

Richard Tansey, a doctoral candidate and assistant instructor in the University of Texas, Austin, has extensively researched the municipal archives of New Orleans, developing a dissertation devoted to the social history of the city before the Civil War. His essay concentrates upon the role played by New Orleans merchants, lawyers, and journalists in mounting filibustering expeditions aimed at liberating Cuba from Spanish control. The haven of countless refugees from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean islands, New Orleans was the traditional locus of expatriate intrigues and of plots by planters, entrepreneurs, and publicists who lusted after cheap land, slave labor, and wider markets in the major Antilles.

## EPILOGUE TO THE MISSOURI COMPROMISE: THE SOUTH, THE BALANCE OF POWER, AND THE TROPICS IN THE 1850s

ROBERT E. MAY  
PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Scholars are giving increasing attention to the interest of Southerners in expanding slavery into the tropics in the period between the Mexican War and the creation of the Confederacy. Whereas historians once interpreted the Southern expansionist vision as focusing almost exclusively upon California, Kansas, and the western plains, they now recognize that this vision included such areas as Cuba, Mexico, and Central America within its sweep.<sup>1</sup> It has also been demonstrated that freesoil interference with Southern tropical expansion efforts had the same tendency to encourage secessionism in the Old South as did antislavery opposition to slavery expansion westward.<sup>2</sup> Amidst this climate of sectional friction, the American territorial impulse was severely crippled, and "informal empire" and commercial expansion evolved as a substitute for the once vibrant spirit of "manifest destiny."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 96-128; C. Stanley Urban, "The Ideology of Southern Imperialism: New Orleans and the Caribbean, 1845-1860," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXXIX (January 1956), 48-73; John A. Logan, *No Transfer: An American Security Principle* (New Haven, 1961), 231-41; Daniel P. Mannix (in collaboration with Malcolm Cowley), *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865* (New York, 1962), 263-87; Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York, 1963), 202-14; Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965), 243-74; William L. Barney, *The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South* (New York, 1972); Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1973). A shorter version of this article was read at the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, August 1978.

<sup>2</sup> This view is implicitly rejected, however, in a number of studies which have stressed American expansion southward after the Mexican War in a national framework. These works either ignore, or explicitly deny, the sectional dimension of American expansionism. Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore, 1935); William H. Goetzmann, *When the Eagle Screamed: The Romantic Horizon in American Diplomacy, 1800-1860* (New York, 1966), 74-91; Richard W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (New York, 1960), 147-61; Joseph Allen Stout, Jr., *The Liberators: Filibustering Expeditions into Mexico, 1848-1862, and the Last Thrust of Manifest Destiny* (Los Angeles, 1973); A. Curtis Wilgus, "Official Expression of Manifest Destiny Sentiment Concerning Hispanic America, 1848-1871," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XV (July 1932), 486-506. Related to this national interpretation is Michael P. Johnson's recent assertion that historians have paid too much attention to the importance of slavery expansion in general (both southward and westward) in their efforts to pinpoint the "operative tension" of the secession movement. Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge, 1977), xx, 84.

<sup>3</sup> Howard I. Kushner, "Visions of the Northwest Coast: Gwin and Seward in the 1850s," *Western Historical Quarterly*, IV (July 1973), 295-306; Ernest N. Paolino, *The Foundations*

The motivation behind the Southern Caribbean impulse, however, has been shrouded in ambiguity. Scholars have divided as to why the Southern people rendered such emotive and substantive support to congressional programs, diplomatic initiatives, and illegal filibustering expeditions intended to extend American control over tropical areas. This essay's purpose is to clarify the contours of this debate, resolve the historiographic confusion, and suggest where the Caribbean expansion agitation intersected the general framework of sectional relations from the American Revolution to the Civil War.

