choices were forged in the relations that engaged them most directly—with the few slaves they may have owned, but just as important, with the women they presumed it their natural right to rule. In the struggle over slavery, yeoman farmers understandably saw the struggle to perpetuate their privilege both at home and at the ballot box.

Viewed within a holistic social context rather than exclusively in relation to planters, yeoman farmers come into focus as part of a small minority in plantation districts privileged by the qualifications of republican citizenship.[38] Little wonder that they exhibited a profound commitment to natural hierarchy and inequality even as they cherished equal rights as independent men. The political ideology of yeomen in plantation areas was thus a contradictory one that defies the common characterization of historians, liberal and left, as egalitarian in impulse.[39] Yeomen did indeed press overweening planters for a greater share of power and resources, and they pressed them for recognition of their rights as masters. But they also found common cause with planters in maintaining and policing the class, gender, and racial boundaries of citizenship in the slave republic. Their commitment to the slave regime owed as much to its legitimation of dependence and inequality in the private sphere as to the much-lauded vitality of male independence and formal "democracy" in the public sphere. As good republicans, yeomen appreciated both of Columbia's faces.

[37] This discussion is based on a quantitative analysis of the social composition of membership of 60 low-country and middle district churches and on textual analysis of church constitutions and dispensation of gospel discipline. See, for example, Beech Branch Baptist Church Book, esp. Nov. 11, 1809, Beech Branch Baptist Church Records; McCurry, "Defense of Their World," 172–334, esp. 237.

[38] Lacy K. Ford, Jr., "Republics and Democracy: The Parameters of Political Citizenship in Antebellum South Carolina," in *The Meaning of South Carolina History: Essays in Honor of George C. Rogers, Jr.*, ed. David R. Chesnutt and Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia, S.C., 1991), 121–45.

[39] Compare the otherwise different interpretations of Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*, and Hahn, *Roots of Southern Populism*.

It was a common trope of political tracts that the only true republic was a slave republic, for only a slave republic maintained the public sphere as a realm of perfect equality. But invariably in republican discourse, independence betrayed its intimacy with dependence, and equality with inequality. "No social state without slavery as its basis," Baptist minister Iveson Brookes offered, as if to make the point, "can permanently maintain a republican form of government."[40] Yeoman farmers, like most enfranchised southerners, were aware of what republican independence entailed.

Many historians, however, see only the public face of slavery republicanism, perhaps because they employ such a narrow definition of "the political," one more theirs than antebellum southerners'. As a result, they mistake ideology for description of social and political reality; the common interpretation of the South as a herrenvolk or white man's democracy bears an unsettling resemblance to the portrait proslavery politicians themselves drew.[41] But the slave republic was emphatically not a democracy, racial or otherwise, as its defenders readily acknowledged in boasting of the restriction of political rights to a privileged few as its distinctive and superior characteristic.

From the earliest skirmishes of the nullification crisis, antitariff South Carolinians such as the editorialist "Leonidas" laid claim to a distinctive republicanism. In the North, Leonidas observed in 1828, "liberty is a principle." In the slave South, where free men possessed of "habits of command" had developed a "privileged superiority," liberty is "a privilege, a passion, and a principle." South Carolina's freemen would never consent to be made "the dastard-trampled slaves of wool-weavers and spindle-twirlers." Constituted as "freemen" by slavery, they would show themselves, Leonidas predicted, to be the natural guardians of the republic against the corruption of the state and its dominant interests.[42]

That slavery did not simply wed southern "freemen" to a passionate defense of liberty but led them to define liberty, freedom, and independence in particular ways was already evident in the insistence of Leonidas that the battle would be met over the right to own slave property. But the distinction between the true republican principles and practices of the slave states and the bastardized ones of the free states was refined and elaborated in sectional struggle throughout the antebellum period.

