

*American Exceptionalism About Our “Peculiar Institution”:
An Ethical and Statistical Problem With
American Historians Whitewashing the Illegal Importation of African Slaves*

INTRODUCTION

In a pious accolade in the New York Review of Books in December of 2008, the preeminent American academic historian of the Civil War, James McPherson of Princeton University reviewed two posthumous volumes of the late great George Fredrickson. McPherson summed up succinctly, with his customary flair, the hegemonic view concerning the unexampled expansion of the African-American population in the U.S. until 1860. This consensus that McPherson supports, leaves out an obvious and crucial source for the incredibly rapid expansion of the slave population, namely the illegal importation of slaves from Africa via mainly Cuba. McPherson’s startlingly obtuse piece sparked the genesis of this book, though my pre-occupation with the illegal slave trade has much deeper roots.

I cite three credible sources to support my theory: W.E.B. Dubois (1868 to 1963), Senator Stephen Douglas (1813 to 1861), and my great-grandfather Colonel William Alexander Percy (1834 to 1888). During the decade-long composition of this tome, I have relied on numerous helpers. The most particularly important and longest serving of all was my former student, Jeremy Meserve, who contributed important research and judgements. I have also been helped by my colleagues Charley Shively and Michael Chesson, both of whom are experts in American history.

The Graduate Record Exam has two parts: verbal and mathematical. The verbal tests rhetorical skills (the art of persuading). The mathematical portion is analytical, the art of correct

thinking. Over ninety percent of those who become historians do far better on the verbal than the mathematical. They learn how to persuade rather than how to analyze. Figures baffle them.

History is perhaps as crucial as prices, taxes, and budgets. I scored on the mathematical almost equally as on the verbal, which is very unusual for a historian. Almost all my research has been about numbers, not about how to research with words.

I. William Edward Burghardt Dubois

The greatest and earliest scholar on the subject, W.E.B. Dubois, the first African-American to earn a doctorate from Harvard was also the first to make a persuasive estimate of the number of slaves smuggled into the U.S. during the antebellum period:

It remains to ask whether it is possible to make any estimate of the number of illicit importations of Africans. In the nature of things statistics are impossible; but a careful comparison of detailed statements by those who had the best opportunities of knowing lead me to believe that from 1807-1862 there were annually introduced into the United States from 1,000 to 15,000 Africans, and that the total number thus brought in contravention alike of humanity and law was not less than 250,000 (Dubois, 1892).

The paragraph concluded his Harvard master's thesis *Enforcement of the Slave Trade Laws* (1892), a precursor to his greatly expanded doctoral dissertation *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (1896) in which he qualified in a broader sense his previous estimate:

Estimates as to the extent of the slave-trade agree that the traffic to North and South America in 1820 was considerable, certainly not much less than 40,000 slaves annually. From that time to about 1825 it declined somewhat, but afterward increased enormously, so that by 1837 the American importation was estimated as high as 200,000 Negroes annually. The total abolition of the African trade by American countries then brought the traffic down to perhaps 30,000 in 1842. A large and rapid increase of illicit traffic followed; so that by 1847 the importation amounted to nearly 100,000 annually. One province of Brazil is said to have received 173,000 in the years 1846-1849. In the decade 1850-1860 this activity in slave-trading continued, and reached very large proportions. The traffic thus carried on floated under the flags of France, Spain, and Portugal, until about 1830; from 1830 to 1840 it began gradually to assume the United States flag; by 1845, a large part of the trade was under the stars and stripes; by 1850

fully one-half the trade, and in the decade, 1850–1860 nearly all the traffic, found this flag its best protection (Dubois, 1896).

Dubois's estimate of the illegal trade to the U.S. is conservative given his range but I concur with the Old Master about the total number smuggled in, though the implied mean average inferred from 250,000—about 5,000 slaves per year—would be inaccurate. I agree with Dubois that the trade peaked during the 1830's and 1850's and I tie that to the expansion of the Cotton Kingdom, which is discussed in detail in Chapter I.

It is not far-fetched to suggest that thousands of illegals were smuggled in every year. Slave ships often held 500 and upwards to 1,000 Africans or more on board, all of them inhumanely crammed into false decks. Hypothetically, if 500 slaves per voyage was the average, it implies that at least ten slavers per year succeeded, not a very large number of undetected ships. Slaves per ship differed in number for every voyage and many died in the Middle Passage, but I begin to see the undeniable plausibility of 250,000 smuggled slaves during the period. That a great number of recent historians of the trade haven't bothered to fully read either of Dubois's groundbreaking studies is evident from the constant referencing of the 250,000 from the latter work where it nowhere appears, rather than the former. Dubois's assiduous and unprecedented work remains the touchstone work by which all that came after are measured. Yet, despite its importance, his findings in *Suppression* have been categorically denounced in recent years by main naysayer David Eltis of Emory University even while many others grossly modify Dubois's painstaking research.

Modern scholars of the trade inevitably refer to the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database** (*TSTD*) originated by Eltis, yet there are major problems with the methodology used by the historian administrators of that database as well as with the work of Eltis himself. Universal reliance on it is resulting in all slave demography becoming more skewed than before and study

of the transatlantic slave trade itself falls victim to a singular flawed interpretation. These problems of demography and statistics are discussed in Chapter II.

Central to Dubois's thesis in *Suppression* is the importance of Spanish Cuba as the main transatlantic depot for African slaves during the antebellum period. Exasperated by his stick-in-the-mud colleagues on the subject of re-opening the slave trade, Alabama State Senator William Yancey stated in 1858 that he:

...did not want to be compelled to go to Virginia to buy slaves for 1500\$ each when he could get them in Cuba for 600\$ each or upon the coast of Guinea for one sixth of that sum (Johnson, 2013).

Yancey lived in Montgomery at the time, the largest slave depot in Alabama apart from Mobile. It is especially telling that Yancey knew the exact prices for slaves in all areas of the trade. I further illuminate the centrality of Cuba in terms of the illegal trade to the United States in Chapter III.

Dubois's observation above parses out the problem of American unaccountability for the illegal trade though most historians counter that slave ships flying the American flag were mostly foreigners taking advantage of its legal protection and that the few American smugglers apprehended were anomalies or carrying the slaves elsewhere besides the U.S. mainland. These quibbles are unfounded as will be demonstrated in Chapter IV.

An oft-used defense against the notion that re-opening the transatlantic slave trade was indeed a prime motivator for the Confederacy appears in Article I, Section 9 of the Confederate States Constitution. Ostensibly, imports of slaves from abroad remained illegal, which helped persuade the slave exporting state of Virginia to secede, though Maryland remained in the Union. Jefferson Davis urged representatives to do their utmost in conveying the impression of the Confederacy's dedication to that principle in the presence of foreign powers:

You are well aware how firmly fixed in our Constitution is the policy of this Confederacy against the opening of that trade, but I am informed that false and insidious suggestions have been made by the agents of the United States at European Courts of our intention to change our constitution as soon as peace is restored, and of authorizing the importation of slaves from Africa. If, therefore, you should find, in your intercourse with the Cabinet to which you are accredited, that any such impressions are entertained, you will use every proper effort to remove them, and if an attempt is made to introduce into any treaty which you may be charged with negotiating stipulations on the subject just mentioned, you will assume, in behalf of your Government, the position which, under the direction of the President, I now proceed to develop.

The snaky wording that followed immediately began to undermine the resolution:

All remaining powers of sovereignty, which not being delegated to the Confederate States by the Constitution nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people thereof...*Especially in relation to the importation of African negroes was it deemed important by the States that no power to permit it should exist in the Confederate Government* (italics ours)...The policy of the Confederacy is as fixed and immutable on this subject as the imperfection of human nature permits human resolve to be. No additional agreements, treaties, or stipulations can commit these States to the prohibition of the African slave trade with more binding efficacy than those they have themselves devised. A just and generous confidence in their good faith on this subject exhibited by friendly Powers will be far more efficacious than persistent efforts to induce this Government to assume the exercise of powers which it does not possess.... I trust, therefore, that no unnecessary discussions on this matter will be introduced into your negotiations. If, unfortunately, this reliance should prove ill-founded, you will decline continuing negotiations ...

Dubois's penetrating intellect also skewered the idea that the seceding states had noble intentions:

This attitude of the conservative leaders of the South, if it meant anything, meant that individual State action could, when it pleased, reopen the slave- trade. The radicals were, of course, not satisfied with any veiling of the ulterior purpose of the new slave republic, and attacked the constitutional provision violently. "If," said one, "the clause be carried into the permanent government, our whole movement is defeated. It will abolitionize the Border Slave States—it will brand our institution. Slavery cannot share a government with Democracy,—it cannot bear a brand upon it; thence another revolution ... having achieved one revolution to escape democracy at the North, it must still achieve another to escape it at the South. That it will ultimately triumph none can doubt (Dubois, 1896).

Brilliant as he was, Dubois later regretted his absolutist condemnation of the illegal trade in *Suppression*. He instead wished that he'd recognized and pursued the macroeconomic scale of it

as he later did in *Black Reconstruction* (1935). Lamentably, he never revisited *Suppression*. In an apology written for the 1954 edition he explains:

“As I read again this work of mine written over sixty years ago, I am on the one hand gratified to realize how hard and honestly I worked on my subject as a young man of twenty-four...There are, however, certain criticisms which are evident...For if the influence of economic motives on the action of mankind ever had clearer illustration it was in the modern history of the African race, and particularly in America. No real conception of this appears in my book... I saw "that vast economic revolution in which American slavery was to play so prominent and fatal a role." Nevertheless, in examining the motives behind the attempt to stop the slave trade during the Revolution, I seemed to have missed the strength of the economic reasons for its failure, although I mention them... I still saw slavery and the trade as chiefly the result of moral lassitude—"the policy of laissez-faire, laissez-passez." I wanted the young nation to call "the whole moral energy of the people into action" instead of accepting a "bargain" on "one of the most threatening of the social and political ills" which faced the nation. But apparently I did not clearly see that the real difficulty rested in the willingness of a privileged class of Americans to get power and comfort at the expense of degrading a class of black slaves, by not paying them what their labor produced...When the slave trade and slavery were debated in the early sessions of Congress I recorded the way in which "property" was stressed by the South in a new way, and how the reopened slave trade meant "fortunes to the planters and Charleston slave merchants." Nevertheless when the Cotton Kingdom was rising to power after 1820, and I studied the Economic Revolution, the new inventions and the rise in cotton sales and prices, I still seemed to miss the clear conclusion that slavery was a matter of income more than of morals (Dubois, 1954).

