Chapter I

THE WHITE PERCEPTION OF BLACK INFERIORITY
Chapter I

THE WHITE PERCEPTION OF BLACK IN RICHIA

Some twenty years before the great French Revolution, a struggle was launched in the Western Hemisphere which gave birth to the world's first modern republic—the United States of America. The armed struggle in the British colonies in America that can be said to have begun with the Boston Massacre in 1770, culminated in victory for the colonists by 1783. By 1789, the thirteen former colonies of Great Britain in North America had evolved a new code of government and had elected George Washington as the first head of state. The military struggle was accompanied by a revolutionary transformation of American life and culture. The most important facet of the changes wrought by the Revolution was in the realm of political ideas. The Declaration of Independence adopted by the Continental Congress on 4 July 1776 declared that all men were created equal and possessed certain inalienable rights to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Basing itself on the theory of natural rights and the doctrines of the Enlightenment, the Declaration put forward the idea that if the basic freedom of a people were obstructed by tyrannical rulers, they, the people, had a right to overthrow the tyrants and establish that system of governance which would protect those basic rights.

The debate that took place in the North American colonies on the idea that the people could determine the way they ought to be governed was certainly unique. Drawing from the democratic intellectual currents of the Old World, American thinkers
and revolutionary leaders like Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, John and Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison and others ushered in the era of modern political democracy based on a republican system.

On 4 March 1789, George Washington was sworn in as the first elected President of a country that had enshrined a Constitution which rejected the hereditary basis of political power and derived its authority from the people of the nation themselves. Nevertheless one central flaw marked this first expression of political democracy in the modern world. There were, in 1790, within the United States, 700,000 black men, some 10 per cent of the population, who were slaves. That was remarkable was that among the owners were those very men who had so eloquently voiced the ideals of the American Revolution. The turmoil of the Revolution and its ideas did not prove strong enough to uproot a patently undemocratic, unjust and seemingly anachronistic institution from American life.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, slavery had taken deep roots in the American economic system. Though many thinking Americans had voiced their opposition to slavery and the slave-trade throughout the eighteenth century, the Revolutionary period did not see any new and significant upsurge calling for the emancipation of the blacks held in bondage. Blacks were not aloof from the Revolutionary struggle either. The first man to fall in the Boston Massacre had been a black soldier—Crispus Attucks. There was considerable disquiet among those who held property in the form of black slaves that
the Revolutionary struggle would result in the freedom of slaves. Efforts were made to ensure that blacks, especially slaves, were not used in the military struggle. Nevertheless, the blacks did not stay out. In the battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775, several blacks participated. Indeed, one black who had been freed just before the battle, Peter Salem, was credited with shooting the British Major Pitcairn. The British policy of freeing blacks who were willing to enlist on their side, overturned George Washington's policy of keeping out the blacks from the Revolutionary forces.

Many of the slave states objected to the enlistment of blacks—free or slave. Nevertheless the British policy had the effect of liberalizing the policy of the colonists towards the blacks. All told, some 5,000 blacks served in the Revolutionary War. This fact, along with the prevailing Revolutionary ethos, gave rise to a significant increase in the number of black slaves who were unmolested by their masters, especially in the North where slavery was no longer an important part of the labour system.

In the Upper South, in the states of Virginia and Maryland, in particular, the Revolution did spark-off a critique


of slavery. There were in these two states some 390,000 slaves. Nevertheless, the fact that Virginia as the most prosperous and populous of the former colonies was an important centre of the Revolutionary activity, definitely contributed to the climate of opinion, at least at one period, that slavery was an out-dated institution and some means ought to be devised to effect its demise without financial loss to the slave-owners.

This trend of thought was best reflected in the ideas and attitudes of one of the most illustrious and prosperous sons of Virginia—Thomas Jefferson. The bulk of Jefferson's wealth was based on his extensive plantations which were worked by slave labour. Several writers have addressed themselves to the "paradox" of the growth of slavery alongside the founding of one of the first democratic republics. In a recent review of the work of historians of the 1930s and the 1940s, John P. Diggins has pointed out that most of them have seriously undermined their work by ignoring Jefferson's views on race and slavery.

Influenced by the Civil Rights upsurge, historians, notably Winthrop D. Jordan, have attempted to redress the balance. In a rigorous analysis of Jefferson's thought and milieu, Jordan, in his important work on the problem of race

---

and slavery in the Revolutionary period, has presented a profile of a man full of contradictions, who was entangled in projecting an Enlightenment philosophy of democracy and humanitarianism through the ethos of a slave-holder.

There have been, since then, significant attempts to answer the "paradox". Edmund J. Morgan has minimized the element of racial prejudice in the continuance of slavery in Jeffersonian Virginia. He ascribes the establishment and development of slavery in the Revolutionary period to contemporary attitudes towards the poor in England. He concludes that the contemptuous manner in which the English ruling classes viewed the poor was the prime reason for the concurrent development of slavery and Republicanism in America. The enslavement of the blacks ("who were only by the "accident" of their enslavement poor"); Morgan argues, was the very foundation of the concept of liberty and equality in the United States, especially in the South. The fact that the blacks were of a different colour was a sufficient though not, by implication, a necessary condition for their


The basic flaw in Morgan's argument is that the blacks, from their introduction to the Americas were slaves. They were not enslaved out of the evolution of economic and social forces, but on the other hand, because of their race, considered inferior and pagan by the European whites, they were abducted from their home continent and inducted into the lowest rung of the social order of Colonial America. This is a fact that Jefferson did not or could not see. Jefferson, the enlightenment thinker, purported to use a scientific method of rational enquiry to find evidence of intelligence, independence and equality that could justify the racial equality of the black and white races. All this was just not discernible in the mass of blacks who were a priori slaves in the Americas, not to speak of the fact that in the century preceding they were forced to adapt to an alien culture as well as prevented from rising within that society in any way, economically or socially.

There was in the initial phases of the Revolutionary period, some sort of an antislavery impulse visible in the Upper South of which Virginia was a part. The fact that Jefferson himself was one of the prime spokesmen of this "antislavery" position is an indication of the conservative nature of the impulse. While drawing up a revision of Virginia's state laws, Jefferson, probably in consultation with other prominent Virginians, had drawn up a proposal for the gradual abolition

---

of slavery to be accompanied by the deportation of blacks. The proposal was never put up formally because, as Jefferson put it, "the public mind would not yet bear the proposition." This was the nearest Jefferson went to actually advocating the abolition of slavery—abolition to be coupled with deportation.

In the draft of the Declaration of Independence put before the Continental Congress, Jefferson accused George III of encouraging the African slave trade and helping in the continuance of slavery in the Americas. These charges were not acceptable to the other slave-holding delegates. As a matter of fact, Jefferson's antislavery thrust which lasted mainly from 1774 to 1784, was directed largely against slave-trade and not slavery. Jefferson's one major antislavery achievement was the introduction of a clause in the abortive Ordinance of 1784 prohibiting the introduction of slavery in the areas west of the 13 colonies after 1800. This proposal was then incorporated in the Ordinance of 1787 which prohibited slavery in the North-west Territories. Jefferson was, in seeking to bar slavery in the new areas, imbued with the same spirit that characterized the Republican Party later—a desire to keep the "new" areas of America free of blacks, free or slave.

Jefferson As a Slave Holder

It is in detailing Jefferson's day-to-day link with slavery as a slave-holder that we can begin to arrive at an


8 Cohen, n. 5, pp. 509-10.
understanding of the "paradox" of slavery in Revolutionary America. Jefferson inherited 20 slaves on his father's death in 1757. By the time of his own death in 1826, he had 267 slaves. These slaves along with his extensive land holdings made him one of the wealthiest men in Virginia. He maintained a life-style of an European aristocrat in Monticello based on the labour of his slaves.

As a slave-owner, Jefferson exhibited all the traits of a Southern gentleman. He was "kind" and "enlightened" a master to the extent it did not erode the profitability and efficiency of his slaves. According to Cohen, there is every indication that Jefferson took pains to ensure that families were not split by sales of slaves. Nevertheless, he did buy and sell slaves.

In spite of Jefferson's "benevolence", his slaves did run away occasionally. It has been calculated from his farm records that there were some 40 instances of slaves running away during his lifetime. When slaves ran away, Jefferson, like any other slave-owner, hired slave-catchers and spared no efforts to recover his lost "property". When runaways were caught, they were punished, sometimes by flogging as one instance in 1805 indicates.

Throughout his lifetime, he freed only two slaves, one of whom bought his own freedom. After his death, his will provided for the manumission of 5 slaves, all members of one Hemmings family. This family was related to his black slave

---

9 Ibid., p. 506.
10 Ibid., pp. 517-8.
nistress, Sally Hemings, who was officially his house-keeper at Monticello. Sally herself was not manumitted. This act was in contrast to that of two of his notable contemporaries, George Washington and John Randolph of Roanoke who provided for the manumission of their slaves on their death.

The fundamental belief which governed Jefferson's thought with regard to blacks was his belief that they were innately inferior and an alien element in America. Any solution to the problem of slavery would have to be accompanied by a solution to the race problem that would accrue after emancipation. This was most clearly brought out in his survey on the State of Virginia which was published in 1787 as his Notes on the State of Virginia. The survey was a masterful exercise in outlining the natural wealth and the state of the society constructed by the colonists in America. It was an attempt to present to the rest of the world a picture of the achievements of the state, and by implication, the new country. Discussing the nature of black slavery and its future, Jefferson declared that while slavery was undesirable, the problem of race adjustment was the primary reason why the Virginians were forced to continue this institution. He noted:

Deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks of the injuries that they have sustained...the real distinctions that nature has made and many other circumstances...[will lead] to

---

the extermination of one or the other race. To these objections which are political may be added others, which are physical and moral. The first difference which strikes us is that of color. This difference is fixed in nature.... They have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidneys, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odor. Comparing them by their faculties... it appears to me that in memory they are equal to whites; in reason much inferior.... The improvement of blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with whites... proves that their inferiority is not the effect of rarity of their condition of life. I advance it, as a suspicion only, that blacks whether originally a distinct race, or race distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites....