One group of historians has depicted the tropical expansion agitation as essentially a manifestation of Southern romantic nationalism. What was significant about the expansion movement, according to this view, was not so much the hope tropical annexations offered of improving the South's political or economic position within the Union, but rather the vista of unlimited empire and grandeur outside the Union following secession. Southern radical leaders utilized this vision to influence the Southern masses to support secession. Rollin Osterweis caught the spirit of this interpretation when he suggested in his *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* that by the late 1850s Southern nationalism originating in South Carolina had fused with imperialism in the Gulf region to "produce the vision of a mighty, *separate*, slave empire, stretching out in a vast golden circle around the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico." John M. McCardell, Jr., similarly, has asserted that expansionists used the issue of Caribbean expansion primarily for "defining and advancing the idea of a Southern nation"; Northern opposition to Caribbean annexations was far more useful to the Southern nationalists in this mission than cooperation would have been. A somewhat mystical expression of the same concept is conveyed in Raimondo Luraghi's recent stimulating analysis of the Old South. Luraghi, who perceives the Old South and Old North as antithetical cultures, argues that Southern expansionists sought a slave empire outside the Union because they recognized that they had far more in common with Latin cultures to the south than with their Northern brethren:

*of the American Empire: William Henry Seward and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973); Roy F. Nichols, *Advance Agents of American Destiny* (Philadelphia, 1956); Charles Vevier, "American Continentalism: An Idea of Expansion, 1845-1910," *American Historical Review*, LXV (January 1960), 323-35; James Patrick Shenton, *Robert John Walker, a Politician from Jackson to Lincoln* (New York, 1961), 136; Hallie Mae McPherson, "William McKendree Gwin: Expansionist," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1931), 36, 46, 111-12, 213-28; Thomas David Schoonover, *Dollars Over Dominion: The Triumph of Liberalism in Mexican-United States Relations, 1861-1867* (Baton Rouge, 1978); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (Ithaca, 1963).

All these countries . . . represented parts of a sea-oriented world, their rivers running toward the same seas, and they turning, so to speak, their backs to the interior of the continent. All appeared characterized by very similar agrarian economies and cultures: the Old South, with its stately mansions, its cotton and rice fields, its towering steamboats . . . ; Mexico and Central America, with their haciendas, big houses, folkloristic dances, colorful cities; the sunburnt Caribbean islands, with their quasi-African folklore, lovely colonial cities, and large plantations producing sugar and coffee.<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis upon Southern nationalism as the prime force behind the Southern Caribbean movement is, in a sense, a sophisticated updating of the argument in many sectionally oriented histories written in the aftermath of the Civil War that the tropical movement was the work of an aggressive slavocracy or "slave power conspiracy."<sup>5</sup>

A second school of thought sees the Southern tropical movement more as a reflection of the Southern position within the Union after the Mexican War. Annexations of new territory to the South would remedy certain deficiencies in the Old South, and allow it to better function as a part of the United States. Historians within this persuasion, however, divide into two subgroups.

Some scholars render essentially socio-economic interpretations, focusing upon the nature of class mobility, land availability, black population

<sup>4</sup> Rollin C. Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (New Haven, 1949), 172-85 (quotation on 173); John M. McCardell, Jr., "Manifest Destiny and the Idea of a Southern Nation," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, November 11, 1977; Raimondo Luraghi, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation South* (New York, 1978), 74; Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, 270; Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, 303. Earl Fomell's argument that Texan expansionists were primarily interested in Cuba and Central America as stations in a revived traffic in African slaves relates to the perception that tropical expansionism was a manifestation of Southern radicalism. Earl W. Fomell, "Texans and Filibusters in the 1850's," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LIX (April 1956), 411.

<sup>5</sup> Horace Greeley, *The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-64*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1864-67), I, 378; Hermann E. von Holst, *The Constitutional and Political History of the United States*, 7 vols. (Chicago, 1876-92), V, 7-9; Oliver T. Morton, *The Southern Empire With Other Papers* (Boston, 1892), 2, 4, 10-12, 15-18, 51. The late nineteenth-century accounts differed as to whether the "slave power" preferred expansion as a means to dominate the Union through increased political control, or whether expansion and empire were intrinsic to a secessionist plot. The slave power interpretation was a descendant of the pre-Civil War abolition and freesoil movements, which frequently interpreted the tropical expansion movement in terms of a manipulation of events by an increasingly aggressive slave power. See for instance *Chicago Tribune*, February 9, 1855; *Washington National Era*, August 12, 1847, January 27, February 3, 24, 1848, January 11, 1849. For historical treatments of Northern antislavery perceptions that the slave power controlled American politics, see David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge, 1969), 62-86; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 9, 73, 95-102, and *passim*.