Analysis of the North's complicity and abetting of the illegal slave trade as well as the inexhaustible demand for slaves by the Southern slavocracy is explored in Chapter V.

Dubois's genius was innate, but carefully cultivated by the wealthy elites of Great Barrington who recognized it in him early on. He was sheltered from the rising tide of racism and inequality that beset most blacks in post-bellum America. Dubois recognized his privilege, "I was born free...I was born in Massachusetts. My great-grandfather fought with the Colonial Army in New England in the American Revolution [earning the grandfather his freedom]. I had a happy childhood and acceptance in the community" (McGill, 1965).

Surrounded as he was by academics and civil rights activists most of his long life, Dubois was still very much a private man of letters throughout. Yet, as editor of the NAACP periodical

The Crisis from 1910 until 1933, and a primary consultant for the W.P.A. Federal Writer's Project to interview ex-slaves during the New Deal, he likely came in personal or literal contact with first generation Africans freed by Emancipation and their descendants. Dubois scholars may know more of which I speculate because at this time I have of course not digested the massive oeuvre he left behind. The relentless activism by this somewhat cranky genius was finally rewarded with a bit of poetic justice. He died in Ghana on August 28, 1963, the same day that 300,000 civil rights activists marched on the Lincoln Memorial in D.C. and the Rev. Martin Luther King shared his egalitarian dream. I believe that Dubois's original estimates for smuggled slaves stand true and historical inquiry into the dimensions of the illegal trade and its perpetrators—Northern and Southern—by future historians is necessary to more fully understand ourselves as Americans.

II. Stephen Arnold Douglas

In *Suppression*, Dubois was likely the first historian of the Gilded Age to use a quote by Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas as evidence for the illegal slave trade. He cited the 27th *Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (1860) as his source for the quote:

Stephen A. Douglas said "that there was not the shadow of doubt that the Slave-trade had been carried on quite extensively for a long time back, and that there had been more Slaves imported into the southern States, during the last year, than had ever been imported before in any one year, even when the Slave-trade was legal. It was his confident belief, that over fifteen thousand Slaves had been brought into this country during the past year [1859.] He had seen, with his own eyes, three hundred of those recently- imported, miserable beings, in a Slave-pen in Vicksburg, Miss., and also large numbers at Memphis, Tenn."(Dubois, 1896)

Yet, this declaration by the Little Giant has been outright dismissed by scholars, perhaps because the original source of the quote is much more convoluted than one would expect. Below I examine line by line the original text of this source, but first I present an analysis of the

conditions from which it emerged.

On 20 August 1859, a Washington D.C. correspondent for the *New York Daily Tribune* telegraphed an article “Douglas Sure of the South”, to editors at Park Row in Manhattan. Under the byline “A Native Southerner”, the article disclosed details about a conversation with an informant at an unofficial meeting in D.C. the night before hosted by Illinois senator Stephen Douglas for a coterie of politicians, publishers and other influential men. Four days later the author telegraphed again to New York, this time an apologetic post-script, attempting to retract his claim that the meeting had taken place at Douglas’s home but not saying where it had taken place.

Re-opening the African slave trade was the central topic of the discussion though the article mainly aimed to defame Douglas in illustrating his arrogance for assuming that he would “bag” the Southern vote for the 1860 Democratic nomination. “Douglas Sure of the South” was a partisan observation but Douglas’s anecdotes regarding smuggled slaves revealed the macrocosm of political forces at play. Despite its title and what was reportedly said, Douglas was never “sure of the South” for the very reason discussed by the men allegedly there. Ignored or dismissed outright as a fabrication by recent historians, the *New York Tribune* report about Douglas’s meeting is the only record of his activities during that week in August 1859. While no correspondence or other records are extant (for the early part of that month) until the 20th, this apparent lacunae in the busy life of Mr. Douglas is of primary importance. Consequences of the report were immediate. Evidently, for different factions about slavery, and a myriad of other issues upon which Mr. Douglas’s influence was paramount, premature statements from The Little Giant were so alarming as to put his candidacy for 1860 in significant jeopardy. Remarkably, the week that may have ended with the meeting at Douglas’s home coincided with

his completion and submission of an essay commissioned by the prestigious *Harper's Magazine*. Entitled, "The Dividing Line Between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty and the Territories", the essay had been much anticipated or even dreaded by insiders concerned with his platform.

I venture to claim that the meeting was actually a party given by Mr. Douglas, to celebrate his completing the essay, especially because his associates in Washington knew that he had been working on it throughout that summer (though some in attendance may not have known the reason for the occasion). Released to the press for review a week later and then published and widely circulated thereafter, the *Harper's* essay contained a lucid argument for popular sovereignty based on Douglas's interpretation of the Constitution and other primary documents. The reaction to it, especially in the South, was overwhelmingly negative. In fact, the reasons behind the backlash to the report in the *Tribune* are analogous to the source that inspired widespread public anger and frustration when the *Harper's* piece saw print. I refer to a period of time elapsing less than two weeks. Within it, Douglas sealed his own political fate by alienating his supporters in the South.

To better comprehend the degree to which the illegal slave trade was inextricably enmeshed in U.S. economic and political affairs, some background information on the pivotal part played by Douglas is necessary. Interpreting Douglas's political and personal motivations in the revealed light of the enormous illegal slave trade is just as valuable as his recorded observations about the smuggling.

The Little Giant was no "dough-face" (a disparaging term typically applied to especially pliable northern politicians who favored Southern interests). He had also split with Southern Democrats over slavery in Kansas. Dissension in his party became so acrimonious that the

usually inscrutable President Buchanan openly loathed Douglas, as did Jefferson Davis and others who would marshal overriding support against him in the Senate (Milton, 1934). Douglas rejected the Lecompton Constitution for Kansas (proposed September 1857, defeated January 1858), which held that slavery would be completely legalized while free blacks living there would have to leave and none could ever re-enter (Davis, 1950). Douglas's obstinacy in the Senate helped to kill that bill even as he was already maligned for his repudiation of the Dred Scott decision (March 6th, 1857). He engendered so much hatred from the slavocracy that in late December of 1859, while he was away on an extended vacation with his wife, his colleagues removed him from chairmanship of the Committee on Territories, a position he had held for fourteen years, eleven as a senator. (Johannsen, 1989)

Indeed, as chairman, Douglas's backroom dealings had caused long-standing resentment from Southerners who begrudged him unfair advantage in his bid for a federally funded railroad to the Pacific via Chicago. An early and avid enthusiast for western development and transcontinental railroad lines, Douglas dedicated much of his indomitable willpower to convince Congress of the best routes and terminals, always with the intention that Chicago would be the main terminus (Hodder, 1925). From 1836 to 1855, Douglas fought valiantly to realize his sometimes obsessed vision for America's railroads. Yet, drowned in the din of argument over slavery, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 was initially predicated not on whether any territory would be either slave or free, but rather the real argument was originally over what latitude the transcontinental railroad would first traverse. The slavery issue provided leverage for Southerners to force compromise into the railroad negotiations. Dissension over slavery obscured the original intention to develop the west. Douglas began to see early on that popular sovereignty could forcefully settle the issue of slavery and jump-start territorial organization. His theories on

the concept evolved from the mid-1840's until he culminated his final statement on it in the *Harper's* essay.

Splitting the unorganized territory left over from the Louisiana Purchase (1803) into two separate territories, Kansas and Nebraska, doubled the odds that the first Pacific-bound railroad would begin from a northern or mid-western station rather than from a hub in the south. Realizing long beforehand the advantage that Chicago could have as a central terminus, Douglas introduced a resolution for organizing Nebraska during his second term as an Illinois congressman in 1844. After the U.S. acquired immense tracts from the Mexican Cession (July 4th, 1848) and the Gadsen Purchase (April 25th, 1854) Douglas and his allies, mostly Whig investors from the Northeast, were faced with the growing possibility of the railroad originating from the Deep South. Gadsen, president of the South Carolina Railroad had his own set of allies, mostly Southern Democrats. Certain of their newly acquired advantage, they conducted at their own expense an extensive survey of the land upon which their railroad would cross, starting from Atlanta and on westward to San Diego. Not until 1858 did a viable railroad connect New Orleans, the hub of the South, with trade from the west and then only as far as Galveston. Though even with the concurrent fervor of the California Gold Rush as an incentive for laying tracks, Arizona's topography still presented daunting obstacles and raised significant doubts about a Southern route (Hodder, 1925). Though he had fervently supported the Mexican War, Douglas so coveted a Chicago route that he decided to appease the slavery expansionists to break the deadlock.

Visiting President Franklin Pierce on January 22nd, 1854 Douglas privately persuaded him to support repealing the Missouri Compromise of 1820 that banned slavery from the Territory (Johannsen, 1973). Yet, even with lukewarm support from Pierce, all of Douglas's

maneuvering and epic oratory proved a pyrrhic victory. The Senate passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in May, but in early 1855 and by the slimmest of margins the House finally voted against railroads through Nebraska or Kansas. Douglas's decade-long struggle for northern primacy of the westward railroad was defeated by one vote, the opposition engineered by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton (Hodder, 1925). In fact, no railroads were authorized, north or south. The national furor over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the preceding Fugitive Slave Law (1850) halted discussion on the subject. Railroad building would have to wait even longer after the financial Panic of 1857 hit.