Therefore, when freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture. (12)

Thus, the drafter of the Declaration of Independence also drafted what can be looked at as a veritable manifesto for the limitation of the black man's freedom as long as he was to remain in the United States of America. Jefferson had argued his case rigorously yet, the implicit racism was transparent. While in his published work he was correctly circumspect in advancing the view of black inferiority "as a suspicion only", his later behavior indicated the depth of his dilemma.

In 1791, the black mathematician and surveyor Benjamin Banneker sent a copy of his famous Almanac to Jefferson, now

---

12 T. Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1955 [1787]), edited and with an introduction by William Peden. Jefferson finished this work in 1781 but was reluctant to publish it. However, since several private copies were already in circulation, he decided to go ahead and have it published.
Secretary of State. Jefferson, while not recanting his earlier views gave a suitably vague reply to Banneker, noting:

"To body wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit... that blacks have talents equal to those of the other colors of men, and that an appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence, both in Africa and America." (13)

Jefferson expressed similar sentiments to his European friends like the Marquis de Condorcet and Abbé Henri Gregoire. Nevertheless in a private letter to his friend, Joel Barlow he declared that he was as yet unconvinced that the blacks were in any way equal to white men. Rather testily he declared, that he was not sure as to whether much of Banneker's work was his own. Banneker's letter to him, he pointed out, "shows him to have a mind of very common stature indeed." It would have been well nigh impossible for Jefferson the slave-holder to accept the fact of black talent, to say nothing of black equality.

Throughout his life, the problem of the black man in America continued to haunt him. He could see no other solution other than the separation of the black and the white races. While sometimes it seemed that his attitude was guided by libertarian concerns, it never overrode his desire to prevent an economic loss that he and his class would sustain as a result of any emancipation of the slaves.

14 Ibid., pp. 452-4.
In his Notes on Virginia he had put forward a plan for the abolition of slavery whereby all new-born blacks would be set free and made to earn their cost price by working as bonded labour and then deported outside the United States. In 1820, when the debates over the Missouri issue began to take shape, but four years later, in 1824, he once again put forward the plan for the gradual abolition of slavery he had put forward nearly half a century before. More than anything else it indicated the unchanging nature of the perception of the black man in America held by Jefferson.

George Washington and Slavery

Jefferson's attitude has been discussed above at some length because he is considered to be one of the finest examples of the spirit of Enlightenment, a statesman whom many contemporaries regarded as one holding "advanced views." George Washington, the Father of the American Republic, was an even wealthier slave owner than Jefferson. Washington had no intellectual pretensions of being a democratic theoretician. Washington, too, was a careful, firm and profit-minded slave-master. He, too, exhibited an unwillingness to split families of his slaves. However, when he had runaways, he spared no efforts to get them back, in one instance, he sold off a particularly

recalcitrant slave to be sent to the West Indies.

There are several statements, frequently cited, indicating Washington's support for the emancipation of slaves. Nevertheless, as the former Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary army, and the first President of the Republic, Washington, who wielded considerable power and prestige, did not initiate any specific plan to free the black slaves. On the other hand, he decried agitation for the abolition of slavery and called for the elimination of slavery "by slow, sure, and imperceptible degrees." 17

Washington, like Jefferson and many of his slave-owning contemporaries of the Revolutionary period, benefited too much from the fruits of slave-labour to convert any libertarian ideas in the direction of black emancipation into practice. An example of this is provided by the haste with which Washington spirited away his house-hold slaves from Philadelphia to Mount Vernon fearing that the slaves, using their long residence in Philadelphia, might sue for freedom under Pennsylvania's laws. 18

Washington is credited with abolitionist sentiments on the strength of a proposal to Arthur Young wherein he offered to


18 Ibid., G. Washington to Tobias Lear, 12 April 1791, vol. 37, pp. 573-4.
rent his estate and offer his blacks to the prospective tenants as hired labourers rather than as slaves. This plan, born probably out of business considerations, did not succeed. In a subsequent letter to Sir John Sinclair, one of his prospective tenants, Washington rarely expressed his belief that emancipation laws were a virtual certainty in Virginia. This itself explains Washington's "abolitionist" proposal in the first place. However, to his "credit", Washington made provisions in his will to free all his slaves after his own death and that of his wife.

The attitude of another Founding Father, the firebrand Patrick Henry was candid enough, as he admitted in 1773:

I am drawn along with the general inconvenience of living without them [slaves]. I will not, I cannot, justify it [slavery].... I believe a time will come when an opportunity will be offered to abolish this lamentable evil....

Henry gives the clearest indication as to how the democratic instincts of the Founding Fathers were often stifled by the personal financial stake they had in slave-holding. Henry advocated some form of emancipation in the Virginia House of Delegates. He opposed the new Federal Constitution, however, on the ground that it conferred upon the government emergency powers that were capable of being used to emancipate slaves.

---


He spoke for his fellow slave-holders when he lamented:

But is it practicable, by any human means, to liberate them \( \bigg\) the black slaves \( \bigg\) without producing the most dreadful and ruinous \( \bigg\) financial \( \bigg\) consequences \( \bigg\) for the masters? (21)

Slavery and the Federal Convention

The issue of slavery was reflected in the debates of the Federal Convention in two of what have come to be known as the "great compromises" that were crucial to the acceptance of the draft Constitution by the thirteen colonies. One of these gave the Southern states the right to import slaves for a period of twenty years without fear of Federal interference. It was only after this concession that the Southern states conceded the right of the Federal government to regulate foreign and inter-state commerce. The other compromise affected was in the agreement of the Northern states that three-fifths of the slaves should be counted in the apportionment of representation in the House of Representatives as well as for the purposes of direct taxation.

In the debate on the provision calling for the prohibition of the importation of slaves we can see the ambivalence with which several slave-owners, especially in Virginia and Maryland viewed the question of slavery. George Mason of Virginia and Luther Martin of Maryland, both slave-owners, denounced the slave-trade. Mason, who owned over three hundred

21 Ibid.

slaves, solemnly declared that slavery might bring the judgement of God upon the nation.

There was an obvious incongruity in opposing the slave-trade while supporting slavery itself, and it was pointed out by many of the delegates. This all-too-weak moral position was shattered by the insistence of South Carolina and Georgia that unrestricted importation of slaves be permitted. The Convention was silent in front of the argument of unvarnished economic interests. Roger Sherman of Connecticut declared that "it was better to let the Southern States import slaves than to part with those states." Finally, by Article I, Section 9, it was agreed that the slave-trade would not be touched by the new government till 1803.  

A similar absence of moral foresight is visible in the other "great compromise" which agreed to count three-fifths of the slaves for the purposes of apportionment of representation and for levying direct taxes. The proposal was put forward by James Wilson of Pennsylvania, a wealthy banker motivated by a desire of ensuring the adherence of the slave-holding states to the new Constitution. The motion was seconded by Charles Pinckney of South Carolina, a die-hard slave-holder. There was some objection to this proposal, but not from the point of view of racial equality, Gouverneur Morris declared himself "against admitting the blacks into the census...since the people of Pennsylvania would revolt at the idea of being put on a footing

23 Ibid., pp. 371-4, 415-6, 409.
with slaves." 24 None of the Northern colonies wanted anything to do with promoting political equality for "free" blacks.

The Southern delegates advanced a single argument whose basis was that property rights in slaves should not be viewed with contempt in a document designed to protect property. They argued, in fact, for counting blacks equally for the purposes of representation, their willingness to accept the "three-fifths" rule was, in fact, a major compromise on their part. Here again the propertyed men of the North compromised. Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania put forward the compromise proposal whereby which three-fifths of the slaves would be counted for the purposes of representation as well as for the purpose of levying direct taxes.

Yet another provision was added to the draft Constitution. Article IV, Section 2 provided for the rendition of all captured fugitive slaves back to their masters. It is in the framing of this clause that we can see the pains taken by the founding fathers to avoid using the word "slave" or "slavery" in the draft document. The original clause would have read "... fugitive slaves and servants to be delivered up like criminals," the rephrased version dropped the word "slaves" in favour of the phrasing "any person bound to service or labour". 25


26 Ibid., vol. III, pp. 443, 453.
In spite of the fact that the draft was carefully laundered to eliminate direct reference to slavery, the "peculiar institution" was central to the spirit of compromise that allowed the establishment of the new Federal Constitution. Without actual reference to slavery, three provisions actually dealt with the institution, Article I, Section 2 dealing with the "three-fifths" clause, Article I, Section 9 which permitted the importation of slaves till 1808 and Article IV, Section 2 which provided for the return of fugitive slaves. The exercise that gave the new Republic its new Constitution was over. Neither democratic nor humanitarian concerns relating to the status of blacks seemed to have marked its course. The spirit which imbued the Founding Fathers was best summed up by John Rutledge of South Carolina who said that "... Religion & humanity had nothing to do with the question [of making the new Constitution] -- Interest alone is the governing principle with Nations...."

Of the fifty-five delegates who came to Philadelphia, only thirty-nine signed the document. Only two of the sixteen who did not sign it put forward issues relating to slavery as part of their reasons for not signing. Eldridge Gerry of Massachusetts objected to counting of slaves alongside free men. Luther Martin was the only delegate who, while refusing to sign the draft, cited the failure of the Convention to limit slavery.

27 See the draft of the proposed Constitution, ibid., vol. II, pp. 651, 656 and 662; for Rutledge's statement see vol. II, p. 364.

28 For Eldridge Gerry's speech to the Convention of
Max Farrand in his book, *The Framing of the Constitution*, refuses to give any importance to slavery as an issue in the framing of the Constitution. Farrand observes that: "In 1787, slavery was not the moral question that it later became."

Recent scholars have challenged Farrand's view. Staughton Lynd has pointed out that slavery was very much a central issue before the framers of the Constitution. Other scholars like Winthrop D. Jordan and Donald L. Robinson agree with Lynd's contention.

The Impact of the Revolution on Slavery

We have detailed the limitation of the democratic impulse on the institution of slavery. In the North, however, the general weakness of the institution combined with the rhetoric of the Revolution did bring about the abolition of slavery.