During the struggle over the abolitionists' congressional petition campaign of 1838, Robert Barnwell Rhett introduced what became an enduring focus on social relations and particularly the distinction between the antagonistic and antirepublican social relations of the free labor North and the harmonious and republican ones of the slave labor South.[43] It was an argument to which proslavery politicians

[40] Brookes, *A Defence of the South,* esp. 45–46; Speech of Gen. Robert Y. Hayne, *Charleston Mercury,* Feb. 3, 1830; W. C. Dana, *A Sermon Delivered in the Central Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C., Nov. 21st, 1860 . . .* (Charleston, 1860).

[41] Michael Wayne recently challenged the dominant interpretation of herrenvolkism but did not take issue with the explanatory value of herrenvolkism itself or with exclusively racial interpretations of proslavery ideology. See Michael Wayne, "An Old South Morality Play: Reconsidering the Social Underpinnings of Proslavery Ideology," *Journal of American History,* 77 (Dec. 1990), 838–63.

[42] Leonidas, *Charleston Mercury,* July 14, 1828.

[43] Rhett, "Address to the People of Beaufort," 7–9. Harper adopted a strikingly similar position in "Memoir on Slavery."

increasingly turned as the sectional struggle deepened and, not incidentally, as the problem of enfranchised dependents fueled restrictionist impulses in northern politics in the 1840s and 1850s. James Henry Hammond, planter, congressman, governor, senator, ideologue, gave it perhaps its most vivid formulation in his writings and speeches from the mid-1840s to the late 1850s.

Slavery everywhere exists in fact if not in name, Hammond reminded his fellow United States senators in an 1858 debate: "Your whole class of manual laborers and 'operatives' as you call them, are essentially slaves." To enfranchise slaves, as the free labor states were compelled to do, threatened a "fearful crisis in republican institutions" and invited revolution at the ballot box. Hammond sketched frightful portraits of the festering and explosive class politics of industrial England's cities, whose fate awaited, if it had not already visited, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. The republic could not long survive such developments without the restraining conservative influence of the South. The genius of the southern system, Hammond insisted, was to have recognized the necessity of enslaving the poor and to have found a race of people "adapted to that purpose." Race was not, in his analysis, an essential but only a fortuitous characteristic of the slave labor system. It ensured that the South's dependent classes were confined within households under the governance of a master, where they could be deprived, as were women everywhere, of political rights. "Our slaves do not vote," Hammond pointed out. "In the slaveholding states . . . nearly one half of the whole population, and those the poorest and most ignorant, have no political influence whatever, because they are slaves." The half of the population who did vote were, as a result, if not rich, nonetheless part of a privileged class of independent men, "elevated far above the mass." Such men could be trusted, as they must be in a republic, to "preserve a stable and well-ordered government."[44]

Slavery was above all else, in Hammond's account, a system of class and labor relations that had become, to the inestimable benefit of the South, a system of race relations as well. It was that convergence that made the South an exemplary republic, one committed to universal manhood suffrage yet able to restrict it to independent men—a herrenvolk democracy, if you will. "History presents no such combination for republican liberty," Rhett boasted, "than that which exists at the South. The African for the laborer—the Anglo-Saxon for the master and ruler." Slavery was the "cornerstone of the republican edifice." As Hammond, Thornwell, and numerous other South Carolina politicians and ministers agreed, the "primitive and patriarchal" social relations of the South prevented the republic from going down the French road of corruption (to use Thornwell's memorable phrase) from a "representative to a democratic government."[45]

[44] Hammond, *Are Working Men Slaves?*, 3–4; Hammond, "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," esp. 110–11.

[45] Rhett, "Address to the People of Beaufort," 13; Hammond, "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," 110–11, 162–63; Thornwell, quoted in Palmer, ed., *Life and Letters of Thornwell,* 310–11. Barbara Fields has argued that slavery must be recognized as a system of class relations, despite the obfuscations of racial ideology; see Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward,* ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York, 1982), 143–78; and Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review,* 181 (May/June 1990), 95–118.