Some have concluded that Douglas's dismantling of the Missouri Compromise was intended to bend the Southern vote his way in the 1856 presidential election. Douglas however, knew that the semi-arid prairies of Nebraska and Kansas had little immediate appeal for cotton planters and he had only wanted to suspend the provisions of the Missouri Compromise for as long as it took the territories to become organized before statehood (Hodder, 1925). Regardless, Senators David Atchinson from Missouri and John Breckinridge (Douglas's friend and Washington D.C. neighbor) from Kentucky, forced his hand to repeal the 1820 Compromise as they and their slave owning colleagues in Alabama and Arkansas would have never agreed to organize the territories unless slavery was protected there forever. After Pierce signed the bill, Missouri Democrats condoned the bloodletting by the Kansas Border Ruffians but many of the large and influential planters had spoken out against the repeal and one fifth of the House nays against Kansas-Nebraska belonged to slave states (Ray, 1909).

It was not primarily the larger planters but the yet slaveless farmers or those who had only one or two that were more anxious to establish slavery in the new territories, the same class who would later form a large and important part of the Army of the Confederate States. Thus, for

about six months, Douglas appeared to get his way in making Chicago the eastern terminus of the transcontinental railroad. The Peculiar Institution became legalized above the 36th°30th parallel after being prohibited there for over a generation, but not for the reason Douglas had originally intended. It was he that principally helped to secure federal land grants for future railroads in Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Mississippi and Missouri, all contrived by him to favor Chicago as the central terminus (Hodder, 1925). Ironically, it wasn't until 1862, about a year after his untimely death in that the Pacific railroad was first authorized by Congress and then without the dissenting votes of the rebel South. Douglas's struggle for a route through Nebraska came to fruition but Chicago wouldn't link with the transcontinental railroad until 1889 when a line finally connected it with Omaha.

Douglas's ambitions and allegiances were complicated, his loyalties torn by competing industrial interests in Illinois, as well as in the nation at large. He was also derided by nativists for supporting opportunities for immigrants, scorned by Protestants because of his Catholic wife and his perceived favoritism toward Mormons, and equally pilloried by abolitionists and pro-slavery groups alike. Sensationalistic newspapers then as now tended to amplify defamatory partisanship while failing to illustrate the facts or subtleties. Douglas's reticence about his position on slavery and his motives for westward expansion caused suspicion, misgivings that were clearly apparent in the *Tribune* article of August, 1859.

Meanwhile, Douglas's fateful opponent Abraham Lincoln was barely on the radar for consideration as a serious contender for the White House when the article about Douglas was published. A centrist in a country where powerful extremists weighed heavily at both ends of the political scale, Douglas's presidential bid became doomed beyond a doubt after the Republicans nominated Lincoln—another centrist—on May 18, 1860. Barely a year later, Douglas died of

typhoid. In the intervening months between the meeting supposedly at his home in D.C. on August 19th 1859 and his death in Chicago, his worst fears were realized in the dissolution of the Union though he was spared the ensuing military carnage.

Douglas was far more pragmatic and less dissembling than Lincoln in approaching the slavery question in 1860. He spent thirty of his forty-eight years defining his political philosophy around the slavery issue. His life span, 1813 to 1861, nearly matches the timeline of slave smuggling into the U.S., 1808 to 1862. My thesis rests on the contention that slaves were smuggled into Dixie from Africa via mostly Cuba. I only know that Douglas directly addressed the smuggling at the meeting reported by the *New York Tribune*. The author of “Douglas Sure of the South” remains an enigma because the staff assignment and accounting records of the *Tribune* have largely disappeared in various corporate bankruptcies. Bylines rarely accompanied feature articles in 1859. Horace Greeley, *Tribune* editor-in-chief and a high-profile opponent of slavery, solicited anonymous contributions (though he verified identities before print) while the Associated Press cooperative, established in 1846, led to a profusion of uncredited articles.

Given the very brief appearance of this “Southerner” in the *Tribune* and the fact that the author had a byline at all, strongly suggests that the author was affiliated with the formidable network of Northern or Border States abolitionists active in D.C. from the 1820’s on. Just how far “south” the *Tribune* reporter supposedly hailed from is unknown. Regardless, his report demonstrated the moral indignation and literary traits consistent with the abolitionist screeds of the day.

The *Tribune*’s undercover stories were widely popular. Earlier in 1859, one surreptitious reporter traveled from New York to Savannah to pose as a slave-owner at auction, purposely bidding low and feigning exasperation at each sale. That detailed expose” about 436 slaves sold

in a single lot was much sought after and reprinted in abolitionist pamphlets (Doesticks, 1859). The article enraged Southerners who promised the author a speedy execution if he was ever apprehended below the Mason-Dixon line again. Other covert *Tribune* stories printed during the 1850's described plantation life and Southern culture in scathingly pejorative terms, adding more fuel to the fires of pro-secession resentment.

Abolitionists at that time were of a different breed than those who had banned slavery in their respective states in the early Republic. When the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1789, every state except for Georgia and South Carolina had antislavery and manumission societies, and even those states passed legislation limiting the importation of slaves. Before 1793, Southern planters, including most of the Founding Fathers, agreed that slavery was economically untenable but that notion disappeared in Dixie after the gin made cotton profitable. While not inconceivable that the *Tribune* reporter was genuinely Southern, there were few vocal opponents of slavery in King Cotton's domain after 1820, though abolitionists became numerous in the Border States. Given the heated polarization between the factions, it is difficult to believe that a bona fide "Southerner" writing for the *New York Tribune* would have escaped notice in a city filled with informants. His brief but incredibly significant "Douglas Sure of the South" may have cost The Little Giant the nomination because it records that loquacious orator explaining at great length justification for his policies which were too subtle for the masses to follow. The *Tribune* report was a prelude to the outrage he sparked a week later when his *Harper's* essay debuted. This was truly the straw that broke the camel's back.

The epicenter of abolitionism was in D.C. but the notables involved were mainly from the North. The few Underground Railroad activists from what can be considered to be the South were stalwart Unitarians and Quakers from west of the Blue Ridge in Virginia and from Ohio, Indiana

and Kentucky. Containing about 10% of all U.S. slaves, those Border States grew mostly corn, tobacco and hemp. Senator Douglas was favored in all those states where cotton production was negligible until the beginning of 1860 when he lost the majority of delegates to seceding factions of his party. In fact, he was nominated only by Northern Democrats since most of the delegates from thirteen Southern states, including some of the Border states, abandoned the Democratic National Convention at Charleston (April, 1860) in favor of secession. The “Native Southerner” had tried to imply that Douglas was satisfied with his influence in the Deep South, yet his unprecedented and grueling tour of those states before the election is evidence that he considered the South far from won. His incredible effort to defeat Lincoln afforded him only Missouri and half of New Jersey as his next-door neighbor Breckinridge “bagged” the entire South and Bell received three of the four Border States that never seceded.

Of the seventy-four slave insurrections that occurred from 1808 to 1861, only three are recorded in Kentucky, the lone slave state of those that remained in the Union to have such uprisings (Holloway, 2010) All others took place in the cotton states. A handful of short-lived abolitionist newspaper presses were destroyed by mob violence in Kentucky and Missouri beginning in the 1830’s, yet that unrest was rarely homicidal (Kielbowicz, 2006). Meanwhile, white residents in and below the Black Belt faced possible ostracism, harassment and even murder if they risked criticism of the peculiar institution in print or otherwise (West, 2005). Usually organized by county, vigilante posses roamed every Southern state—especially after the Nat Turner Rebellion in 1831—harassing abolitionist sympathizers as well as hunting escaped slaves. At the same time, genteel planters treated some Northerners and foreign nationals with their legendary hospitality, but travelers who were revolted by slavery enough to write down their experiences usually kept opinions to themselves while visiting as many contemporary

diaries attest, not to mention the traveling journals of Frederick Law Olmsted.

Antagonistic defense of slavery was never as pronounced anywhere above the Mason-Dixon as it was below. Feverish pursuit of enormous cotton profits caused desperate measures to secure labor, including smuggling slaves in. That Senator Douglas himself witnessed evidence of smuggling was not a coincidence, rather it was a rare admission by a public figure that had no internal moral conflict about slavery. Like many of his colleagues, Douglas obfuscated for political reasons but unlike them his pragmatism was absolute. An Illinois Congressman for almost two decades, he witnessed the rise of industry. By 1859, 339 factories, 916 mills, and 142 distilleries were thriving in Illinois (Stewart, 1903). Douglas's constituents wanted railroads and the expansion of industry in the west. Understanding the power of Northern industrialism and banking, he tailored his rhetoric on slavery to realize his vision of the West.

The most salient point in the "Southerner's" interpretation of Douglas's meeting was that the planter aristocracy feared and rightly so, that re-opening the foreign slave trade at such a time would destroy their wealth. They would lose a monopoly on the trade as well as suffer depreciated value for their slaves and their crops. Baldly insinuated, the "Native Southerner" was somehow forced to revise the setting of his fly-on-the-wall report as he had touched upon an exceedingly sensitive nerve running through the richest and most powerful sectors of the cotton trade, particularly the planters in the Deep South but also the factors, shippers and insurers of New York and New England.

In the South however, aristocratic planters of the landed gentry and nouveaux riche were keenly sensitive to the loyalties of their white countrymen who were too poor to own slaves. When war finally came, yeomen who might have one or two slaves and even propertyless whites that fought for the Confederacy had many reasons for doing so, but the lowest common

denominator was slavery, the right to own slaves and the opportunity to buy them. In 1859, former Mississippi governor and Know-Nothing Party member Henry S. Foote defended the equity of his class in regards to keeping the foreign slave trade illegal:

Would you be willing to shoulder your musket in vindication of slaveholding rights-would you be willing to fight for them and risk your domestic peace and happiness if your slaves were only worth five dollars apiece? Why every man sees that is an absurdity, Therefore the system depends on keeping the prices high (Johnson, 2013).