The war had the impact of encouraging the formation of societies to manumit slaves. The Quakers were the first to organize such societies. But by the end of the war, every state from Massachusetts to Virginia had societies that could be

Massachusetts see ibid., vol. III, pp. 263-4 and Martin's speech to the Maryland legislature is in vol. III, pp. 172-4.


called broadly antislavery, though they advocated means often as diverse as proposals to deport blacks to calls for immediate emancipation. These societies were active in the Revolutionary period and their impact was felt all over the North. Vermont was the first to abolish slavery in 1777. In 1780, Pennsylvania undertook a plan for the gradual abolition of slavery. In 1793, the courts of Massachusetts freed slaves of that state declaring that under the state constitution which declared "all men are born free and equal," slavery could not be countenanced. In 1784 Connecticut and Rhode Island passed acts providing for the gradual abolition of slavery. In the following year, New York and New Jersey passed emancipation acts but effective legislation was passed only by 1799 in New York and 1804 in New Jersey.

Slavery did not end in the North because it was unprofitable. Indeed Zilversmit has shown that slaves were economically useful and their labour profitable till the period slavery was actually abolished in those states. Nevertheless, it is true that slave-labour became less central to the changing economic structure of the North. This factor combined with the work of the black and white advocates of freedom, resulted in a steady abolitionist pressure on Northern state legislatures. Significantly most of the state emancipation or gradual emancipation laws cited the language of the Declaration of Independence in phrasing their acts.

31 See Zilversmit, n. 2, pp. 130-1, 115, 123, 121, 180, 192-3.

32 Ibid., vii-viii, 34, 45-6, 49, 52-53, 225.
The Revolution sparked off a criticism of slavery all over the South as well. However, the strongest challenge to slavery was mounted in the Upper South. There were strong economic reasons for the support visible to the societies favouring emancipation or manumission. Tobacco had been the staple crop of the Upper South, but it required intensive care and depleted the land. The newly settled Western lands soon began to compete effectively with these regions and drove the price of tobacco down. Accompanying this was the impact of the war itself, which promoted the growth of light industries and urbanization. Economic changes in the region and the winds of freedom in the North, created doubts about the viability of slavery in the Upper South which drove the prices of slaves down. This can be seen in the attitudes of the Virginians like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry described above.

These factors, however, did not result in anything but increased manumissions of slaves. In 1785-88, the Maryland and Delaware legislatures debated plans for the gradual abolition of slavery but nothing came out of them. While the Northern states passed measures that led to the freedom of blacks, legislatures in the Upper South were content to pass acts permitting slave-owners to manumit their slaves, if they so chose.

The Lower South was unaffected by the winds of freedom.


34 Zilversmit, n. 2, p. 155 and Berlin n. 33, pp. 29-30.
There was no call for even gradual abolition in the states of this region. Given the fact that even the liberal leadership of the Upper South, men like Jefferson and Washington, were not really committed to any form of emancipation, it was no surprise that there was no antislavery impulse in the Deep South. Even the move towards manumissions did not make any significant impact in these states.

The years of the Revolution however saw a remarkable increase in the number of free blacks in the slave states. In the Upper South this was largely due to the liberalization of the manumission laws. In the Lower South, however, it was due to a number of blacks of mixed ancestry who fled the island of Santo Domingo after the outbreak of the black revolt led by Touissant L'Ouverture, as well as free blacks who migrated from the West Indies. Between 1755 and 1790, the percentage of increase of the free blacks in the Upper South was 88.5 per cent and in the Lower South, 99.5 per cent. However, these figures do not convey the whole picture. The proportion of blacks free in the Upper South was, in 1790 when the Revolutionary impulse reached its peak, 5.5 per cent in the Upper South and 1.6 per cent in the Lower South.

The antislavery impulse in areas where slave labour was extensively used was, it is clear, extremely weak. When the Revolutionary leadership did not provide it, it was not likely


36 These figures are from Tables constructed by Ira Berlin, Ibid., pp. 46-47.
to emerge from elsewhere. Even the strongest impulse, that of ending the slave trade, petered out soon. W.E.B. DuBois has shown that in the very years which shaped the American Republic, there was an upsurge in the slave trade, both external and domestic.

DuBois has also pointed out that the steps taken to end slavery and slave-trade, especially in the North, served "to blind the nation as to the strong hold slavery still had on the country." Robert McColely has shown that in the state of Virginia, slavery was a healthy institution in the years of the Revolution. The years of slavery's supposed decline, were, in fact, the years of its greatest expansion. Berlin indicates that this was due to the fact that just about this time, the plantation of cotton was gaining in importance. Further, the expansion of slavery into new areas westwards, stimulated a heavy demand for slaves. The rising profitability of slavery was the death-knell of the antislavery impulse of the Revolutionary period, especially in the South.

The myth of the supposed decline of slavery, especially in the Revolutionary and the immediate post-Revolutionary period blinded many public figures and historians to the fact that the Founding Fathers gave little indication of any desire to extend


38 Ibid., p. 52; Robert "McColey, Slavery in Jeffersonian Virginia (Urbana, Ill., 1964), pp. 5, 21, 71; see also Berlin, n. 33, pp. 28-29.
the fruits of their revolution to the black Americans. This was indicated amply by their personal attitudes as well as the fact that the institutional framework of the new Republic had incorporated the slave system into the new nation.

Slavery Triumphant: The Emergence of "King" Cotton

We have pointed out the very limited impact of the Revolution on the great mass of blacks in the United States. By the opening of the new century several Southern states went back even on the limited measures they had undertaken to alleviate slavery. In the North, freedom for the blacks became the rule and the sectional identity of the nation divided into slave and free states began to take shape. The Westward march of slavery into the Gulf region was encouraged by the increasing importance of the cotton fibre both in the rising industrial areas of the North-east and England. Between 1800 and 1821, the new states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and Missouri were created where slaves were the primary mode of labour. Into these states were sent thousands of black slaves from the older slave-holding regions. This domestic slave-trade was augmented by the persistence of the African slave-trade, illegal since 1808.

In the ensuing decades, the institution of slavery grew by leaps and bounds. Firstly, it expanded its geographical area. Secondly, the number of slaves increased from some 700,000 in 1790 to 2,000,000 in 1830 and 3,000,000 by 1850. Thirdly, the

39 Franklin, n. 1, pp. 166-84.
output of cotton increased from 3,000 bales in 1790 to 5,387,000 bales annually in 1860. This was reflected in the price of prime field-hands. In the early years of the Republic, the prices of prime field-hands varied from $350 and $500, but on the eve of the Civil War they ranged between $1,000 and $1,500.

The growth of slavery was accompanied by the virtual extinguishment of the antislavery movement in the South. All over the South new legislation was enacted to strengthen the already harsh laws governing the slaves. In word and letter, these statutes made little pretense of being anything but harsh and undemocratic. In fact, the political leadership of the country, too, did not exhibit any particular concern at the spectacular growth of the institution.

The period of the Presidency of Andrew Jackson, the years between 1828 and 1836 is regarded as a major breakthrough for American democracy. The period has been referred to as a triumph for the common man in America. As far as slavery was concerned, Jacksonian democracy did not leave much impact.

Jackson's name became linked with black history by his use of black troops against the British in the famous Battle of New Orleans in 1812. After the battle, Jackson issued a formal proclamation to the blacks noting that "the American people would applaud your valor." His recognition of black valor was, however, reflected neither in the attitude of the American people

41 Ibid., Franklin, pp. 188-9.
nor in that of Jackson himself when he became the President in 1828.

Jackson himself was a slave-holder. Like Washington and Jefferson, Jackson was reputed to be a good slave-master. He was, however, motivated like those good people by a desire to preserve his property. He did not hesitate in having his slaves whipped for "insubordination". His attitude towards his hapless bondsmen was brought out by his will. He left most of his slaves to his son, but like bits of property, he parcelled out some unfortunate blacks as gifts to various relatives.

The Jackson Administration however did not embark on any strong defense of slavery. Jackson himself indicated this when he chose to ignore a letter by Benjamin Lundy, the Quaker abolitionist, in 1823. Lundy had hoped to get a commitment for the gradual abolition of slavery from Jackson. Nevertheless, as President he was quick to condemn the abolitionists for instigating slaves to revolt. However, he also condemned any recourse to "mob law" against the abolitionists. John M. McFaul has pointed out that while slavery was itself not a major issue in the Jacksonian period, the Jackson Administration had a clearly pro-slavery bias.


43 See for example A. Jackson to Andrew J. Hitchings, 3 August 1840, ibid., vol. VI, p. 69; A. Jackson to A.J. Donelson, 3 July 1821, vol. III, p. 87; see Jackson's Will in vol. VI, pp. 221-2.

44 Ibid., Benjamin Lundy to A. Jackson, 4 September 1823, (footnote contd.)
The strengthening of the institution of slavery in the South was accompanied by an equally strong ideological thrust. One of the most important thinkers of the Deep South was John C. Calhoun. Spanning the post-Jefferson era, to the eve of the Civil War decade, Calhoun transformed Jefferson's concept of the United States as an agrarian democracy into a model of a Greek republic complete with helots. As he put it in 1838:

Many in the south once believed that it [slavery] was a moral and political evil. That folly and delusion are gone. We see it now in its true light, and regard it as the most safe stable for free institutions in the world. (45)

Calhoun put forward the Southern society based on slave labour as being superior to that of the North with its incipient contradiction between capital and labour. Calhoun's aggressive assertions of the greatness of slave-owning societies became the driving force of the ideological war between the North and the South. Calhoun asserted that the only possible relation between the black and the white race was one of servitude of blacks. His lesson from world history was that "there never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the

---

community did not...live on the labor of the other." Looking at the harsh exploitation of wage labour in the North and also at the upsurge of the nascent labour movement, Calhoun proudly declared that slavery was "the most solid and durable foundation on which to rear free and stable political institutions." As for the enslavement of only blacks, he put forward the racial argument that given inherent racial and intellectual differences "instead of an evil slavery was a good -- a positive good."