growth, and soil erosion in the Old South. Eugene Genovese in *The Political Economy of Slavery* contends that "steady infusions of new land" were "probably" required to appease Southern nonslaveholders; that expansionists anticipated that tropical acquisitions would avert potential race war in the South, increasingly likely if black and white Southerners continued to be pent up within a confined space; and that the pre-Civil War economic revival of the Upper South "depended on virgin lands" to provide a market for the sale of the surplus slaves produced by its economic transformation. Genovese's themes are elaborated upon by William Barney, who in a series of recent studies has emphasized impending race war as the stimulus to Southern tropical expansionism. Barney proposes a tropical "safety valve" theory reminiscent of Frederick Jackson Turner's controversial view that the American frontier provided an outlet for class tensions in urban areas to the east. Citing reproduction rates among American slaves unparalleled in the Western Hemisphere, Barney asserts that expansionists saw tropical expansion as mandatory to achieve "social space in which the slaves could be controlled and their density prevented from reaching unmanageable proportions." Barney hypothesizes that the expansionist vision, at least in theory, included the eventual disappearance of slavery in the South as black labor drained into the tropics from the states, duplicating the process by which slavery had once been eliminated in the American North and channeled exclusively into the South. In a study of American interest in Cuba before the Civil War, Basil Rauch observes that Southern imperialists such as James Dunwoody B. DeBow expected commercial advantage from Cuban annexation, and noted that Southern planters, faced with one-crop-induced exhausted soils and declining productivity, intended to migrate to Cuba where they would encounter fertile lands and surplus slaves at modest cost.<sup>6</sup>

Other historians have argued that political implications explain the

<sup>6</sup> Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, 246–50; Barney, *Road to Secession*, 49–84; Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Princeton, 1974), 19–23; Barney, *Flawed Victory: A New Perspective on the Civil War* (New York, 1975), 45; Basil Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba, 1848–1855* (New York, 1948). Barney, Genovese, and Rauch, of course, acknowledge other factors in their explanations of the Southern Caribbean impulse. My concern is with the thrust of their argument, which is socio-economic. The safety valve is also given attention in Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., "The Relation of Herndon and Gibbon's Exploration of the Amazon to North American Slavery, 1850–1855," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XIX (November 1939), 494–503. Bell argues that the ideological impetus behind the explorations of the Amazon River Valley in 1851–52 by Lieutenant William Herndon and Passed Midshipman Lardner Gibbon of the United States Navy was the expectation that one day the excess slaves of the Mississippi River Valley could be siphoned off to Brazil, thus relieving internal pressures in the South. Robert F. Durden shows that James DeBow urged tropical acquisitions in the early 1850s from a safety valve rationale. Robert F. Durden, "J. D. B. DeBow: Convolutions of a Slavery Expansionist," *Journal of Southern History*, XVII (November 1951), 441–61.

urgency behind the Southern interest in the Caribbean. John Hope Franklin, for instance, asserts in *The Militant South* that "Southerners would have been willing to fight for land in the 1850s had there been no hope for economic gain." According to the "political" interpretation, Southerners felt that their slave system was in grave danger from growing antislavery influence in Congress. Southerners expected that antislavery leaders would eventually be able to utilize the Northern control of Congress to either abolish slavery by direct legislation, or to cripple the institution in the South through indirect legislation. New slave state congressmen and senators from tropical annexations would throw enough extra votes to the South in Congress that the region would possess the power to veto damaging legislation.<sup>7</sup>

All three approaches have some validity, since Southern expansionists worked from widely deviating premises. Their ideologies, political affiliations, subregional identifications, speculative interests, racial views, and personal psychologies all mitigated against a unitary program for tropical expansion. Texans, for instance, were far more likely to desire Mexico as a means to eliminate a haven for runaway slaves than were fellow expansionists from sister Southern states. Expansionists who agreed ideologically, moreover, often differed over the appropriate means to accomplish the same objectives: many endorsed private filibustering expeditions; others rejected them as illegal or dysfunctional. It would be very unwise, therefore, to suppose that all Southern imperialists marched to the same tune. Genovese, pursuing this logic to its extreme, argues that it is "unnecessary to assess the relative strength of the roots of slavery expansionism," since all roots related to the competitive difficulties of "slaveholder hegemony" in an unfriendly world market.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, eclecticism has its limitations. Tropical imperialism was essentially a political movement rather than a reflection of socio-economic conditions, and this politically