The impetus for why the lower classes of the South took up arms has apparently been over-intellectualized. Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams* makes a valid point:

High slave prices further stratified Southern society... a society in which privilege was defined by slaveholding more than race...[N]onslaveholders not only found slaves out of their purchasing power but more and more competing with skilled slaves, gin-wrights, draymen, stevedores (Johnson, 2013).

A Louisiana editor warned in 1859:

[T]he minute you put it out of the power of the common farmers to purchase a negro man or woman to help him in his farm or his wife in the house you make him an abolitionist at once (Johnson, 2013).

At least 3.5 million non-slave holders owned 50 to 100 acres of Southern land in 1859 (Owsley & Owsley, 1940). The wider analysis of antebellum yeomanry has consistently lumped together those farmers who owned a handful of slaves and those who had none. The dividing line between the two is more instructive than I've been led to believe. The fact that only 4.95% of all whites in the Confederacy owned slaves seems to fly in the face of popular perception, but the numbers are deceiving. Statistics from Glatthar's magisterial *General Lee's Army* (2009) indicate that about half of all Confederate enlistees in 1861 owned slaves or lived with slaveowners. Glatthar found that over 10% of enlistees in the Confederate army in 1861 personally owned slaves, while nearly 26% of those lived with a parent who was a slave owner; therefore about 36% of enlistees either owned slaves or lived with parents who did. Add about 15% to that number which

represented those volunteers who lived in a slave-owning household that did not consist of their family members. Therefore, approximately one half of the Confederates did not cohabit with slaves, yet Glatthar isn't quite done:

Nor did the direct exposure stop there. Untold numbers of enlistees rented land from, sold crops to, or worked for slaveholders. In the final tabulation, the vast majority of the volunteers of 1861 had a direct connection to slavery. For slaveholder and nonslaveholder alike, slavery lay at the heart of the Confederate nation. The fact that their paper notes frequently depicted scenes of slaves demonstrated the institution's central role and symbolic value to the Confederacy (Glatthar, 2009).

Thus, the institution affected nearly every Southerner, regardless of whether they owned slaves or not.

Analyzing 429 letters from Confederate soldiers, James McPherson concluded that a considerable part of the army was not favorable towards slavery, citing that only 20% wrote definitive pro-slavery statements. He implies that the rest must have had some reservations about slavery based on his observation that “none at all” dissented (McPherson, 1997). I disagree with that historian, as I do about his other seemingly strategic obscurantist claims. The Peculiar Institution was ubiquitous wherever sugar, tobacco, rice, hemp—and cotton above all—flourished.

Factoring all the cotton growing states together, I find a mean annual average for maintaining prime adult male slaves at about \$137, women \$81, and children \$62. If females reproduced at the tremendous rates postulated by the American Exceptionalists and their offspring survived through infancy, planters other than the super-rich would have gone bankrupt supporting the infants and neonates. Given that slaves were very expensive to begin with, often bought on credit as long as cash procured at least one prime hand, the middling slaveholders would have been hard-pressed to provide for such prolific slave families. The large planters with fifty or more slaves weren't as concerned with cost of living expenses for them, but those that

held fewer than ten slaves were on much stricter budgets than those who could afford more (Hammond, 1897).

Even whites without slaves and even with no land at all are supposed to have acquired a notion of their own genetic inferiority to their “betters” while retaining a rigid sense of racial superiority over blacks. Even if this were true for a few, it was the evangelical enthusiasm of slave-owning Minute Men that were able to encourage the slaveless and landless into supporting secession (West, 2005). At town squares across the Cotton South, paramilitary groups condemned the North, promising would-be recruits that they too could acquire slaves, the basis for a Southern quality of life, provided they fight the Damn Yankees for the right to own slaves (Genovese, 1975).

Other factors such as “ego-centric sectionalism” and even outright ignorance have also been tossed in the seemingly endless speculation about why they fought. Yet, even the semi-literate “plain folks” of the South must have intuited that they might finally afford slaves if Dixie could throw off the yoke of the federal ban against importation, nominal as it was. Fighting under the Stars and Bars was a financial incentive for those who coveted the possibility of reasonably priced slaves and lower tariffs. Even when cotton prices plunged in 1837, the U.S.’s most lucrative export remained so and rose dramatically in price per pound in the decade before the War. Most Southerners would have jumped eagerly at the chance to grow it, but they needed slaves to profit from its cultivation. Slaves were prohibitively expensive, even when bought on credit. Buying a prime age male slave at antebellum prices would be analogous to purchasing a top-notch Porsche today.

Myths about Southern illiteracy and ignorance of current events are exaggerated. At least 70% of white Southerners could read and write by 1859 (Volo & Volo, 2004).

Southern newspapers, “fire-eaters” like the *Mississippian*, *Charleston Mercury*, *Richmond Examiner* and scores of others echoed in print the threatened psychology of the slaveowners and denounced the blasphemy of abolition. Hammering this into the reading public and their word-of-mouth associates, one would have been hard-pressed to find abolitionist literature originating anywhere below the Ohio River or east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. At around 8,000 daily copies, the *Richmond Examiner* had the highest print-run of any Southern paper, yet well over 2,000 other newspapers appeared throughout Dixie, and only a very few were Pro-slavery Unionists (Andrews, 1966). A highly explosive little anti-slavery book did emerge from North Carolina that greatly agitated the fears of the slavocracy about losing support for their institution from their less prosperous neighbors. Hinton Helper’s *The Impending Crisis of the South* (1857) was dedicated to the “non- slaveholding whites of the South” and he was thereafter forever maligned as a traitor by the angry mouthpieces of the Cotton Kingdom. Helper contended that the “plain folk of the Old South” were slaves themselves to the existing order because of the avarice of the big planters who staved off industrial development in the South (Helper, 1857). Most everyone knew if an independent South opened its harbors to slavers, the value of slaves would plummet, turning former profitable investments into losses for planters. Southern social theorist George Fitzhugh opined:

Extend and increase the institution by renewing the foreign slave trade, and the price of slave products, of all the necessaries, and many of the comforts and luxuries of life would decline rapidly. The market for Northern products would be increased and extended, and their prices would rise. The mercantile interest, the shipping interest, the manufacturing interest, nay, every interest at the North, would feel its revivifying influence. But the white laborers of the North would benefit the most. They would have constant employment at high wages, because the labor market would not be overcrowded; and they would find the expenses of living continually diminishing (Johnson, 2013).

A labor market flooded with *bozales* would also cheapen cotton considerably even as that

commodity had risen steadily in price since Polk slashed its import duties by 55% in 1844. Transcriptions from the annual Southern Commercial Conventions (1837 to 1859) leave me clear signposts along the pathway to war. Vicksburg, host of one such event in April of 1859, that seated Southern governors and state delegates to vote on Southern policies, spent four days out of five arguing over repealing the slave trade ban. Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas voted for repeal, with Tennessee and Florida voting nay, while South Carolina, which had put up some of the loudest spokespersons for reopening the trade, split evenly. Once the South's busiest port, Charleston had been far surpassed by New Orleans and even Mobile since the early 1830's. That port's declining business was a significant factor in the initial call for repeal. Tennessee's proximity to Virginia allowed for easy egress for the inter-regional slave trade down the Tennessee to Chattanooga and thenceforth west to the cotton fields. Florida's sparse cotton was grown only in its northwestern part in those counties that clustered around Apalachee Bay. Slaves could easily be brought illegally into Florida from Cuba via the Apalachicola River and dozens of other landings on its Gulf coast. Most planters in that state were of the larger sort and their negative vote on repeal of the slave trade hinted that they would brook no competition from those of lesser means. In fact, the slavocracy in Florida was more ruthless and intolerant of challengers to their status quo than those in the other cotton states (Denham & Roth, 2007).

Delegates from Virginia, Maryland and Kentucky had left the Vicksburg convention before the vote on repeal, knowing that an insurrectionary cabal was being formed by the cotton states in an attempt to re-legalize the importation of slaves to Southern shores (Bernstein, 1966). While some argued outright for repealing the prohibition as a state's right to unrestricted commerce, others were more measured in their opposition. Eventually, a consensus was reached

that re-opening the African slave trade was contingent on the dissolution of the Union.

Therefore, it was deferred indefinitely until a peaceable separation became impossible. Planters and Northern cotton interests, though enthusiastic when the clamor for reopening grew louder in the early 1850's, were not keen on riding out such an abrupt market disturbance as the legal import of slaves would have been after forty years of black market slaving.

Confederate constitutional debates from January through March of 1861 were never recorded for posterity but one can deduce that their actions were also calculated to attract Great Britain's support, though their feebly aimed attempt to appease Parliament by prohibiting slave importation was obviously a temporary measure in their long-range aspirations, as Dubois noted. If victorious, the Confederacy would have had *lebensraum* to expand the market for slaves in new territories, allowing the gradual trickle-down of slave prices. The grand design of the new government included the eventual acquisition or seizure of Cuba where slaves were still being regularly shipped to and from, albeit illegally. During the Buchanan presidency (1857 to 1861), Jefferson Davis was one of the most outspoken activists in favor of annexing Cuba. Davis also seriously considered conquering the rest of Mexico. Acquiring Cuba would have eased slave traffic to the Confederate States from Havana, but the initial journey to and from Africa would have still met with British patrollers, not to mention those of the Union Navy. Unfortunately for the Lost Cause, long-range planning was not the Confederacy's strong suit. Davis, reportedly more concerned about the quality of official stationery than promoting productive foreign relations, underestimated Parliament's dedication to eradicating the trade, which superseded even Liverpool's demand for raw cotton (Merli, 2004). The South would painfully learn that "King Cotton diplomacy" was overrated. The *Tribune* articles by our "Native Southerner" neatly framed the slavocracy's pre-war dilemma.