Calhoun's reactionary vision of the nature of American civilization was, in the subsequent decades, the driving force of pro-slavery intellectuals and political leaders. It led, for the first time in American history, to the development and systematization of the principles of the natural inequality of man. In the North, following the impulse of the capitalist development, a liberal ideology became visible. This manifested itself in a general upsurge of a reform impulse. This upsurge, though directed towards perfectionism in all aspects of American society, morals, education, politics and religion, came mainly to focus on slavery. The rise of Garrisonian abolition was accompanied by an upsurge of antislavery propaganda in the North through the press, the pulpit and in the form of petitions to Congress.

The Natural Inequality of Man

The most remarkable aspect of natural science in the eighteenth century was its refusal to commit itself to any belief in the natural superiority or inferiority of races. This can be attributed to the prevailing Enlightenment philosophy as well as to the fact that this science, just emerging, was content to identify and classify natural phenomena. Carl von Linnaeus, the great Swedish naturalist, preeminent in the eighteenth century, did classify races into four types but refrained from proposing any hierarchy of races. Johann Frederick von Blumenbach and George Louis Leclerc Buffon, both authoritative natural scientists of the period, also developed their own categorizations. Their principal argument was that the differences visible in the various human beings arose from climatic and environmental factors rather than from innate differences. Both Buffon and Blumenbach were stern critics of the enslavement of blacks on the grounds that they belonged to an inferior race.

Though the view of these naturalists was predominant in Europe at this time, dissenting views on the nature of man had already begun to appear. One of the first European thinkers to reject the basic equality of all human races was Voltaire.

Though Voltaire did not give any detailed attention to the subject of race, his essays were quite influential. He was followed in his view by Lord Kames, a Scottish jurist. Kames rejected the theory that the environment was responsible for the discernible differences in the races of man. An English physician, Dr. Charles White, is credited with the first "scientific" formulation of the theory that human races belonged to different species which originated separately and not from a single Creation. White believed that all natural beings were linked up in an hierarchical chain. In this chain, the highest station was occupied by the white man; the black man, he argued, occupied an intermediate position between the white man and the ape. Not only were there vital differences in the anatomy of the black and white men, but also intellectual and emotional ones. Gossett has concluded, however, that the idea of the multiple origins of man or polygenesis was not generally accepted in the eighteenth century though both Kames and White were widely quoted by pro-slavery racial tracts in the nineteenth century.

The end of the age of Enlightenment saw the steady advance of the white men across the globe. As the white man with his "superior" culture began to overwhelm the non-white nations, the idea of the superiority of the white race began to gather strength. Thus, James Cowles Prichard, one of the most influential naturalists of the early nineteenth century, though a monogenist, came to see in the changing racial types a

50 Gossett, n. 49, pp. 45-51.
reflection of the movement of various races from primitive savagery to civilization. Prichard did not give much credence to the idea that climate alone was the factor responsible for racial differences. He put forward the idea that the societies of the savage type were invariably dark in colour and by a process of civilization, became whiter. Thus, the idea of polygenesis was not necessary for proving the inferiority of the black race. Though a general trend towards lowering the status of the non-white races began to take shape in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century, the use of the theory of polygenesis receded.

Intellectual currents in the United States generally followed the prevailing ones in Europe in this period. Thus, the most influential American scientist of the early nineteenth century, the Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith accepted the belief in the common origin of all human races. Smith, professor of moral philosophy at the College of New Jersey (later to become Princeton University), elaborated his views in his Essay on the Causes and Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. He believed that climate and not any diverse origins of the human races, was primarily responsible for the obvious racial differences. As an environmentalist, Smith carried his theory to the logical conclusion that a change in the environment could change the racial traits.

51 Ibid., pp. 54-56.
52 Samuel Stanhope Smith, An Essay on the Causes and Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. (footnote contd.)
While polygenist ideas died down in Europe, they had a remarkable resurgence in the United States. More so than any other white nation, the United States confronted two diverse races in close proximity—the American Indian whose land they sought, and the black whose labour they exploited. Writers have remarked that in this phase American scientific thought was clearly out of step with that of Europe. We would like to contend that the reasons for this were precisely the necessity arising out of the relation of the white Americans with the two non-white races. The main aim of the school of thought that came to be predominant in the antebellum decades—the American School of ethnologists—was directed towards proving the superiority of the white races and the inferiority of the non-white races. The method they used was towards developing the theory of polygenesis. If humans could be proved to have originated from diverse sources and periods of history, it would be easy, then, to show that the non-white races, the American Indians and the blacks, belonged to a distinct natural species, not quite the same as the white man. This is what American natural science set out to do in the antebellum decades.

American Science in the Antebellum Decades

Within the space of three decades, the influence of the Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith was overwhelmed by that of the

To which are added strictures on Lord Kaima [!] discourse, on the original diversity of mankind (Philadelphia: Robert Aitken, 1787), pp. 13, 91-93, 109.
American school of ethnologists. The leader of this school was Dr. Samuel George Horton of Philadelphia. Horton's work on the differentiation of races by measuring their cranial capacity was fundamental to antebellum arguments on the inferiority of the black based on polygenesis. It has been generally accepted that Dr. Horton, one of the pre-eminent American naturalists of the period, was by no means a pro-slavery apologist: his work commanded respect in all the circles of the scientific community. Nevertheless, this cannot be said of Dr. Horton's close collaborators, the Egyptologist George R. Gliddon and the prominent Mobile, Ala., physician, Josiah Clark Nott, who were out-and-out pro-slavery men. The work of Horton, the scientist, was publicised by these two to a point that Horton's subjective lack of bias vis-a-vis the black race, meant little.

Beginning as a geologist, Horton gathered one of the largest collections of human crania in the United States. His collection of crania of the American Indians was extensive and supplemented with those of the other races. With the help of George R. Gliddon, he procured several specimens from Egypt as well. Using the phrenological techniques then in vogue, along with innovations of his own, Horton made exhaustive measurements of the shapes and inner capacities of the crania. From this research he deduced that there existed fundamental distinctions in the size and inner capacity of the crania of the different

races. Morton's *Crania Americana*, published in 1839, showed that the Caucasian race possessed the crania with the largest capacity followed by the Mongolian, the Malay, and the Ethiopian (black) races. The American Indian race, on the basis of Morton's measurements, as well as by his observations on the aspects of the race's language, arts, religion and mode of government, was indicated as a distinct species from the other races. Appended to Morton's book was an essay by George Combe, an eminent English phrenologist. Combe indicated that the capacity of the skull was linked to intellectual capacity, and thus national character. On one hand, Morton accepted this belief on the other, he set about making his own refinements.

For one thing, Morton determined that climate was a marginal factor in the development of races. Intellect, colour, and other racial traits, according to Morton, were primeval attributes of races. This was a direct refutation of earlier American views on the racial differences among men. Nevertheless, at this point, Morton did not put forward polygenosis as a distinct theory. While the polygenic implications of this theory were obvious, some loopholes remained. Morton bided his time. In the meantime, George R. Gliddon, the man who had supplied Morton with the Egyptian skulls returned to America and became a lecturer on Egyptology. With the help of Gliddon, Morton launched his new venture in the direction of Egyptology.

---

Orton's next book, *Crania Aegyptiaca* published in 1844 sought to show that the ancient Egyptians were neither Caucasians or Ethiopians but a blend of the two along with other races like the Semitics, and the Austral-Egyptians. Orton also declared that while slavery did exist in ancient Egypt, the slaves had been black men.

The next phase of Orton's work was linked to that of Josiah C. Nott. Nott, a prominent and respected physician of Mobile, Ala., basing his belief on his extensive experience as a physician, declared that whenever there was an intermixing of the races, there was a tendency towards the offspring of such unions being sterile. Without even purporting to use contemporary science, Nott asserted that this observation, indicated that the blacks and the whites belonged to distinct species. In the well-known case of animals, too, such a phenomenon existed as the mule, which was a sterile offspring of a horse and an ass.

The scientific argument to back Nott's ideas was provided by Dr. Orton. This was the capstone of the theory of polygenesis as propounded by the American School. Orton, the serious scientist that he was, could not but fail to have noticed that in the case of the inter-breeding of blacks and the whites, there was, in fact, no general sterility. Orton came up with an ingenious, though somewhat implausible argument, that the "domesticity" of the two human species concerned prevented this

55 Stanton, n. 53, pp. 45-51.
56 Ibid., pp. 24, 27-50.
phenomena, visible in animal species. He concluded that given this fact, "hybridity ceases to be a test of specific affiliation." In short that this phenomena, the sterility of interbred offspring, could not be applied to human beings.

It was left to Louis Agassiz, the great zoologist, and the most famous naturalist of the pre-Tertiary era, to put the ultimate stamp of respectability to the polygenic origins theory. When Agassiz arrived in the United States in 1846, he was already accepted as one of the leading zoologists of the world. Till his arrival in the United States, Agassiz did not accept the hierarchical differentiation of man into various species. He accepted the fact that the prevalence of man all over the globe went against his zoological researches which indicated that flora and fauna of various species were limited to specific geographical areas. Man, he maintained was the last and greatest link in the chain of Creation and did not follow the rules laid down for lower forms of life.

In the United States, Agassiz confronted a different type


of human being, the black man, for probably the first time in his life. Agassiz, the naturalist, was appalled. In a letter to his mother he gave a vivid account of his first confrontation with the blacks. He described the blacks as having large limbs, thick lips, black colour and heads covered with wool instead of hair. Agassiz found the blacks utterly loathsome and saw in their racial presence a great danger to the United States.

Agassiz was impressed by Morton, both as a man and scientist. Morton's collection of crania fascinated the great scientist, and Morton's ideas on race, after his own initial impression of blacks, made him a quick convert to the polygenic theory on the origins of man. In an article on "The Diversity of the Origin of the Human Races," he posited the black as distinct species. Using the researches of the American School, Agassiz came to stand four-square behind the belief that the "unity of species does not involve...unity of origin."

In the antebellum decades, American natural science came to accept the natural inequality of man. Within the United States there was not visible any refutation of the ideas of Morton and Agassiz. There were several critiques of the ideas.

---

61 Stanton, n. 49, pp. 102-4.
of polygenesis but the propounders of these views did so from varying motives and never had the prestige of a Huxley or an Agassiz.