Such explicitly antidemocratic sentiments were not reserved, moreover, for the private communications of a handful of like-minded conservative extremists. On the contrary, editors, correspondents, and political candidates lauded the advantages of South Carolina's conservative republicanism on the stump and in the columns of local newspapers. In the midst of the Kansas crisis and the usual calls for unity within the state, the editor of the *Orangeburg Southron* rejected as "but a crude form of the wildest radicalism" an up-country editor's proposal to turn election of the state's presidential electors over to "the people." It was, he said, merely a ruse to reform the entire electoral system in the state. He aggressively defended the "compromises of our state constitution," and especially the restrictive franchise, as "those conservative elements of our polity, that constitute the bulwark of our strength and the barrier to radical and vulgar aggression." Even the pamphlets distributed by the 1860 Association, whose explicit mission was to galvanize popular support for secession, prominently employed the antidemocratic defense of slavery republicanism. At least in the coastal parishes and the middle districts of the state, politicians and aspirants to office asserted openly that the franchise was not the right of all men, but the privilege only of free and independent men. They were not loath, that is, to make a republican principle out of exclusion. And while it was always a potentially explosive issue, they articulated this view with some confidence that their largely yeoman constituencies responded as men empowered by the demarcation of such narrow boundaries to the political community.[46]

The principle of exclusion was articulated, significantly, in the gendered language of republican discourse. Such terms as "manly independence" and "womanly weakness" served in political tracts and speeches to construct, legitimize, and patrol the boundaries of the republican community, excluding not just women but all those who bore the stigma of dependence. Robert Barnwell Rhett was a master of the genre and demonstrated his skill in regular calls to arms. In an early antitariff speech he wove gender, class, and politics into a republican tapestry in which unmanly men, guilty of "abject submission" to northern "tyranny," were not just rendered effeminate but "crushed and trampled slaves." Those, however, who left "despair . . . to the weak," those who "as freemen" would never consent to "lay the bones of a slave beside those of a free ancestry," only those were true republican men. Dependencies were deliberately conflated by the gendered language of republicanism; independence, by contrast, remained brilliantly distinct. As Rhett had put it in a speech the previous June to his constituents at Walterborough Court House, the seat of Colleton District, the tariff must be resisted as "an infringement on our privileges as men." "Impotent resistance" or "submissive patience" was a fit response

[46] *Orangeburg Southron,* May 21, May 28, June 4, 1856; Townsend, *The South Alone Should Govern the South;* John Townsend, *Doom of Slavery in the Union: Its Safety Out of It* (Charleston, 1860). See also Rhett, "Address to the People of Beaufort"; William Henry Trescot, *Oration Delivered to the Beaufort Volunteer Artillery on July 4, 1850* (Charleston, 1850); James Henley Thornwell, "National Sins: A Fast Day Sermon Preached in the Presbyterian Church. . . November 21, 1860," *Southern Presbyterian Review,* 13 (Jan. 1861), 649–88; James Henley Thornwell, "State of the Country," *ibid.*, 860–89.

only of women or slaves. It was in no small measure in defense of that conception of republicanism that southern citizens rallied in the name of republican manhood.[47]

When a politician took the platform at a meeting, muster, or Fourth of July barbecue and claimed to speak "as a freeman," the salutation was not simply an invitation to his largely yeoman audiences to regard him as one among equals. It was that, but it was also an evocation of shared privilege, an invitation to see themselves as part of the elite: as freemen in a society in which the majority were not free.[48] It was, moreover, a constant reminder of their stake in social hierarchy, political exclusivity, and slavery. "Slavery is with us a powerful element of conservatism," William Henry Trescot, a low-country planter and historian, wrote, because "the citizen with us belongs . . . to a privileged class."[49] This was an argument with great appeal to yeomen.

The banner of "free men" was an emblem of the conservatism of "American republicanism," waved to distinguish it from "French democracy," or mobocracy, as so many low-country planters referred to the bastardized politics of the North. Thus the "MEN of the South," yeomen and planters, were challenged repeatedly to "set aside womanly fears of disunion" in favor of "manly and resolute action," not, as many historians have argued, of an egalitarian and democratic regime, but of a hierarchical and republican one. Their loyalties were secured to a regime in which the rights of citizens were awarded only to those few who were fully masters of themselves and their dependents.[50]

Yeoman farmers were committed to the defense of social hierarchy and political privilege, including slavery, in large measure because of the relations of personal domination on which their own independence rested. But the prerogatives of power around which the public sphere was constructed could not be denied within. Thus the very values in which yeomen and planters found agreement also drew yeomen into a political culture and ideology in which planter prerogatives were difficult to resist. They were left, as a result, with few resources to represent effectively their specific interests as small farmers in a region of great planters, and they were overmatched in every aspect of South Carolina politics.[51] Empowered by a system that rewarded privilege, yeoman farmers found themselves overpowered by vastly more privileged planters.