The “Native Southerner” relayed his piece to New York from D.C., it had been nearly fifteen years after Morse’s first telegram in 1844. Telegraph offices and newspaper bureaus had clustered together on D.C.’s “Newspaper Row” at 14th and Pennsylvania Avenue. There were as many or more than twenty direct lines from there to New York in 1859 (Nonnenmacher, 2001). Political news issuing from D.C. came by wire out of the Row, a mere block away from the White House and a short nine block ride to the Capitol.

Unscrupulous information gathering was as cutthroat then as now and leaks along the telegraph lines occurred just as information spreads on today’s Internet. Disclosure and the selling of information became a real problem. Geographically, D.C. was a relay station for both Northern and Southern wires, so intercepting messages there was tempting to the operators. The “Native Southerner” and his source were probably compromised because that byline did not appear in the *Tribune* again.

As for the railroads, upon whose rights of way telegraph lines were routinely erected, federal regulatory oversight for the telegraph industry was minimal at first; not until 1901 did it come under more thorough federal scrutiny. Mirroring Maryland’s, D.C. adopted a statute in 1852, penalizing untrustworthy operators with a \$500 fine and or up to three months in jail (Nonnenmacher, 2001). This came in response to the discovery that an unknown number of keyers were stealing stories from the Associated Press and selling them to unaffiliated newspapers at a discount. Long distance telegrams of 1,000 words could cost as much as a \$100, so operators embezzled from such exorbitant fees while also profiting from stealing the latest stories on the wire. The decentralized nature of the telegraph system aided the thieves as their own internal networks for sharing information was hidden by ciphers known only to the cognoscenti of Morse. The presence of an abolitionist propagandist from the Deep South in the

midst of the Capitol would have been a hard secret to keep because agents of other newspapers were always milling about (seven on Newspaper Row alone), as were the bustling couriers and newsboys; most of whom would have shared information for a penny.

Other information pipelines in Washington connected the black community as free blacks began to outnumber slaves. Since tobacco cultivation had dried up in much of the Chesapeake, the nation's capital city supplied the domestic slave trade with their surplus, often parceling out lots of slaves for nearby Alexandria, Virginia. Racial tension in D.C. turned to violence during 1848 when the print shop of the abolitionist newspaper *National Era* was burned to the ground by a pro-slavery mob. Without exception, every senator from the cotton states strenuously opposed limits on the slave population in the Capitol, but importing slaves there was prohibited by the Compromise of 1850, one resolution among many that were fostered through by Senator Douglas, who took over handling the bill from the aged and ailing Henry Clay. Yet, law still permitted slave auctions amongst citizens of the district. Washington D.C. in 1859 was still very much a slave territory. More than 3,000 slaves labored there, yet so also did 11,000 free blacks, a wild disproportion compared with the cotton states. A mixture of patricians and civil servants, white tradesmen and laborers, slaves and freemen, D.C. was more racially integrated and slavery more politically contentious there than anywhere else in the South. Slaves were emancipated there almost a year before Lincoln's Proclamation. Resistance against freeing D.C.'s slaves had been relentless as it was widely perceived that if emancipation was authorized in the Capitol, that act would serve as a litmus test for the legality of slavery elsewhere. Indeed, D.C. never became segregated until Woodrow Wilson imposed it in 1920 (Wolgemuth, 1959).

"Douglas Sure of the South" saw print on August 23rd, 1859. The content seems to have caused great ire, at least to the unnamed informant who shared the story in confidence. A

retraction with an apology about the mislocation of the meeting was telegraphed to New York the very next day by the author, proving that rapid exchanges occurred between the author and *Tribune* editors. While the paper had offices on the Row, it did not circulate in D.C. except by mailed subscription. Therefore, the author must have received a telegram from his employers immediately after the original article ran in New York. The reasons behind the plausibly frantic communications will be discussed below. For now it is sufficient to suggest that dire political and professional implications forced the author to yield a reluctant correction statement. The apology was also printed in the *Tribune* on August 27th, retracting that the meeting had been held in Douglas's home.

Not having read the entire corpus of *Tribune* issues in the antebellum period, I feel it is safe to assume that apologies were rare if not non-existent under Horace Greeley's righteous and polemical editorship, especially regarding statements made on behalf of the abolitionist cause. During the publication of the "Native Southerner" pieces, Greeley was on a personal and highly publicized tour of the western territories from which he was reporting in installments (and from whence the apocryphal "Go West Young Man" advisory is supposed to have emanated) and so his editorial duties were shared by his assistants. The "Southerner" pieces stand out as anomalies even amongst the scurrilous agitprop writings of the period, partly because of the apologetic retraction but also for capturing powerful historical confluence in motion. Senator Douglas's position on the illegal slave trade, the class warfare revealed by his observations, and the unlikely permeability of his "squatter sovereignty" theory that justified extending slavery in the territories had immeasurable impact on events leading up to The War.

Much to the vexation of the Democrats, Greeley's radical *Tribune* (the third most popular penny daily in New York, and the second most popular weekly in the North) had consistently

lauded Douglas since the beginning of 1858 when the Lecompton Constitution failed to pass. Embraced and celebrated by many Republicans for his fight against the bill, he grew ever more loathsome to the slavocracy after rejecting the Dred Scott ruling during the Freeport debate with Lincoln. His speech there hinged on the term “unfriendly legislature” which he used in the context of territorial governments having the power to prohibit slavery if they so desired without interference from the federal government. His carefully worded defense of popular sovereignty seemingly redefined the Dred Scott ruling in terms favorable to abolitionists who abhorred Judge Taney’s implications that slavery could not be impeded in any state or territory as far as a slave was a citizen’s property. Douglas’s high-wire rhetoric afforded him re-election to the Senate but made him more enemies in the South. Douglas’s popularity resonated with a vast contingent of moderates belonging to every state, but abolitionists reviled him for supporting slavery even as the Ultras in the Senate, led by Jefferson Davis, scorned him as a traitor. Both sets of extremists took to pillorying him. Douglas found himself in a predicament that led him to define his views in print at extraordinary length and sophistication, a task he set himself to at his home in D.C. during the summer of 1859 when the meeting reported by the “Native Southerner” occurred. The original *New York Tribune* article as printed on August 23rd, 1859 follows below with analysis:

From Washington Douglas Sure of the South Correspondence of the New York Tribune Washington, August, 20th, 1859

A person who has visited this, the metropolis of the Union, only during the Session of Congress, will readily perceive the great change in its appearance in visiting here at this season of the year. True, there are the same spacious sidewalks, and wide dusty streets, but the passersby are few and far between. Pennsylvania Avenue no longer presents the lively appearance it generally wears on a pleasant afternoon during the Session of Congress; and the magnificent and attractive Capitol is utterly deserted. Even about the hotels, which are usually the great resort of loiterers, few are now to be seen.

The 35th Congress had adjourned months earlier on March 10th, and Douglas was between second and third terms as senator, having beaten Lincoln for the Illinois seat the previous year. Douglas was at his D.C. home in preparing for a rancorous nomination process the next spring. Even as he received support from all over the nation, he was well aware that his party might split over slavery. He knew his nomination in Charleston the following spring was hardly a foregone conclusion. Toiling away in his study for much of July and August, Douglas was researching material at the Congressional library to bolster his political convictions and positions. Meanwhile, his adored second wife, Adele Cutts, eight months pregnant, entertained far fewer guests than usual, allowing him ample periods of quiet in which he was to formulate his final word on popular sovereignty late that summer. Our “Southerner” continues:

Take it all in all, Washington is a very dull place during the summer months. The few politicians who still hang about here are unmistakable evidence of overtaxed brains in efforts to figure out who are to be, or who are not to be, the nominees of the Republican and Charleston Conventions. The two principal headquarters of the politicians are the rooms of the Republican Association and the residence of Senator Douglas. A few days since I accompanied a friend to the former of these headquarters, and was somewhat surprised to find Republicans so wide awake in this Pro-Slavery city. Here I found a spacious hall, and ranged along on one side of it large pigeon holes well stored with the publications of this Association—a large table with newspapers from all parts of the country, and some six or eight clerks busily engaged in packing and directing documents—most of which I noticed were directed to Minnesota.

At the Republican Association rooms in D.C., known as the “Wigwam”(a generic term for political headquarters but usually associated with the 1860 Republican Convention in Illinois where the headquarters actually resembled a wigwam), the “Southerner” observes campaign materials sent by party staffers eager to capitalize on a mostly anti-slavery electorate in Minnesota. Ironically, a decade earlier in 1849, Stephen Douglas had personally drafted the bill for incorporating the Minnesota Territory, his motive for which was railroad oriented. The long process leading to its statehood in May of 1859 was at times caught up in the argument over

slavery in Kansas. Democratic Party delegates of the new state would nominate Douglas for president in January of 1860. In vain, they nominated him again at the national convention in Charleston but the party fractured. Republicans had already won the Minnesota governorship and a Senate seat in 1859, so Douglas's hold on the presidential vote there had become ephemeral by the time our "Southerner" entered the Republican headquarters.