One of the strongest attacks on the theory of polygenic origins came from the Rev. John Bachman, a Lutheran minister. Bachman, himself a slave-holder, was a well known naturalist from Charleston, South Carolina. His critique, thus, was not from the point of view of proving black-white equality but towards dismissing the theory of polygenesis for its anti-clerical overtones. Bachman criticized the ideas of the American School for being scientifically untenable. His explanation for the seeming diversity of races rested on the older ideas of environmental determinism. He argued that all men had descended from the same original species but over time, the Caucasian had improved while the black had degenerated. While climate and environment had indeed given rise to the black race, a reversal of the process was no longer possible as was observed from the blacks in the United States. Varieties had, over time, become permanent types. This argument was no "advance" in contemporary scientific thought and was actually another argument for proving black inferiority but without challenging the Biblical belief of one Creation. There were several Southerners who supported Bachman's views especially as they did not feel entirely comfortable with the anti-clerical pretensions of the American School.

The American School's ideas had a predictably warm reception in certain circles of the South however. Gliddon was overwhelmed when Calhoun himself, as Secretary of State in the Tyler Administration in 1844, sought his advice on ethnological theory to counter British and French objections to the annexation of Texas. Gliddon referred him to Morton who sent him copies of *Crana Americana* and *Crana Aegyptiaca*. Gliddon suggested that these books along with his own work proved conclusively that the African race was inferior to the white and doomed to perpetual servitude.

The ideas of the polygenists were popularized by a number of proslavery propagandists like John H. Van Evrie, and Samuel Cartwright. Cartwright's singular concern was to prove the compatibility of the Bible with slavery. Cartwright argued the case of polygenosis from the point of view of "Biblical truth." He "proved" that the blacks belonged to a different species from humans by claiming that the blacks came into being before the creation of Adam and Eve, and as such, they were part of the natural world over which the Biblical ancestors were given domain by God.

---

64 Ibid., Stanton, n. 49, pp. 52, 61-62.

One of the early critics of the theory of polygenesis was the greatest of the Southern proslavery propagandists, George Fitzhugh. Initially, Fitzhugh criticized the polygenic origins theory noting that it was against the Scriptures. He also felt that placing the black outside the pale of humanity would damage the concept of paternalism which was central to the belief of the "positive good" view of slavery. The heightened debate in the 1850s however, converted Fitzhugh. In a review article of a book of Van Evrie in 1861, Fitzhugh declared that the former had conclusively proved "that the negro is of a different species, physically, from the white man."

If Calhoun was the political leader of the great offensive to expand the geographical limits of slavery, Fitzhugh was to emerge as its leading theoretician. Writing after the great revolutions that had convulsed Europe in 1848, Fitzhugh declared that they offered the "conclusive proof that liberty and equality have not conduced to enhance the comfort or the happiness of the people." In his view, the great democratic upsurge of the workers and peasantry was against the genuine interests of the poor. As a matter of fact, Fitzhugh declared, "Pauperism and crime advance...with liberty and equality." The conclusion was, according to Fitzhugh, that slavery as a system was far in advance of the democratic-capitalist framework as it

66 George Fitzhugh, Sociology for the South or, the Failure of Free Society (Richmond, Va., A. Forris, 1854), p. 95; see also George Fitzhugh, "The Black and White Races of Men," cited in Frederickson, n. 65, pp. 69-70.

67 Ibid., Fitzhugh, pp. 227-29, 235.
prevented the rampant exploitation of the poor by its paternalistic outlook. Fitzhugh was nothing if not consistent: his rigorous theoretical formulation led him to declare that slavery was an advance on feudalism! Just at the time when historians and political thinkers were evolving a self-conscious view of human history progressing from the tribal society to primitive slave-societies and feudalism towards industrial advance under capitalism, the Southern ideologues were providing the most sophisticated argument for the iniquitous institution of slavery.

Fitzhugh developed these arguments in his subsequent book, Cannibals All! or, Slaves Without Masters. Fitzhugh now carried his arguments regarding the superiority of slavery over democratic capitalism to yet another extreme, though not to an illogical conclusion. Fitzhugh now declared that a universal system of slavery would be a great boon to civilization. This was a qualitative leap in the Southern theoretical formulations. Here, by implication if not directly, Fitzhugh argued that the condition of the poor and the working people, regardless of their race, would be best protected and advanced by slavery.

George J. Frederickson has pointed out that while no Southern politician reached this extremity of views, Fitzhugh's beliefs represented the "first development of a Southern world view." This view arising out of the development of slavery in

---

a democratic capitalist framework, was firmly reactionary. In Fitzhugh's opinion, the "free labor" doctrine advanced by the Northern elements who eventually banded together to form the Republican Party, was a justification for socialist ideas. In fact, he argued, socialism and not abolition was the true goal of Northern Republican politicians!

Not all proslavery apologists lived in the South. One of the ablest proslavery propagandists, John H. Van Evrie, referred to earlier, was a resident of New York. His book on Negroes and Negro "Slavery" appeared originally in pamphlet form in 1853. It was published as a book in 1861 and reprinted in 1863.

Van Evrie declared that all the conceptions of blacks as humans were fallacious and were, in fact, originated by the Europeans and slavishly accepted by the Americans. Van Evrie was no scientist and his achievement was to popularize the view of the polygenic origins of man. He declared that in the chain of creation of the human races, the African had been created first and the Caucasian, the most perfect and highest species was created last. Though Van Evrie's phobia of blacks was scarcely concealed, it did not lead him to any original theoretical formulations as in the case of Fitzhugh. On the other hand he came out with an aggressive defense of white equality. To that extent, Van Evrie was the archetypal white supremacist of the North. Van Evrie's attack on Northern

69 Fitzhugh, ibid., pp. 252-6; and Frederickson, n. 65, pp. 68-69.
capitalists "who produce nothing but enjoy everything" was actually a projection of the "free labor" doctrine which we shall discuss later.

There was a spate of writings on the "positive good" argument for slavery in the 1850s. This was a logical culmination of the trend of proslavery thought in the 1840s. There were Southern intellectuals like Albert T. Bledsoe, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Virginia, who questioned the cherished concept of "inalienable" rights of men and insisted that slavery was the state best fitted for blacks. The Rev. William G. Brownlow carried the battle north and undertook to debate an obscure abolitionist editor in Philadelphia on the question as to whether slavery ought to be perpetuated. Brownlow, the editor of a Tennessee paper, the Knoxville Whig, more than held his own against the Rev. Abram Pryne, who edited an obscure antislavery newspaper, the Central Reformer in McGrawville, N.Y. Brownlow asserted that "slavery was established for the benefit of that class of the human family who had not the capacity to provide for their wants—and of this class are the entire African race...." The blacks had forfeited all rights of freedom by refusing to develop their homeland in Africa. In America, Brownlow declared, it was the duty of the whites to prevent their relapse to "barbarism" by keeping them in perpetual

bondage.

The beliefs of Southern clergymen that the black was an inferior species and that justification was provided by the Scriptures to keep him in slavery were even accepted by some Northern clergymen. Thus Nehemiah Adams, a Boston ecclesiastic who had no proslavery leanings, after a tour of the South in 1854, came to conclude that the blacks were indeed an inferior grade of human beings. He argued that slavery was God's plan for using Southerners "as the chief instrument" to protect blacks from the vicissitudes of life.

Southern newspapers publicised many of these ideas and also published stories on the dismal conditions of the Northern workers and free blacks. Several Southern states went a step further in fostering the "positive good" argument. This was in the form of passing laws to permit Southern free blacks to return to slavery voluntarily. Not many blacks bought this argument however. The few cases of blacks returning to slavery trumpeted by the Southern press referred to some old and indigent blacks. By this time, manumission was no longer accepted as a humanitarian gesture in the South. It was regarded as


72 Nehemiah Adams, A South-side View of Slavery; or, Three Months at the South in 1854 (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1855), pp. 119-22, 209-10.
outright sedition, an unhealthy encouragement to the slave population. In the 1850s, demands for the expulsion of the free blacks in the South came up repeatedly and more orthodox proponents of the "positive good" argument even suggested the reenslavement of all free blacks. In the legislatures of Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Missouri there was even debate on proposals to reenslave free blacks. Arkansas had the distinction of passing a law that called for the enslavement of all free blacks who chose to remain in that state after 1 January 1860. On the eve of the war, Missouri and Florida followed the example of Arkansas. In Mississippi and Tennessee, such legislation was on the verge of being approved before the outbreak of the Civil War. Kentucky, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana gave indication of their following suit. In Maryland the debate on expulsion measures proved unfruitful and a referendum was proposed to decide on the issue. In Virginia and North Carolina, expulsion measures were brought up but failed in their respective state legislatures.

Southern thought overwhelmed by slavery remained untouched by the increasing democratization of the North, albeit a democratization of white polity only. While Northern racial thought was hardly any less hostile to the blacks, the linking up the institution of slavery with the alleged inferiority of

73 Berlin, n. 33, pp. 366-7, 370-5. David Donald has pointed out that by the 1850s there was virtually no dissent to the torrent of proslavery writings pouring out of the South. David Donald, "The Proslavery Argument Revisited," Journal of Southern History (New Orleans), vol. 37, no. 1, February 1971, pp. 8-9.
the blacks became the vital divide for the two sections. Men like Morton and Agassiz, upon whose work a pseudo-scientific critique of the black man developed, were not Southerners much less proslavery. They were part of a national scientific community. Similarly, Van Evrie, and Hinton R. Helper, whose ideas we will discuss later, were Northerners with a large and receptive audience in that section.

Contemporary Historians and the Shaping of the Racial Idea

We have just outlined some of the scientific and intellectual bases of anti-black attitudes prevalent in the United States, especially the South. There was however, yet another aspect of racism in antebellum America. This derived from the work of historians in America at that period. Most of the characters were not consciously committed to proving that the blacks were an inferior order of being, nevertheless, the trend in American historiographical thought which saw American achievements in terms of the qualities of the white race, undoubtedly contributed to strengthen the racism propagated by cruder sources. As a matter of fact, this school of history which celebrated the racial values of the white race sought to play down or even ignore the contribution of the non-white races, thus providing a rationale for the domination of the white race through the globe. Prominent among the historians were George Bancroft, William H. Prescott, John L. Motely, and Francis Parkman. Francis Lieber, a political theorist, too contributed to the racial ethos.
The researches of Norton and others in the field of natural history were reflected in the field of history by a growing reliance of historians on race to provide explanations for the growth of civilized societies and their institutions. The "Teutonic Origins" theory purporting to provide explanations of the development of representative democracy, judicial systems and other institutions of the Western world made its appearance at this time but gained its maturity in the postbellum decades. The stress on race to explain historical achievements served in a negative manner to highlight the backwardness of the blacks. Though none of the well-known historians in America took an avowedly anti-black stand, their celebration of their racial forbears inevitably contributed to the growing racist climate in the United States.