<sup>7</sup> Franklin, *Militant South*, 104–105; May, *Southern Dream*, 10–13; Urban, "The Ideology of Southern Imperialism," 48–49, 53, 70; Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 9th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974), 287. Charles C. Tansill argues that Southern congressional support for reciprocal trade with Canada in 1854 was aimed at alleviating Canadian economic distress, and thus diverting Canadian attention away from annexation to the United States. Such annexation, to Tansill, would have given a "very substantial increase in political strength to the Free-Soil Party. . . ." Charles C. Tansill, *The Canadian Reciprocity Treaty of 1854* (Baltimore, 1922), 76–77. Donald Warner, however, feels that the extent of Southern opposition to Canadian annexation has been exaggerated. Donald F. Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849–1893* (Lexington, Ky., 1960), 27n. A post-Civil War interpretation stressing political motivation is Joseph Hodgson, *The Cradle of the Confederacy; or, the Times of Troup, Quitman and Yancey* (Mobile, 1876), 314.

<sup>8</sup> Ronnie C. Tyler, "The Callahan Expedition of 1855: Indians or Negroes?" *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXX (April 1967), 574–85; Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, 251.

induced excitement related far more to sectional goals within the Union than to romantic visions of empire without. These considerations explain why the Caribbean question became such an explosive issue in the South before the Civil War.

The case for expansionism as a facet of the Southern nationalist program rests primarily upon rhetoric, but is buttressed by the actions of some leading Southern nationalists, a number of whom employed the vision of a tropical slave empire to persuade audiences (and perhaps themselves) that secession would be beneficial to the South. Few outdid Robert B. Rhett's speech at Walterborough, South Carolina, in 1851:

Within eighteen months . . . we shall have *the whole South* with us. And more than that, *we will extend our borders; we will have New Mexico, Utah, and California.* Utah has slaves! We will march into California, and will ask them if they will have slaves, and her people will answer 'ay, we will have slaves!' And what of Mexico? Why, when we are ready for them . . . *we will take her too, or as much of her as we want.* We will form a most *glorious Republic! more glorious than the ancient Republic of Rome.* . . .

Other extremists issued similar predictions. James DeBow, one of the high priests of Southern nationalism, told the Southern Commercial Convention in 1857 that after secession "Mexico, Central America, Cuba, the West Indies, generally, would properly, in the remote future, become parts of a system which assimilated so much to its necessities with their own."<sup>9</sup> Such visions of grandeur were especially prevalent during the secession crisis of 1860–1861, when secessionists were pulling out all the stops in their efforts to persuade the Southern masses to cross the brink to secession.<sup>10</sup>

Some Southern radicals, in addition, were deeply immersed in the filibuster movements of the 1850s. Benjamin Wailes, a Unionist Mississippian, for instance, remarked that he had encountered a "fillibuster [*sic*], fire eating Democrat" preacher at a political rally in 1855. Extremists John A. Quitman of Mississippi and C. A. L. Lamar of Georgia worked together to liberate Cuba from Spanish rule. Radicals Roger Pryor of Virginia and William Yancey of Alabama abetted William Walker's efforts to rally Southern backing for his filibustering to Nicaragua. George Bickley's exotic Mexico-filibuster organization, the Knights of the

<sup>9</sup> Washington *National Era*, August 7, 1851; *Official Record of the Debates and Proceedings at the Commercial Convention Assembled at Knoxville, Tennessee, August 10th, 1857* (Knoxville, 1857), 14. See also Thomas Jones Pope to John A. Quitman, May 5, 1851, John Quitman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter MDA); *Southern Quarterly Review*, XXI (January 1852), 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> May, *Southern Dream*, 236–38.