The "Southerner" cites the location of the Charleston Convention headquarters in D.C. at Douglas's home but it seems unlikely that the August 19th meeting took place there. In fact, Douglas's home in the Capitol was an immense square brick building of three enjoined rowhouses dubbed "Minnesota's Row", after one of the building's transient owners and resident, Minnesota's first senator Henry M. Rice. Construction of the buildings and their eventual habitation was a project planned by Douglas, Rice and then Vice- President John Breckinridge. Rice and Douglas had worked together through the 1850's, finally failing to acquire federal land grants to connect St. Paul with the Illinois Central Railroad. They later fell out over slavery in Minnesota. Yet, there was more to their relationship than legislation. Douglas had purchased 6,000 acres of land at the head of Lake Superior predicting that the port would be the northern launch point for the Pacific railroad. He persuaded Rice, Breckinridge and others to invest in the land for this reason. No returns on investment occurred until after 1870, by which time Douglas was long dead and his real estate mysteriously divested by his executor (Milton, 1934). Another instance of the forfeiture of Douglas's legacy would occur later in the 1870's, when Douglas's sons unsuccessfully sued for recompensation for the destruction of more than 1,000 bales of their plantation cotton by Yankees during The War. The evidence in support of the sons was overwhelming but their case dragged on for years and was finally rejected by the U.S. Court of Claims in 1879 (Reports from Court of Claims Vol. XIV).

The warm friendship and political alliance Douglas shared with Vice-President John C. Breckinridge had soured when Buchanan's differences with the Little Giant became heated. Bowing out of the 1856 presidential race in the interest of party unity, Douglas had practically handed Buchanan the presidency and had said as much, but gratitude from "Old Obliquity" was in short supply. Further intensified because of the dispute about the Lecompton Constitution, the enmity between Douglas and the President split the party. In May of 1859, Douglas's next-door neighbors conspired against him. Buchanan sent Rice to Breckinridge to convince him that Douglas's popularity in the Vice-President's home state of Kentucky was intolerably dangerous. During the campaign against Douglas that ensued, his delegates there began to desert him. Thus, his abutters were decidedly unfriendly by the summer of 1859. (Office, 2012)

The exact location notwithstanding, details about the meeting emerge:

On any evening may be found at the residence of Senator Douglas Democrats of all shades, as well as every class of fence men. On Friday evening last was quite a large gathering there of politicians of all stripes, by special invitation. Prominent among the guests were Senator Iverson of Georgia, Mr. Browne, editor of The Constitution (the government organ), Mr. Coombs, editor of The Republic, and many other leading Southern and Northern party men. There was much private and confidential conversation between Mr. Douglas and the representative of the different factions there assembled.

Senator Alfred Iverson, one of the most combustible "fire-eaters", a devoted secessionist, became at that time understandably worried about Douglas's appeal in Georgia. Among Douglas's Georgia delegates, comprised mostly of moderate conservatives, was W.B. Gaulden, largest slave owner in the state and a conspicuous advocate for re-opening the African slave trade.

An Irish journalist who had immigrated in 1852, William Montague Browne edited the *New York Journal of Commerce*. He became a tireless promoter of the pro-slavery cause. He moved to D.C. early in 1859 to start up his own newspaper, the *Washington Constitution* and

would become Jefferson Davis's aide-de-camp in The War (Coulter, 1967). Joseph J. Coombs was also a newspaperman and a lawyer. Coombs, however, was a fiscal-minded abolitionist that shared ownership of the D.C.-based *Republic* with George Melville Weston, a widely read Whig-turned-Republican economist who spent considerable study about the disadvantages of poor white Southerners suffering under the slavocracy.

Douglas began to air his opinions at this meeting of widely divergent minds, knowing full well that all present were keen to ingest and decipher the latest evolution of his influential views:

Mr. Douglas appeared to take all by surprise by the strong and decided opinions he expressed in the conversation. He said that the whole Slavery question was a momentous one, and must be fought and fought now to the end- and the question whether himself or any other man was to be nominated for or elected to the Presidency, sank into insignificance in comparison with the great issue.

As principled as Douglas was, he was hardly a 20th century liberal. Though born in Vermont, The Little Giant later made his way in life through Southern Illinois social circles dominated by white supremacists and where slavery was the status quo. Possessing one of the most agile and astute political minds of the period, Douglas was ever vigilant about how his position on slavery would affect his career.

Marking the evolution of his thoughts, a letter Douglas wrote to his friend J.B. Dorr on June 22nd 1859 served as a definitive campaign statement for the upcoming Charleston Convention. Douglas's firm stance about slavery issues was thus displayed as the letter was widely reprinted in newspapers across the land. Douglas refused to accept the nomination if:

[T]he Democratic party should repudiate their time-honored principles, and in lieu of these interpolate into the creed of the party such new issues as the revival of the African slave trade, or a Congressional slave code for the Territories, or the doctrine that the Constitution of the United States either establishes or prohibits slavery in the Territories beyond the power of the people legally to control it as other property (Milton, 1934).

It can be assumed that everyone at this meeting knew of that statement of Douglas's two months earlier. He did not accompany the rationale for his position with an acknowledgement of the consequences thereof. His main ambition, like Clay's, was to prevent secession and none fought with more intellectual energy and rhetorical power to save the Union before the War than he, certainly not Lincoln. Douglas had no illusions about slavery or its *raison d'être* underlying secession, but he must have at least recognized that his sacrifice to the altar of principle could tear the country asunder. The Little Giant's failure to secure the presidency ensured the greatest disaster yet to befall the United States. This *Tribune* piece and its follow-up appeared at the onset of the most factional moment in U.S. history. The Southerner further described promulgating Douglas's views:

He was very vehement in his denunciations, and ridiculed the idea entertained by many of his Democratic friends, that by the decision in the Dred Scott case Slavery existed in or went into the Territories—contending that no such decision had been made; or if made, could have no binding force; that such an idea was ridiculous in the extreme; he wondered that any were found so foolish as to harbor such a thought.

At that juncture Douglas reiterated his Freeport Doctrine knowing that consistency on those points would define his position. His ridicule of those who disagreed with his artful interpretation of slavery's legal status in the territories affirmed his abiding respect for each territory's authority to choose slavery or oppose it. His sticking point was that if slavery was to exist in the Territories, a police force assembled by the local legislature needed to be in place prior to the introduction of slaves. The existence of such a force verified that a legislature could enforce slavery or its prohibition.

Douglas went on to articulate his rather simple logic on the matter:

He contended that Slavery could not go into the Territories except by special local enactment after a Territorial Government had been duly formed, and that Slavery did not and could not exist in the Territories until then; that all persons who go into a Territory before an act has been passed for the establishment of a Territorial

Government are interlopers and trespassers, and have none of the rights of "citizens of the several States." and can claim no protection nor obtain redress for grievances of the general Government; and hence they can have no legal protection or claim for any slaves they may take with them.

In the aftermath of Bleeding Kansas, Douglas sought to revise his definition of Popular Sovereignty in which he implicitly did not condone the kind of "squatter sovereignty" that had caused all the violence since 1854. Because he had been largely responsible for the passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act in 1854, by 1859 he wanted to qualify his intentions. The meeting seems to have been an opportunity for Douglas to exercise some of the rhetorical muscle he had been developing that summer to write an essay commissioned by *Harper's* with which he would clarify and promote his positions. Entitled "The Dividing Line Between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty", it was published at the beginning of September 1859, two weeks after the meeting described in the *Tribune* article. Therefore, Douglas had completed or was nearly finished with the work that would define his campaign for the presidency in 1860. After Douglas disparaged those who failed to understand his logic, it occurs to our "Native Southerner" that The Little Giant's politics could be misconstrued as running counter to his own party. He interrupts the narrative to opine cynically:

With such views as these, Mr. Douglas might be considered a proper candidate for the Republicans nomination. But is he sincere, and can he be trusted? I think not, and before I close this letter I will show that this is the game of a shrewd and unprincipled politician.

The author makes his case for Douglas's duplicity by quoting him verbatim about the illegal slave trade:

In regard to the slave trade, Mr. Douglas stated that there was not the shadow of doubt but that it had been carried on quite extensively for a long time back, and that there had been more slaves imported into the Southern States during the last year than had ever been imported before in any one year, even when the slave trade was legal. It was his confident belief that over 15,000 slaves had been brought into this country during the past year. He had seen, with his own eyes, 300 of those recently imported miserable

beings in a slave pen in Vicksburgh, Mississippi, and also large numbers at Memphis, Tennessee. This is no imaginary sketch, but the expressions of Mr. Douglas as enunciated in conversation on Friday evening at his residence, and cannot be controverted by himself or friends.

The preceding utterance from Douglas reveals convincing evidence of the illegal slave trade.

Douglas scholars old and new, however, have disregarded it. In recent years, a notable oversight of this kind was committed by Douglas expert Graham A. Peck, Associate Professor of History at Saint Xavier University. Peck's article "Was Stephen A. Douglas Anti- Slavery?" (2005) decides that Douglas's true feelings about slavery put him in the pro- slavery camp. He erroneously allies his thesis with more assiduous scholarship by historians who were and are far too intelligent to suggest Douglas was anti-slavery or otherwise in any strict sense. The evidence tells me that his personal feelings are a moot point compared with volumes of material on the subject that he expounded upon both in the Senate and in his writing. Meserve questioned Mr. Peck after reading his article, as Meserve found faulty scholarship and tendentious writing. Their e-mail exchange follows:

Sent: Tuesday, January 17, 2012 11:59 AM

Hello Professor Peck,

I have read your finely written article on the question of Mr. Douglas's Anti-Slavery stances. I am curious to know how you came up with the statement that the New York Daily Tribune articles of August 1859 written by a "Native Southerner" are "suspect, being written under a pseudonym by a political opponent of Douglas." (Footnote 10). Nowhere in the articles or the Wells book is this information substantiated. One could surmise that it's true on the face of it, but the facts are not borne out by the sources you have provided. I am greatly interested in this instance during Douglas's career and would very much appreciate any information about this "Native Southerner" and what his true identity was.

Thanks for your time,

Jeremy Meserve

Meserve investigated his footnote that purported to be from Damon Wells's *Stephen Douglas: The Last Years* (1990). There was no mention of anything in the pages of that book that could support Peck's statement about the *New York Tribune* articles of 1859. Peck replied to Meserve:

Tue, Jan 17, 2012 at 1:01 PM

Dear Jeremy,

I will look at my notes when I get a chance. My recollection is that my source for that information was a newspaper but apparently that is not what the footnote says. I'll find out, although I'm at the beginning of the semester so it may take me some time.