John Lothrop Motley in his widely read *Rise of the Dutch Republic* brought out this aspect of racial thought. Though he depicted the Dutch struggle against Spain in the seventeenth century in racial terms, he insisted that it was "a portion of the records of the Anglo-Saxon race—essentially the same, whether in Friesland, England, or Massachusetts."

George Bancroft, the pre-eminent American historian of the period exhibited a similar bias. In an early essay by him on the "Doctrines of Temperaments," he accepted the prevailing theories of environmental determinism. While accepting the essential unity of races, Bancroft asserted that differences arose out of climatic and environmental differences. He went

---

74 Cited in Gossett, n. 49, pp. 89-90.
on to outline the different types of "temperaments" and allotted them their racial slots.

By 1860, however, a mature Bancroft possessed a much wider vision of human society that saw historical phenomena as a progressive evolution of human society. Speaking to the New York Historical Society in 1854, Bancroft, without directly referring to slavery declared:

...as a consequence of the tendency of the human race towards unity and universality the organization of society must more and more conform to the principles of FREEDOM. (76)

Nevertheless, as Harvey Wish has pointed out, there is in Bancroft's writings, an underlying admiration for the Teutonic "love of personal independence." Bancroft saw in the early settlement of America the operation of the "Anglo-Saxon mind, in its serenist nationality, neither distorted by fanaticism nor subdued by superstition...fondly cherishing the active instinct for personal freedom, secure possession, and legislative power...."

Bancroft's influence on historical writing in the United States was immense. However, several writers have felt that Bancroft's vision of a "self-generated" movement of history


towards a progressive unfolding of a democratic civilization and America's special role in it, tended to imbue many American historians with a world-view which was tinged with a degree of chauvinism. Though Bancroft did not espouse Anglo-Saxonism in his writings, he did stress the immense and unsurpassed contribution of England in the economic, political and cultural development of the United States.

There were however, other contemporary historians who stressed racial ideas more strongly. In his *Conquest of Peru*, William Hickling Prescott brought out the "cruel and avaricious" Spanish impact on America as against the influence of the Anglo-Saxons. With the Anglo-Saxon, declared Prescott, the "principle of action" was not greed or a desire to convert the natives to Christianity "but independence—independence, religious and political."

One of the most noted political theorists of the period was even more at ease in ascribing American achievements to racial factors. In a tract on civil liberty and government, Lieber traced American institutions and practices to European racial history of Anglo-Saxons and Celts. Referring to blacks, he pointed out that even the "stanchest abolitionist did not advocate political equality of blacks and whites."

---


Francis Parkman was essentially a conservative of the old mold. For him all history of the world was a history of the "leading minds". To this end he even opposed universal suffrage. Parkman's work centered around the British and the French in North America. Parkman attributed the British victory over the French to their peculiar racial traits. He noted:

The Germanic race, and especially the Anglo-Saxon branch of it is peculiarly masculine, and, therefore peculiarly fitted for self-government... The French who were of Celtic stock were too prone to abstractions and generalizations. (81)

The impact of this vision of human history could not but contribute to the overall adverse racial bias against the blacks. If conquest and authority depended on racial traits, the inescapable logic was that the conquered and the ruled were so due to their racial predilections.

Antislavery Racism

The onslaught of racial thought whether directed against the black or in celebration of the white, did not leave those whites untouched who, for years had advocated the cause of the blacks with courage and persistence. Given the almost universal prevalence of racial explanations for intellectual, economic and political achievement, it would have been indeed remarkable if some abolitionists had not succumbed to similar explanations. Nevertheless, most abolitionist thought on race was not entirely

81 Cited in Gossett, n. 49, p. 96; see also Charles Haight Farnham, A Life of Francis Parkman (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1901), pp. 282-7; Harvey Wish has pointed to the influence of Parkman's Anglo-Saxonism on Theodore Roosevelt, see Wish, n. 77, pp. 99, 105-7.
unfavourable to the black. Many northern antislaverymen sought to provide arguments for the uplift of the blacks by resorting to what Frederickson has termed romantic racialism.

An early and influential antislavery divine, the Rev. William Ellery Channing gave the first indication of the Northern response to the yet-to-mature Southern critique of the blacks. Discoursing on slavery in 1835, he declared:

I know that this doctrine of monogenesis so venerable in the eyes of our fathers has lately been denied.... It is freely granted that there are innumerable diversities among men; but be it remembered, they are ordained to bind men together and not subdue one to the other.... (32)

Channing’s gentle rejoinder on race may have helped to develop a more receptive attitude towards several Northern intellectuals. Nevertheless, in the succeeding decades, a distinct and often unique response characterized the attitudes of antislaverymen in the North.

The romantic racial perception of the blacks tended to present the blacks in a benign but, nevertheless, in an essentially derogatory manner. As Gilbert Haven expressed it 1854, "The African has been despised and rejected... [because] of a submissive, peaceful, religious spirit.... His elements are needed to make a perfect man...." This was, given the context


83 Gilbert Haven, National Sermons: Sermons, Speeches and Letters on Slavery and its War from the Passage of the (footnote contd.)
of the times, a positive view of the blacks but one which nevertheless depicted the blacks as different.

Similar beliefs were accepted by Lydia Maria Child, the influential editor of the organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the National Anti-Slavery Standard, who declared that "the races of mankind are different, spiritually as well as physically." Nevertheless as she indicated in her well-known Appeal in Favor of the Class of Americans Called Africans, these differences arose out of circumstances and not innate differences.

Orville Dewey posed the romantic racial viewpoint when he imputed the obvious racial differences between the races to their lack of "rough, fierce Northern \(\text{white}\) energies... \(\text{compared}\) to the singularly childlike, affectionate, docile and patient \(\text{nature of the blacks}\)...." Dewey, like other romantic racialists viewed the blacks in sympathetic light and criticized the characterization of blacks as "indolent," "reckless," and happy in the state of slavery. He declared:

\[
\text{What is meant, I pray, by this constant reiterated charge of inferiority? If only that he } \text{the black} \text{is uncivilized, uncultivated... } \text{? it is all very intelligible and very true.... But surely it is not meant to be denied that their faculties are human faculties.}
\]

---

84 Cited in Frederickson, n. 65, p. 107; see also Lydia Maria Child, An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans (Boston: Allan & Tricknor, 1833).

85 Cited in Frederickson, n. 65, p. 102.
53

That is to say, reason and imagination and affection and conscience are in them as in us. (86)

Such viewpoints often led their proponents to suggest that an amalgamation of the traits of various races, if not the physical amalgamation of the races was a desirable end. We have already referred to Gilbert Haven's belief that the black man's traits were vital for the evolution of "a perfect man." In 1854, Haven declared that the blacks as God's chosen race would purge the Anglo-Saxon race of its "worldliness, selfishness and irreligion."

A major spokesman for the idea of racial amalgamation was Moncure Daniel Conway who believed that the "simple goodness, kindliness, and affectionateness" of the black race would be an invaluable contribution to any advance of civilization.

Some of the most unique ideas on race and racial destinies were presented by the great Unitarian minister, Theodore Parker. In 1851, Parker took issue with Francis Parkman for his harsh condemnation of the American Indian in his famous work, The Conspiracy of Pontiac. He noted that the treachery which Parkman had attributed to the Indians was not a unique characteristic of them "but generic of all races in a low state of development." He wanted Parkman to censure the whites for

87 Ibid., p. 149.
introducing liquor to the Indian and for their ill-conduct towards the Indian women. He declared that "the Teutonic Race...is naturally exclusive - loves to exterminate the neighboring tribes...the Celts & Greco-Italian stock assimilate with other tribes. The history of America shows the same thing in the conduct of the English & French toward the Indians." 89

Parker frequently bemoaned the "ethnologic idiosyncrasy" of the Anglo-Saxon race reflected in their racial instinct to conquer, kill and exterminate. Nevertheless, he found in their love of liberty, capacity of organization and indomitable will, "the best specimen of mankind which has attained great power in the world." 90

However, Parker's hatred for slavery was beyond question. Parker was a stern critic of those who declared that blacks were biologically inferior to whites. He criticized Agassiz for declaring that blacks were a lower form of life than humans. He pointed out, "the upright form, the power of speech, the religious faculty, permanence of affection, and self-denial" were enough to prove the fact that blacks were human. 91

Parker's vision of the great destiny of the Anglo-Saxon


90 Cited in Frederickson, n. 65, p. 100.

91 National Anti-Slavery Standard, 27 May 1854.
race, however, did not lead him to the position of the other Northern racists who sought to clear the United States of all the non-white races. Starting from the assumption that the white race was the only one to have attained civilization, Parker declared that it was the destiny of America "to bring diverse races into closest contact." Thus to mix "60,000-80,000 Mongolian Chinese in California...400,000 American Indians...4,500,000 Africans and 26,000,000 Caucasians" would be the great experiment of democracy in America. While he felt, however, that the Indian would be eliminated "with the forest," the black with his docility and "affectional instinct" would "temper the Anglo-Saxon blood to furnish a new composite tribe, far better... than the old."

Few whites disagreed with Parker's celebration of Anglo-Saxon racial virtues. Blacks were offended by his constant assertion of Anglo-Saxon virtues, but the National Anti-Slavery carried his speeches without comment. In antislavery circles, his affirmation of Anglo-Saxonism along with his espousal of antislavery sentiments was perhaps unique.