[47] Extracts of speech of Robert Barnwell Smith [R. B. Rhett], *Charleston Mercury,* Aug. 6, 1829, and Robert Barnwell Smith [R. B. Rhett], "An Address of Sundry Citizens of Colleton District to the People of South Carolina," *Charleston Mercury,* June 18, 1828; see also Leonidas, *Charleston Mercury,* July 17, 1828; Townsend, *The South Alone Should Govern the South,* esp. 6, 9, 17–18, 30–35, 40. For a pioneering treatment of manhood and honor, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982).

[48] Extracts of speech of Robert Barnwell Smith, *Charleston Mercury,* Aug. 6, 1829. The quotation beneath the banner headline of the *Williamsburg Kingstree Star* read "Let Every Freeman Speak." For examples from the nullification crisis, see the addresses and speeches reprinted in the *Charleston Mercury,* June 18, 1828, July 17, 1828, Aug. 4, 1828, Feb. 17, 1830.

[49] William H. Trescot quoted in Olsberg, "Government of Class and Race," 78; see also Hammond, "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," 104–5.

[50] Townsend, *The South Alone Should Govern the South,* 40, 9.

[51] Contrast this argument with that of Ford, that slavery had made South Carolina yeomen the political equals, and possibly superiors, of planters: Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism,* esp. 372–73.

A gendered approach to political history draws our attention to what we acknowledge in our own political system but usually deny in historical analysis. It is that values expressed in the public sphere reflect complex and deep-seated beliefs about a whole range of relationships and issues, many of which are considered private: marriage, sexuality, parental authority, motherhood, manhood, and the very concept of privacy—in fact, the whole range of issues that constitutes the core of contemporary conservative politics.[52] The holistic approach that a gendered analysis compels is particularly pertinent to the interpretation of republicanism.

The meaning of republicanism was contested repeatedly over time and space. It was crafted into political movements and imperatives as diverse, on the one end, as the Paineites whose radical artisan constituency redefined independence and pushed at the outer limits of republican citizenship, and, on the other, of proslavery planters who sought in it a reactionary counterweight to the insurgent democratic movements of the Western world.

But while republicanism had a long and complex history in the United States, it had one consistent feature: the distinction between independent men, in whom the public trust could confidently be placed, and dependents, in whom it could not. Those who called themselves republicans, whether Paineites or Populists or proslavery yeomen, were committed to that distinction.[53] No matter how the definition of independence was reworked or the boundaries stretched—and there were those redeeming moments—republicanism was defined by the principle of exclusion. The exclusion of women, or slaves, or propertyless workers, or any other so-called dependent class marked not simply the limits of republicanism but one of its defining characteristics. In the antebellum South, this was dramatically evident, for in some regions more than 80 percent of the population was excluded from the privileges of citizenship. But everywhere in the United States, from the early days of the republic to the Civil War, the commitment to government by the virtuous and independent lent a special and contradictory character to political culture and ideology. In some times and places, it generated universal manhood suffrage; in others, an abhorrent and brutal program of geographical expansion; in yet others, the defense of slavery through Civil War. And always the disfranchisement of women.

[52] See, for example, Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom* (Boston, 1990), esp. 242–62.

[53] The recognition that republicanism was defined by its boundaries and exclusions and that relations of personal domination are properly the stuff of political history could prompt a different emphasis in the treatment of radical artisan republicanism than that offered by Eric Foner and Sean Wilentz or of anticapitalist yeoman Populists than that offered by Steven Hahn. See Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York, 1984); Hahn, *Roots of Southern Populism*.