Graham Peck

Meserve confirmed his reply and wished him luck in the new semester. He followed up with this puzzler:

February 5, 2012 7:10:28 PM EST

Jeremy,

I had almost forgotten about your request as your e-mail dropped lower and lower in my inbox, but just remembered about your question yesterday when I returned from a board meeting of the Stephen A. Douglas Association in Chicago. So I thought I should e-mail you because I am so swamped I'm not sure when I'll have time to dig into my records. It is possible at a conversation with me would be more useful and would be easier for me to schedule at this time.

The short answer to your question as far as I can remember, without checking any notes, is that I made my judgments about "Native Southerner" based on what he wrote and not about any additional information from another source. So I doubt, even if I check my notes, that I would have information on who was behind the actual articles (assuming that is your chief interest).

Anyway, it struck me that maybe a brief phone conversation would be more useful for both of me than waiting for me to dig around and finding everything I had. That way I could figure out exactly what you were interested and whether I can help.

Let me know if that would be helpful for you.

Thanks,

Graham

Because Meserve surmised that nothing farther could be gained from a conversation with him, he did not call Mr. Peck regarding the *Tribune* articles. Why Peck denied the validity of the statement by the “Southerner” just because he misstated where the meeting occurred defies reason. It certainly plays into the hands of those who want to diminish the numbers of slaves that were imported before The War. In making his case for Douglas’s pro-slavery stance, Peck debunks the *Tribune* sources as well as other evidence about Douglas and his personal relationship with the Peculiar Institution. The reality is that Douglas’s principles defined his political actions, as conflicted as they might appear to me today. He can’t be pigeon-holed or confined to the mundane dichotomy suggested by popular images of cruel slavemasters versus those of the righteously condemnatory Garrisonians. Peck does not deny that Douglas’s stance on slavery is difficult to decipher, yet he does his utmost, as do recent Lincoln hagiographers, to paint Douglas incontrovertibly as pro-slavery. The Little Giant’s position on it was more layered than Lincoln’s before The War. I assert that scholars like Peck de-emphasize the evidence and this chronic negligence about the illegal slave trade is unfortunate.

The above sentence by our Native Southerner, “*This is no imaginary sketch, but the expressions of Mr. Douglas as enunciated in conversation on Friday evening at his residence, and cannot be controverted by himself or friends*”, is strenuously over-assertive, suggesting that the author was excited to be the bearer of such an exclusive scoop. Yet, it is exactly this emphasis that he later disavowed. The renunciation obscured the setting of the meeting while heaping more defamatory remarks on Douglas.

Douglas’s anecdotes about illegally smuggled slaves originated from his triumphal six-

week tour of the South after defeating Lincoln for the Senate. With his wife Adele, Douglas left a jubilee atmosphere in Springfield, Illinois, boarding a steamer for New Orleans on November 23rd, 1858. Docking in Memphis for a welcoming celebration en route, the Little Giant observed barracooned slaves that were obviously smuggled in. He saw even more down river in Vickburg, Mississippi, smuggled in he supposed from the Gold Coast (Milton, 1934). He may have been correct about the origins of the slaves but they were probably shipped via Cuba, as he may have learned for himself when he and Adele spent the latter part of December in Havana. When there, Douglas conducted much personal investigation in that magnificent city in order to inform himself about the island so many Southerners coveted. Douglas agreed with Jefferson Davis and other bellicose expansionists about the seemingly imminent annexation of Cuba, openly stating to the Senate, "I don't care whether you want it or not...I are compelled to take it, and I can't help it." (Johannsen, 1989)

In fact, Douglas's arrival there coincided with the climax of the sugar harvest. He likely witnessed Havana's busy docks teeming with slaves loading hogsheads of sugar and molasses into the holds of schooners and steamers. By that time also Cuba's first railroad, built specifically for transporting sugar from the cane fields to port, would have been a spectacle as well.

After Douglas discussed the alarming dimensions of the illegal slave trade, Iverson of Georgia chimed in:

Senator Iverson, on the same occasion, stated that he could not endorse the views put forth by Mr. Stephens, of his State, in favor of the reopening of the slave-trade. He thought it dangerous to stand upon such a platform, and yet, it was plain to see that he favored it, and could not refrain occasionally from defending Mr. Stephens and his doctrine. He further stated that it was very certain that a large majority of the people (the poor non-slaveholding whites) of Georgia favored the reopening of the slave trade, but that the slave owners, who had the controlling power in the State and the South, strongly opposed it, and hence such a measure could not successfully be carried through.

Alexander Stephens, the “little pale star from Georgia”, was a state senator and though formerly a Whig, had ascended quickly in the pro-slavery “favorite sons” inner circle of Buchanan’s Democrats. As a more direct sounding board for his constituency, Stephens’s position on repealing the prohibition of slave imports was reflective of those who wanted some slaves but could not afford more or any at all. Iverson reluctantly opposed this, evidently not as cognizant as some in the planter aristocracy were about the impacts of such a repeal.

You will see by what I have written that Mr. Douglas is doing everything in his power to secure a majority of the delegates from the Free States to the Charleston Convention. Indeed, he confidently boasts that he will have almost the entire Free-State delegation, and speaks sneeringly of the South as though he had it in his breeches pocket, or, in the words of the illustrious Gov. Wise, “had bagged the South.” Thus relying upon his opposition to the reopening of the slave trade, he feels confident of securing the influence and cooperation of the slave-owning aristocracy in controlling the Convention, and thereby hopes to get enough of the Southern delegation combined with the Free-State vote to secure his nomination. He publicly avows that the South will go for him, or whoever may be nominated by the Charleston Convention, because it would be suicidal to stand up against the Democratic nominee.

A Native Southerner

Thus the “Southerner” concluded his report about the meeting with every intention of impugning The Little Giant in the worst possible way. The substance of the meeting is documented even if the intent of the article was to attack Douglas. If Douglas was guilty of some bravado regarding the choice of the Southern delegation, it was most certainly a calculated bluff considering who was in the room. Yet, the partisan politics of the account failed, even as an undercover expose’, because the author was forced to retract where the meeting took place.

Douglas did oppose reopening the slave trade and this was indeed pleasing to at least an important element of the “slave-owning aristocracy”. It is true that some planters supported Douglas and that his disfavor of the reopening was an important factor in their consideration. In fact, however, many big planters of the South mostly maligned Douglas by this time because of the Freeport Doctrine. Another less perceptible reason for their disliking Douglas may have been that The Little Giant was a very vocal Anglo-phobe. He hated British influence and castigated their perceived intentions often in the Senate, especially including during the Oregon border issue with England, which had germinated the territorialization of Kansas and Nebraska. Planters would not have taken kindly to such a powerful figure constantly biting the hand that fed them. 70% of all Southern cotton had been sent to Liverpool for the preceding fifty years.

Alternatively, the “Native Southerner” seemed to reflect the worst fears of the Republicans, that Douglas’s pandering abilities would win him a majority of delegates at Charleston. Douglas knew better and so did Buchanan and the rest of the Democrats. Factions of the party that were hostile to Douglas were about to erupt in yet more rage when his *Harper’s* article saw print two weeks later. Upon publication, that essay inflamed slaveholders everywhere. Douglas’s enemies were gleeful at this apparent career suicide. Writing to Buchanan, Secretary of War John Floyd pronounced Douglas’s finished (Johannsen, 1989).

Stephen Douglas had a great deal of personal experience with slavery. His wealth derived from it. If one reads only his public speeches it is easy to conclude that he was, like almost everyone else a white supremacist and no true friend of the Negro. This is not so discernible in his writings.

Douglas oversaw a 2,500 acre cotton plantation on the Pearl River in Lawrence County, Mississippi. He was made manager of the plantation with 150 slaves after the death of his father-

in-law, Col. Robert Martin death in 1848. His wife inherited all of it. Martha's father had initially tried to give Douglas the plantation outright but he refused it, only agreeing to manage it at his death. The exact words of the Colonel's will to Martha stated, "I would remind my dear daughter that her husband does not desire to own this kind of property and most of our collateral connection already have more of that kind of property than is advantage to them." When Martha died five years later, she willed the plantation and slaves to their two sons, both toddlers at the time. Douglas did indeed benefit from the plantation, he collected 20% of profits as management fee.

On behalf of his sons and in partnership with another landowner he sold the constantly flooding Pearl plantation in 1857 and acquired another near Greenville, Mississippi of about 3,000 acres ("Guide to the Stephen A. Douglas Papers 1764-1908," 2011). Douglas traveled to the new Mississippi plantation around the beginning of June 1859 to inspect its care and sign a new contract with the overseer. He stayed there a few days to ensure his son's property was being managed satisfactorily and was back in D.C. by the end of the month.

Immediately upon Douglas's return from the plantation, he wrote a statement letter to his friend the Dubuque Iowa editor J.B. Dorr on his resolute stance against the reintroduction of the slave trade, a communication that was intentionally leaked to the newspapers. Whether or not this last visit to the Mississippi plantation had an effect on his political outlook is purely speculative, yet it is instructive to note that his platform as described to Dorr and others that summer was "irreconcilably opposed to the revival of the African slave trade, in any form and under any circumstance." (Douglas to Peyton, August 2nd 1859)

The *New York Tribune's* "Native Southerner" followed up his own expose with a curious retraction two days later. As I have said, the original *Tribune* article was telegraphed from D.C.

to Manhattan on August 21. The retraction is below:

FROM WASHINGTON THE RECENT DOUGLAS CONVERSAZIONE Correspondence of the N.Y. Tribune Washington City, August 24, 1859

It appears I made an error in my communication of the 20th in which I stated that the conversation then alluded to took place at the residence of Senator Douglas. This was not so; it was at some other place where these politicians were assembled.