The impact of racial thought was, however, considerable in the intellectual circles of New England which were generally antislavery. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the pre-eminent New England intellectual, too, exhibited traces of racial thinking as evidenced by his book, English Traits. Like George Bancroft, Emerson saw race as a vital factor in shaping a nationality, as he put it:

92 National Anti-Slavery Standard, 27 February 1858, 27 May 1854.
It is race, is it not? that puts the hundred millions of India under the dominion of a remote island in the north of Europe. Race avails much, if that be true, which is alleged, that all Celts are Catholics, and all Saxons are Protestants; that Celts love unity of power; and the Saxons the representative principle. Race is a controlling influence in the Jew, who for two millenniums, under every climate; has preserved the same character and employments. Race in the negro is of appalling importance.... (93)

Like many of his contemporaries who tended to view the blacks from a romantic racial viewpoint, Emerson too believed that the impact of "civilizing the negro" with the Anglo-Saxon would represent a vital element in the general progress of society.

One of the leading intellectual figures of the North, Charles Eliot Norton, viewed the blacks' temperament in a less than romantic manner. Reviewing Anthony Trollope's book, The West Indies and the Spanish Main, Norton declared that the emancipation of blacks in the West Indies had created immense labour problems which resulted in the use of indentured labour. This was a result of the fact, Norton pointed out, that the blacks were "endowed by nature with an indolent temperament and naturally took to leading idle and easy lives."

Perhaps the most influential of all the New England

---

93 Ralph Waldo Emerson cited in Gossett, n. 49, pp. 97-98.


95 Atlantic Monthly (Boston), vol. 5, no. 3, March 1860, p. 376.
writers on race was Harriet Beecher Stowe. Her famous book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, reputed to have brought on the Civil War, was one of the most effective vehicles of romantic racialism. Stowe's views emerge principally from her characterization of blacks like Uncle Tom, the main character in the novel, as loyal, obedient and docile as opposed to the "hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race." The differentiation between the races is further accentuated by her mulatto characters who exhibit rebellious traits, presumably a racial gift of the Anglo-Saxons. Mrs. Stowe's perception of black racial traits was brought out sharply in her second novel, *Dred, A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* published in 1856. Here she depicted a rebellious black modeled on Nat Turner. However, the rebellious and violent character, Dred, was not a normal black, he was shown as a "clearly warped and deviant personality," though made so by circumstances. Under the normal circumstances, the black role-model was Uncle Tom.

Mrs. Stowe's novels brought out the romantic racial viewpoint of the blacks in the sharpest manner. Her stereotypes of docile blacks and rebellious mulattoes was accepted by many whites. Mrs. Stowe was clearly no amalgamationist. In this she followed several other white abolitionists who were constantly accused of trying to amalgamate the races. We have

---

96 Frederickson, n. 65, pp. 112-3.
outlined the views of Gilbert Haven, Theodore Parker and Honora Conway with regard to the beneficial effects of amalgamation. It can be argued that, barring Conway, and possibly Haven, most abolitionists did not countenance racial inter-marriage. On one hand scientific opinion declared that inter-mixing of races was deleterious for the progeny and secondly, advocacy of such views in a racist environment was certainly not good strategy. Thus William Lloyd Garrison and Lydia X. Child opposed inter-marriage between whites and blacks. Child declared that one of the purposes of their movement was "to prevent the amalgamation now going on by forced sexual relations between slave women and their white masters." Nevertheless, many of the sentiments expressed by people like Emerson, Parker and others with regard to the fusion of racial traits of the whites and the blacks can be interpreted to their espousal of cultural amalgamation and not necessarily a physical amalgamation of the races.

Not all antislaverymen were swept off their feet by the prevailing racial ideas. William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, two of the outstanding leaders, refused to espouse this type of romantic racialism. In a pointed dig at Theodore Parker's constant assertion that blacks were docile, Phillips pointed to the black revolution at Santo Domingo as the only example in history of a race taking up the sword and succeeding. Slavery, Phillips pointed out, was not an uncommon phenomena in history, and virtually all the races had been subject to it time or the other. Referring to William C. Hall's book on the

98 National Anti-Slavery Standard, 6 January 1842.
99 Frederickson, n. 65, pp. 120-3.
Colored Patriots of the Revolution, Phillips declared that if some whites thought that the blacks were any less militant than other races, they were only deluding themselves and ignoring the lessons of history.

Another influential New Englander, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, editor of the Atlantic Monthly, too rejected the stereotype of the docile black. In an article on "Physical Courage" written in 1853, he pointed out that the blacks were capable of the "toppest height of daring" when required.

James Russell Lowell was one of the few New England intellectuals who came out strongly against race glorification. He noted with some asperity, that barring a small segment of New Englanders, there was no Anglo-Saxon stock in the United States. Lowell's ethnological defense of the blacks was based on the acceptance of environmentalism. Citing the theories to the effect by the English naturalist Prichard, he noted:

The ethnological students seem to put beyond question the fact that the difference of physical structure, and of color of skin, may all be referred to climatic causes, and do not in the least countenance the theory of essential diversity of races.

Lowell was more forthright in condemning the usage made of ethnology for aggressive nationalism. He declared:

We have no especial interest in these assertions of national nobility, except in as far as they have been the cause of national

100 Corliss Phillips, Speeches, Lectures and Letters, Second Series (Boston, 1891), pp. 69-76.

oppressions. Men are very willing to excuse any unnatural feature in their social system by tracing it up to some inscrutable divine arrangement. (102)

Frederickson points out that in spite of his skepticism towards theories proving the inferiority of blacks, Lowell was a cultural amalgamationist of sorts. Lowell too saw the benefits of the infusion of the "humbler but truly more nobler qualities" of blacks in the American mainstream.

Higginson echoed similar sentiments when analyzing the transformation of human races from barbarism to civilization. He asked:

...who shall define what makes the essential difference between those lowest types and those loftiest types of races? Not color.... Not unmixed purity of blood.... We can only say that there is an inexplicable step in progress, which we call civilization. (104)

Frederickson has pointed out that many of those committed to the antislavery movement in the North, especially its original leaders Garrison, Theodore Weld, and Phillips, consistently assumed that all men had "the same psychology and possessed identical moral capabilities." Nevertheless, he points out that they were able to make little headway against the rising tide of racism, both of the romantic and anti-black


103 Frederickson, n. 65, pp. 107-8.

variety, which was to have the long-term consequences reflected in the persistence of racism in the United States till recent times.

"Negrophobia" and White Democracy in the North

To what extent racial ideas had come to stay in the United States was seen by the political developments in the North in the 1850s. Since the war with Mexico, the eyes of the politicians in the United States had turned towards the vast expanse of territory in the West. These regions, as future states of the Union, were important elements in the structure of political power within the United States. Our description of the attitudes of the North and the South with regard to slavery in the decades preceding the Civil War indicates that there already existed a divide in the world-views of the two sections.

In the late 1840s, the Free Soil Party arose in the North, demanding that all new Territories should be kept free of slavery for the benefit of free white labourers. Around this was shaped the "free labor" doctrine which strengthened by the controversy over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, gave rise to the Republican Party in the North. An essential component of the idea that slave labour should be kept out of the Territories was that the blacks, free or slave, tended to devalue "free labor". Thus anti-black beliefs were given full rein in the North and the mid-West. Given the fact that Southern Slavocracy
too, for reasons of its own, sought to project the values of its own system, the political battle in the United States in the 1850s shaped around the issue of slavery expansion. Though the major thrust of the Northern ideologues, helped by the anti-slavery forces, was directed against the South, the blacks came in for sustained attack by the Northerners as well.

Eugene Berwanger has pointed out that the heartland of the Republican Party, the mid-west, had long followed anti-black policies imbued by the notion that its bounty was for the benefit of whites only. In the 1850s many of the states began to tighten their black exclusion laws in an effort to maintain the "racial purity" of their region.

All across the North, a political realignment of forces occurred in the 1850s with the foundation of the Republican Party, dedicated to prevent the extension of slavery into any new areas of the United States. While this had an obvious progressive edge, its anti-black bias was not too hidden. The Rev. C.S. Henry an obscure follower of the Republican ideal, while outlining his objections to slavery on moral and economic grounds, blamed it all on the black presence in America. He declared:

A large mass of a different and inferior race...are among them [the Southerners], whom the laws and customs of many generations have subjected to the disposal and

The Republicans were willing to countenance the presence of slavery in the South, but unwilling to accept its expansion into the Territories where it would degrade white labour. This was, to a great extent, a belief shared by most of the Republican Party.

The man who was to become the first President of the country to be elected on a Republican ticket, Abraham Lincoln, voiced similar sentiments in his debate with Senator Stephen A. Douglas in 1858. He declared:

\[
\text{I will say, then, that I am not...in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and the black races... while they remain together there must be the position of the superior and the inferior and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.} \]

(108)

In the context of the times, these were not the ravings of a rabid racist but those of a mainline Republican locked in a senatorial contest with one of the most influential politicians of the country.

Lincoln was by no means alone in his views on the black race. While anti-black views were not unique in the mid-West,

107 C.S. Henry D. D., Plain Reasons for the Great Republican Movement, That We Want, Why We Want It; and That Will Come If We Fail (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), pp. 14-15.

William H. Seward who had defined the North-South divide as once an "irrepressible conflict," and who was Governor of New York, was no less "moderate." In a campaign speech in 1860 he declared:

The great fact is now fully realized that the African race here is a foreign and feeble element, like the Indians incapable of assimilation...and it is a pitiful exotic unnecessarily transplanted into our fields, and which is unprofitable to cultivate at the cost of the desolation of the native vineyard. (109)

With the Republican leadership having so assiduously learnt the lessons of the ethnological and climatic theorists, it was not too difficult for them to arrive at the solution next best to slavery to solve the black problem in the land. This was the idea of deportation or colonization of free blacks at first and later if the example proved beneficient, the slaves as well. We will discuss the Republican policy of colonization in a later chapter.

While Lincoln's views on the essential inferiority of the blacks and the desirability of their deportation represented the middle ground in the Republican Party between the more extreme antislavery elements and the more rabid racists, there was no dearth of anti-black propaganda in the North. In the ethos we have described, it was not surprising that one of the most viciously racist writers, Hinton Rowan Helper became even more popular than Harriet Beecher Stowe.

In 1857, Helper, who had lived the earlier part of his

life in a slave state, published his book, *The Impending Crisis of the South and How to Meet It*, which immediately gained immense popularity in the North. Helper saw the corrupting influence of slave-labour on the whites in the South. He accepted the tenets of the polygenists that the blacks were an inferior race, but refused to accept that it condemned blacks to slavery. He proposed a plan whereby blacks would be freed and deported to Liberia with funds raised by a compulsory tax on the slave-holders. Helper was by no means a friend of the blacks. He was motivated by a desire to protect all whites from what he believed was the malevolent influence of the blacks. It is for this reason that he wished to have them freed and removed from the United States. Helper's advocacy of steps to protect "free labor" made his work a classic critique of slavery from the point of view of the North, it was against the slave system as well as the black man.

George E. Frederickson has pointed out the strong elements of Anglo-Saxonism in Helper's writings. His earlier book, *Land of Gold* published in 1855 contained a vicious diatribe against the Chinese labour in California. He observed that:

No inferior race can exist in these United States without becoming subordinate to the will of the Anglo-Americans. (111)

Frederickson notes that racism was the ruling passion of Helper's writings. This is borne out by his later writings. He was


111 Ibid., pp. xxvc-xxviii.
appalled at the Republican attempts to make the blacks citizens. His book *Noli Me Tangere, A Question for a Continent*, published in 1857, was one of the most vicious anti-black treatises ever published in the United States. The chapter headings of the book are sufficient indication of Helper's outlook:

1. The Negro, Anthropologically Considered: An Inferior Fellow Done For.
2. Black: A Thing of Ugliness and Death.
4. The Servile Baseness and Beggary of the Blacks.
5. Removals: Banishments; Expulsions; Extermination.
6. A Score of Bible Lessons in the Art of Annihilating Effete Races.
8. Thirteen Kindred Pages from "The Impending Crisis of the South."
9. White Celebrities and Black Nobodies.

The book advocated the compulsory deportation of the blacks from the United States and if that were to fail, their physical annihilation as a race. Helper followed up this book with two more anti-black works. Frederickson points out that his racism "if excessive [was] not entirely out of place in the America of the period."

---

112 Cited in Hugh Talmadge Lefler, *Hinton Rowan Helper: Advocate of a "White America"* (Charlottesville, Va., The Historical Publishing

113 See George M. Frederickson's "Introduction" to n. 110, p. lx; such was the racist ethos of the period that (footnote contd.)
The era of white democracy was perhaps personified by Walt Whitman, "the Poet of Democracy." In an essay on "Slaves and Slave Trade," written in 1846, he came out strongly against slave-trade. Nevertheless, he justified slavery declaring that while he believed slavery to be doomed, "the institution of slavery is not all without its redeeming points...."

That Whitman was representing the forces of white nationalism of the Republican variety was indicated by his support for the Wilmot Proviso barring slavery from the Territories. He declared:

The young men of the free states must not be shut out from the new domain (where slavery does not now exist) by the introduction of an institution which will render their honorable industry no longer respectable. (115)

Whitman's vision of America was that of a land that would not be tainted by a black presence--an All-White America. He, too espoused the cause of black deportation. In an article in the Brooklyn Daily Times in 1853, he noted:

abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, and Samuel J. May were convinced that Helper was an abolitionist in spite of his violently anti-black views. See J.J. Cardoso, "Winton Rowan Helper as a Racist in the Abolitionist Camp," Journal of Negro History, vol. 55, no. 4, October 1970, p. 322.


Ibid., Rogers and Black, pp. 205-6, 208-13.
Who believes that whites and blacks can ever amalgamate in America? Nature has set an impassable seal against it. Besides, is not America for the whites? And is it not better so?

This article was written two years after he had written his famous paen to American democracy *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman was at that time, as a journalist, deeply involved in Northern politics as a member of the Democratic Party.

The onset of the Civil War that saw the emancipation of the blacks did not see any change in the white perception of the black man as an inferior being and an undesirous element in America. We will show later that the emancipation of the blacks during the war was no humanitarian measure but arose out of the circumstances of the war. We will also detail the persistence with which the Lincoln Administration tried to deport the blacks to points outside the United States. If nothing else, the war heightened the fears of the racists in the North. Black slaves in the South were a manageable entity, but blacks free were liable to create a major problem in the racial balance in the United States. Added to this was the fact that the abolitionist press, steadily gaining influence in the war, repeatedly pointed out that the black slaves freed by the war operations were completely capable of adjusting as free people in American society.

By the time of the Civil War, the dominance of the American School of ethnology over American natural science was

complete. A number of African racial thinkers used their "proofs" of black inferiority as axiomatic. The abolitionists had long relied on the Bible to disprove the theory of polygenic origins of man; however, by 1860, the Bible had been used freely to buttress both the pro- and antislavery argument.

The abolitionists, encouraged by the events of the Civil War, renewed their assault on the proslavery racial thinkers. The American natural scientists having gone over to the proslavery cause, abolitionists relied on European naturalists to help their cause. Abolitionists were quick to pick up the work of European naturalists like N. de Quatrefages, Professor of natural history at the Museum of Natural History in Paris, T.G. Latham, a British ethnologist, Dumont d'Urville, a French geographer and the renowned Alexander von Humboldt, to emphasize the unity and equality of human races. Nevertheless, natural science as a whole gave no convincing proof to either parties. As Theodore Tilton put it in 1863, that no convincing proof existed that the black race was condemned to permanent inferiority.

As the 1850s came to a close, many Northerners began to have second thoughts about the desirability of immediate emancipation of slavery. Charles Eliot Norton, after reviewing Trollope's account of the impact of emancipation in the West Indies came to the conclusion that emancipation deserved more serious attention. He posed the issues to his fellow Americans

---

thus:

How far a forced system of labor for wages might answer for the blacks, -- how far a regular and organized plan of education might elevate them, -- how far the danger of their relapse into barbarism may be obviated by preliminary precautions, -- are the questions that the country which next undertakes emancipation must solve for itself.... (118)

How seriously Horton himself viewed these problems was brought out by a review of a book written by a conservative Philadelphia lawyer, Sydney George Fisher. Horton reduced Fisher's arguments presented in his book *The Laws of Race as Connected with Slavery*, to three points:

1. The white race must govern the black wherever they live together.
2. The two races must never amalgamate.
3. Each race grew in specific geographic circumstances.

Horton accepted these propositions as being if not wholly true, at least pointing "the way to essential truths." Thus, the first point was completely accepted by him, noting that "some form of subjection of the negro may be necessary for a time that extends far into the future...."

It was the prospect of the rapid growth of the black population in the United States especially in the Deep South that agitated Horton the most. He was therefore one with those who sought to prevent "the expansion of this transatlantic Africa" northwards by extending the geographical limits of slavery. As a matter of fact, Horton, more or less completely,

agreed with Fisher's call to confine the "new Africa" to its antebellum limits. Like Fisher, Horton viewed the black culture as a "barbaric" influence in the United States and as such a threat to the "Freedom, civilization, and the energetic genius of the Saxon race."

Similar views can be seen in the writings of James Shepherd Pike, the Washington correspondent of the New York Tribune and Joseph Henry Allen, a New England clergyman and editor. They saw the blacks moving by the operation of "natural laws" to the "semi-tropical marshlands of the South."

Once the sectional conflict began such views gained greater currency. For one thing, the race problem began to look much more frightening as blacks began to flee the South and seek shelter in the North. As the prospect of emancipation drew closer, several racists began advocating the convenient solution that a special homeland be created for the blacks in the deep South, a region they were in any case suited for climatically.

Several mid-Western politicians, though radical in their call for the prosecution of the war against the South, also saw the black population draining off Southwards in the event of emancipation. Though there was an element of wishful thinking in such beliefs, V. Jacques Voegeli has pointed out that the mid-Western politicians were not merely actuated by a "machiavellian" policy to that end but genuinely influenced by the statements of


120 Frederickson, n. 65, pp. 144-5.
contemporary physicians, sociologists, statisticians and ethnologists and generally accepted ideas on race.

The extreme reactions of the racists in the North were represented by many like Hinton Rowan Helper who predicted the worst from the policy of emancipation. Horace Bushnell, one of the most distinguished Northern clergymen predicted that after emancipation, the blacks would be wiped out as a race in a Malthusian struggle with the superior white race. A similar sentiment was expressed by the Rev. J. M. Sturtevant, president of the Illinois College. Sturtevant declared that far from a mixing of races, the post-emancipation scene would be characterized by racial strife in which the blacks would inevitably be destroyed as a race.

We can see from the above that even at the time of emancipation there was no forthright acceptance of the equal place of blacks in American society. Far from a unified stand against racial ideas, the United States slipped into a period of even greater racism. During the Civil War, the blacks not only proved their ability to rise from the degrading depths of slavery but also the fact that they could fight for freedom, if necessary. These facts only spurred on the racists to greater


122 Frederickson, n. 65, pp. 155-8. It was in this period that the term "miccgenation" was coined by a Northern editor, see Frederickson, n. 65, p. 172; see also Eugene Berwanger, "Negrophobia in Northern Proslavery and Anti-slavery Thought," Phylon: The Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture (Atlanta, Ga.) (Hereinafter cited as Phylon), vol. 33, no. 3, Fall 1972, pp. 266-75.
attempts to keep the blacks in a degraded position. The period of even greater emphasis on racial explanations for human conduct and history was to follow in the later half of the nineteenth century. The expansion of the white people across the globe served as a background to the tragic and vain struggle conducted in the United States for the blacks to retain and extend their freedoms.

George M. Frederickson has concluded that in the period under review, the average opinion of Americans, whether in the North or the South could be thus summed up: firstly, blacks different from whites in physical characteristics; secondly, blacks were deficient at least in some of the alleged white racial traits like enterprise and intelligence and that these differences were fundamental, subject possibly to only slow change; and thirdly, a physical inter-mixing of races was undesirable from the point of view of both the races.

An attempt will be made in the following chapters to analyze the extent to which these ideas shaped the frightened, aroused and angered black opinion of the time and influenced the long and arduous struggle of the blacks to attain freedom. It was a struggle inextricably inter-connected with the issue of race.

123 See Gossett, n. 49, Chapter VII.