I also owe an apology to the gentlemen who gave me the details of that conversation for making it public, as I have since been informed it was strictly a private and confidential conversation, and was imparted to me with no idea that it would go any further; and it certainly should not, had secrecy been enjoined on me.

Interestingly, the day after the original article appeared, one of Douglas's Ohio supporters wrote and warned him, "You ought to suspect the motives of any man who asks you to define...your position of any existing issue. You have defined your position...in the Senate, and every man knows precisely what your position is". The Southerner explains further:

But I presumed when I penned the letter, that as Mr. Douglas was a public character, he had no views on great and leading political issues which he wished kept private while he promulgated opposite views to the public. At all events, I deem this explanation proper, in order to exonerate my informant from the stigma of retailing what was regarded as a strictly private conversation.

The "informant" could have been a Douglas supporter who was sternly reprimanded and professionally threatened by his handlers once the *Tribune* report circulated. The follow-up piece is therefore in deference to the informant, but its tenor suggests that "The Southerner" defied a complete retraction of what transpired and made a half-hearted attempt to mend his indiscretion by obscuring where the meeting took place. He goes on to make that a moot point:

Those who have observed the sayings and doings of Mr. Douglas and his followers, as also those newspapers devoted to his interests, must be struck with how generally and persistingly they carry on the game of brag. It seems to be an understanding among them that this game of brag is the great capital upon which they are to trade, and by which they hope to intimidate the weak, encourage the doubting, and force into his meshes all who are indifferent about principle, and care only for success. Just notice with what audacity and boldness they claim all the defeats of the Democracy in the recent elections, as an endorsement of Douglas and his doctrines, and claim it as an unmistakable evidence of his growing popularity. And yet nothing is more self-evident in these recent elections, than that the course of both Douglas and Buchanan is utterly

contemned. Not a single man from the Opposition members recently elected to Congress can be found who favors Douglas; but on the contrary, every one of them so far as my knowledge extends, is not only politically but personally directly opposed to him. So much for the game of brag.

It is true that Republicans won a startling number of elections in 1858. While some abolitionist and Unionist newspapers were quick to suggest that supporting Douglas could be beneficial towards unifying the nation, few Republicans were ready to acknowledge the considerable power of Douglas in light of their own motivations.

It is quite evident that politics is in a very chaotic state in the South at the present time, owing to the exciting question of re-opening the Slave Trade. The large slave-owners are becoming somewhat alarmed, and are crying out lustily to the administration "Hold-enough-enough!" They see that this continued influx of newly imported slaves into the South will have a tendency to materially affect their pecuniary interests and weaken their power over the poorer classes who have not heretofore been able to hire slave-labor, much less to own slaves, and therefore unable to compete with their slave-holding neighbors.

The statements made in the preceding paragraph sublimely explain the slaveholder's dilemma. Therein lies the main reason for why the trade was carried on illegally.

It is believed by many hereabouts that it is owing to this appeal of the large slave owners that the Administration are now disposed to take some steps to stop this traffic, which has been so extensively carried on for some time past, and that, too, with their knowledge. I shall look with interest to the South for further developments in regard to this question of re-opening the slave trade.

A Native Southerner

III. Colonel William Alexander Percy

In addition to Douglas and Dubois, I have a third source, a most reliable oral tradition because it comes from a very literate Southern planter. My great-grandfather William Alexander Percy (Princeton, 1853) was one of the largest and most successful planters in the Mississippi Delta. Stephen Douglas probably met and knew Percy who lived in nearby Leland, Mississippi. Percy's plantation abutted Douglas's to the south. When Douglas arrived to inspect his sons' plantation in June of 1859, it is not far-fetched that an introduction between the two would have been arranged, as was Southern custom.

Percy descended from one of the wealthiest planter families frequenting out of Natchez. Moving from Huntsville Alabama, he settled on the east bank of Deer Creek with his widowed mother and siblings in 1841. Percy became one of the most recognizable figures in Washington County. Though, Senator Douglas was not often present on the plantation that he helped administer, Percy certainly knew James McHatton, part-owner of the Douglas plantation, whose own plantation was also located a few miles south of Percy's. Percy was also politically in tune with Douglas. He was in the minority of Washington County's planters who were against seceding from the Union. Another neighbor of Percy's, an anti-secession Whig judge named Jacob Shall Yerger was elected to a committee position on the Secession Convention of Mississippi largely with the help of Percy.

The Colonel told his oldest son Leroy Percy, U.S. Senator from Mississippi, who in turn told his nephew and ward my own father William Armstrong Percy II, who finally confided to me that vast numbers of slaves were still being imported in the 1850's from Africa via Cuba, where they were "broken in" before being smuggled into the States. This "breaking in" phase included disciplining the slaves, teaching them to plow, and familiarizing them with some words of English. Slaves transshipped from Barbados or other British islands (declining after the end of

slavery there in 1833) already knew English of course. I sincerely hope, but cannot prove that my great-grandfather bought or didn't buy any of these illegal imports.

Almost three score years ago when I was fourteen, I went from the heart of Dixie in Memphis, Tennessee to Middlesex School in Concord, Massachusetts, the stronghold of Yankeedom, proud station on the Underground Railroad, home of Thoreau, Emerson and the Alcotts, where what mattered most socially was how many ancestors you had on the Mayflower. The Yankee boys – I was the only southerner in my entering class of 33 – quickly taught me that the Negroes, as they called them, were just as good as I: they confidently asserted that it was the Irish, their predominant servant class, who were inferior. I, of course, was well aware of how awful the rednecks were. After all they had tossed out my father's Uncle LeRoy as United States senator in 1912 -- the first direct election to the senate in Mississippi. Theodore Bilbo had been the campaign manager for their candidate Vardaman, and even my louche father recognized that his Uncle LeRoy's greatest achievement during the 1920's had been keeping the Klan out of Washington County (See Kirwan's *Revolt of the Rednecks*, 1951). All gentlefolk knew how horrid lynchings were and how stupid, brutal, and corrupt the poor whites, on top since 1912, were. As my Uncle Will wrote in *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941), from that time forward the bottom rail (the rednecks whom he considered inferior to the blacks) was on top and was going to stay there. The upper class Southerners, which included all my family, didn't protest segregation or the Democratic white primary. Nor did I know how brutal and lethal slavery had been, nor even how unfair and humiliating sharecropping was, until I came to study amongst the Damn Yankees.

When I went home on vacations, I began investigations into these northern boys' claims. "Perfessor" Falls, as everyone dutifully called him, ran the school for blacks near my

grandmother's plantation. He told me that it was hard to keep the students in school, even though classes were suspended for the most intensive periods of cotton labor, planting and hoeing from spring until the fourth July and picking in fall. Their parents, without education themselves, saw little need for their children to receive schooling. Besides, children became useful on the farm at about age six when they could gather eggs, water cattle, and most importantly, pick cotton. In such hard times, as in the Depression, and even early, post-WW II South – especially on such poor soil as they had near Memphis – every hand was needed. Many didn't attend school, Perfessor Falls claimed to my astonishment, because they lacked clothes. That reminded me that during the summers I had seen many totally nude up to puberty, as had also been common in the days of slavery and reconstruction. But that was in the late 30's, towards the end of the depression and when rural electrification was only beginning, courtesy of the T.V.A.

During these discussions my father, who saw nothing wrong with segregation except that it was enforced by rednecks instead of Bourbons, related how his uncle and guardian the Senator, who had died in 1929, had told him that his father Col. Percy, (Princeton, 1853) had related how slaves were being imported in great numbers up until the outbreak of the Civil War. Col. Percy, like General Robert E. Lee, opposed secession before joining the Confederate ranks.

I thought this claim about importing slaves was dubious, but I never forgot it. Over the years I have worked on demography in medieval Sicily, Renaissance Europe, and more recently in ancient Greece and Rome. Such work and passing acquaintance with comparative studies of slavery convinced me that the extraordinarily rapid increase in the number of African slaves in the antebellum south, though doubtless undercounted, could not possibly have come about by natural increase – even if all the slaves had been treated as paternalistically and benevolently as I had been taught to believe before I set in foot in Concord and began to learn otherwise. This

dramatic increase could not even have been accounted for had all the slaveholders in the Old Dominion and other less settled states with worn out land had concentrated exclusively on breeding, which they rarely did. Never in all recorded history has the slave population grown so exponentially except, if one accepts the standard account, in the antebellum U.S. and in Bermuda.

In some West Indian islands, slaves were worked to death in an average of seven years. Because they were so cheap they didn't need to be preserved much less bred, as was the case in late Republican Rome when Cato in *De Agricultura*, copying Carthaginian manuals, recommended brutal exploitation and no breeding for maximum profit. Slaves always had a longer life expectation in the North American colonies and the U.S., however, than in the Caribbean or Late Republic Rome, but they weren't superhuman breeders. This is simply untrue in light of how expensive slaves became between 1807-1860. It was not feasible to spend so much capital on slave labor and not protect in some measure the health and care of the slave. This observation lends some credence to the notion that slave- owners were more humane than has previously been allowed, but I do not exonerate those who did indeed treat their slaves brutally.

Where there is such a demand, a supply will almost always materialize. It is a law of economics. See how much liquor was consumed during prohibition. How much dope today? How many illegal immigrants do I have today? Much of the commodities and many of those people were smuggled in just as slaves were up to 1862, into the bayou lagoons and swamps along our porous Gulf coast. Cotton production in Dixie increased 1000% from 1793 until the Civil War! Even if the planters had had mechanical cotton harvesters roaring across their field, as one historian erroneously claimed in a recent generally well-received book, natural increase and

shipments from the Upper South together could never have supplied nearly enough hands to plant and chop all this product, no matter how good the weather!

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