Golden Circle, manifested the radical dimension of the tropical expansion thrust in both its stated goal of achieving a new slave empire centered in Cuba, and its participation in Texas secession activity following Abraham Lincoln's election.<sup>11</sup> Also pertinent is the fact that the Deep South generally rendered more support for tropical annexations than did the Southern border states.

However, it would be farfetched to jump from such evidence to the conclusion that the Caribbean expansion movement in the South in the 1850s represented the product of a network of Southern nationalist conspirators. For one thing, a number of prominent Southern nationalists held off from giving the movement support. Edmund Ruffin found William Walker intriguing, but when it came to the crunch at a meeting of the Southern Commercial Convention at Montgomery in 1858, Ruffin was the only Virginia delegate to oppose a pro-Walker resolution, and he walked out of a speech by the filibuster because he did not want his presence to imply involvement in Walker's cause. Ruffin professed a belief that a Southern Confederacy could eventually annex Haiti and enslave its destitute blacks, but he never gave the expansion movement solid support.<sup>12</sup> Nor was the expansion movement particularly strong in South Carolina, the mother state of secession.

More significant is the strained reasoning intrinsic to the secession conspiracy interpretation. Such an interpretation leaves little room to explain why numerous unionists throughout the South, such as Alexander Stephens of Georgia, found themselves within the expansionist camp. It also confounds Southern radicalism with Southern nationalism, thereby distorting the orientation of expansion advocates. David Potter has perceptively observed that most Southerners by the late 1850s manifested dual loyalties: both their region and their country (and frequently their own states and locales) attracted their affections simultaneously. The Old South produced but a limited number of unconditional Southern nationalists; that is, individuals whose ideologies tended exclusively to separate nationhood. Potter's view is confirmed in James L. Roark's recent study of the Southern planter class, which finds that as late as the eve of war, "nationality was . . . incipient, only weakly developed, and only partially functional."<sup>13</sup> From such a perspective, it can be understood that most

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin L. C. Wailes Diary, July 14, 1855, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereafter DU); Louis Schlessinger to John A. Quitman, September 9, 1854, John Quitman Papers, MDA; John A. Quitman to C. A. L. Lamar, January 5, 1855, John Quitman Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter Quitman Papers, Harvard); *Richmond Whig*, January 14, 26, 1858; Edmund Ruffin Diary, May 15, 1858, Library of Congress.

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Ruffin Diary, April 20, May 14, 15, 1858, Library of Congress.

<sup>13</sup> David Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848–1861*, completed and edited by Don E.

radical expansionists committed their efforts to Caribbean projects not so much because they totally despaired of the Union, but rather because they hoped that the fruition of such projects might avert the very necessity of secession. Thus, Richard K. Crallé could complain in 1852 that the United States government had become one of the most "corrupt" and "despotic" on the globe and predict that Southerners would eventually have to resort to the bayonet to protect themselves, yet four years later praise the Ostend Manifesto and aid James Buchanan's election campaign in the South.<sup>14</sup>

Most leaders of the Southern Caribbean movement conform to the dual-loyalty paradigm. Few had totally lost hope in the Union at the time of their Caribbean advocacy. Roger Pryor, as late as 1857, wrote in a personal letter that he was not yet ready for secession, and that the new Democratic administration in Washington should be allowed a chance. John Slidell of Louisiana, a key personality in the expansion movement because of his efforts in the United States Senate to have neutrality legislation prohibiting filibustering expeditions repealed, was a Jacksonian Democrat and James Buchanan's campaign manager. Slidell would eventually commit himself to secession at the time of Lincoln's election, and play an instrumental role in swinging his state to leaving the Union, but during his period as expansionist he was at the core of national politics and anything but a Southern nationalist.<sup>15</sup>

Even Mississippi's John A. Quitman, described by William Barney as one of the "most influential fire-eaters" and perhaps the foremost model of an expansionist agitator in the Old South, conforms to the character of a dual-loyalty Southern extremist. A nullificationist and consistent agitator for states' rights, Quitman tried to lead his state out of the Union as its governor in 1850, and often employed the rhetoric of Southern nationalists in his speeches. Quitman, however, also had sisters in the North, sent his son to Princeton, conducted cordial business relations with Northern

Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), 469-72; James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1977), 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> Richard K. Crallé to John A. Quitman, September 3, 1852, J. F. H. Claiborne Papers, MDA; Richard K. Crallé to James Buchanan, July 14, 1856, James Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Pryor to John A. Quitman, November 2, 1857, Quitman Papers, Harvard. Slidell's role in Democratic national politics in the 1850s is traced in Roy F. Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948); Louis M. Sears, "Slidell and Buchanan," *American Historical Review*, XXVII (July 1922), 709-30. For Slidell's conversion to secessionism see John Slidell to Edward Butler, November 1, 1860, Edward Butler Papers, DU; John Slidell to James Buchanan, November 13, 1860, James Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; New Orleans *Daily Delta*, November 29, 1860; Charles B. Dew, "Who Won the Secession Election in Louisiana?," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXVI (February 1970), 19.

merchants, and travelled extensively above the Mason-Dixon line. He had ambition for high national office after the Mexican War, and campaigned openly for Lewis Cass in 1848. In June of that year he could speak of his "abiding confidence in the patriotism, intelligence, and firmness of the rank and file of the democratic citizens of the whole Union," and could explain how the National Democracy had resisted the "sectarianism of the free soil men" and adhered to the "cherished principles which have conducted the country to happiness, prosperity and power." In 1856, Quitman travelled to New York's Tammany Hall and told the New York Democracy that he hoped that the time "would never come when the citizens of Mississippi could not . . . call the citizens of New-York 'fellow-citizens.'" In Congress from 1855 to 1858, he became a workhorse and spokesman for the national military establishment. His radicalism did not prevent his hoping as late as 1857 that Republican House Speaker Nathaniel P. Banks would treat the South justly, and that Southern "equality in the Union" could yet be secure. Even at the height of his radicalism in 1850-51, Quitman would have withdrawn from his secession position had the North met Southern demands. Afterwards, Quitman would assert that the South would have been better protected within the Union had the region's moderates rallied to radical demands. To Quitman and men of his ilk, it was the unionist Southerners who were the real "conspirators," for, by failing to insist upon Northern concessions, they endangered Southern "property, liberties and our lives."<sup>16</sup> One need not deny the radical credentials of men such as Quitman, but rather recognize that Southern nationalism was a fluctuating component of their public stance instead of a consistent frame of reference.

Caribbean expansion, therefore, represented an *alternative* to secession for most radicals. Any suggestion that Southern radicals endorsed efforts to acquire tropical areas merely from a hope that in their own failure they could convince the Southern masses of the logic for secession defies normal credulity and implies that the secession movement was far more organized, conspiratorial, and methodical than it actually was. While some Southern secessionists may have genuinely expected to see an independent Southern Confederacy acquire tropical lands after secession, such hopes do little to explain why politicians and common folk across the whole spectrum of Southern politics became so deeply involved in Caribbean agitation while the South was still in the Union.

<sup>16</sup> John A. Quitman to Eliza Quitman, September 21, 1850, John A. Quitman to Lawrence Keitt, July 23, 1857 [copy], Quitman Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina (hereafter SHC); Natchez *Free Trader*, September 26, 1855; Vicksburg *Sentinel*, July 26, August 9, 1848; New York *Times*, February 23, 1856; Barney, *Road to Secession*, 86.

More confidence can be placed in socio-economic interpretations of the Caribbean movement. Expansionists in the Old South did publicly avow that a dangerous black/white ratio could be alleviated through the opening of new territory to slavery. Thus, radical Mississippi Southern Rights leader and Cuba filibuster C. Pinckney Smith remarked to the Adams County Southern Rights Association in May 1851 that exclusion of the South from California would endanger the South because confinement of its black population might incite race war. The Fayetteville *Arkansian*, a Breckenridge paper, warned in the midst of the 1860 election campaign that "the great increase of our slaves" would be fatal to white Southerners if the South were "curtailed in our domains."<sup>17</sup> There was talk in the air before the Civil War of planters migrating southward with their slaves. Matthew Fontaine Maury, noted booster of American development of the Amazon River Valley, predicted such a movement to Brazil; Maury's daughter reported in 1852 that some Southern "gentlemen" had inquired of the Brazilian minister to the United States regarding privileges if they migrated to Brazil with a thousand slaves. It is safe to assume that some Southerners would have made the move into tropical regions had they been assured protection for slave property under United States auspices. This would have been the case had Southerners felt secure about taking their slaves into California and Kansas; there is no reason to expect that the tropics were any different. One gets a sense of this from a Southerner's response to the prospects in 1858 that William Walker might regain power in Nicaragua:

The Slave States . . . are already hemmed in in a way that shows there is the smallest possibility of breaking the fetters and expanding to a degree corresponding to the progress of the world and requirements for slave labor staples. This being the case, it will be conceived that the Americanizing or Southernizing—of Nicaragua is the only Salvation for our peculiar institutions. . . . This . . . is now seen and felt by our people, and our enemies may depend upon it that when Genl. Walker again raises his standard in Nicaragua there will be very little division of sentiment in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi[,] Louisiana and Texas. Let him get a fast hold there, and a stream of men & means will flow thither that will throw in the shade the rush of abolitionists into California, Kansas & c. &c.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Natchez *Free Trader*, May 28, 1851; Fayetteville *Arkansian*, September 21, 1860. See also *Congressional Globe*, 32 Cong., 2 Sess., 194, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 299–300; Macon *Daily Telegraph*, November 27, 1860; Alvy L. King, *Louis T. Wigfall: Southern Fire-eater* (Baton Rouge, 1970).

<sup>18</sup> Matthew F. Maury to Ann Maury, March 17, 1851, Betty Maury to William Blackford, May 5, 1852, Matthew F. Maury to Mary Blackford, December 24, 1851, Matthew F. Maury Papers, Library of Congress; William DeForest Holly to C. J. Macdonald, September 26, 1858, William Walker Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. A Northerner who travelled to Cuba reported hearing Louisiana sugar planters had

Commercial advantage also induced Southern interest in the tropics. The annexation of Cuba would have benefitted many merchants. Southerners were often speculatively involved in the various expansion projects. Pierre Soulé, who sold bonds for William Walker and was instrumental in the drafting of the pro-Walker resolutions of the platform committee in the Democratic National Convention of 1856, was reported in the press as having invested \$50,000 in a Nicaraguan ranch.<sup>19</sup>

Too much stress, however, can be placed upon the socio-economic underpinnings of Caribbean expansionism, particularly the argument that it derived from an internal crisis. While fears of slave revolt plagued the antebellum South, slave reproduction was nonetheless encouraged. Many Southern expansionists endorsed the resumption of the African slave trade to expand the South's slave labor pool. Had the region been teeming with the dangerous black surplus cited by the safety valve theorists, there would have been little reason to urge slave trade resumption to enable the South to settle new acquisitions with slaves. Jefferson Davis told the Mississippi Democratic State Convention of 1859 that it was fortunate that Cuba already had slaves, because otherwise the South would not have the requisite number of slaves to develop it if acquired. Congressional candidate John J. McRae of Mississippi urged a renewed slave trade so that the South would have the facility to settle new acquisitions from Mexico. Ronald Takaki's argument that the South suffered a slave deficiency which was driving up prices too high for non-slaveholders is pertinent here, as is Gavin Wright's reminder that Southern policymakers did little to encourage white immigration into the region (which would have offset the claimed racial imbalance as well as given the South additional representation in Congress).<sup>20</sup>

concrete plans for a migration to that Caribbean island after its annexation to the United States. John S. C. Abbott, *South and North: or, Impressions Received During a Trip to Cuba and the South* (New York, 1869 [1860]), 53.

<sup>19</sup> Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, August 9, 1856, Appleton Oaksmith Papers, DU; William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (Mobile, 1860), 238–39, 275n; J. Preston Moore, "Pierre Soulé: Southern Expansionist and Promoter," *Journal of Southern History*, XXI (May 1955), 209; Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, September 29, 1856; Cincinnati *Daily Enquirer*, September 28, 1856.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson *Mississippian*, July 27, 1859; Natchez *Free Trader*, September 23, 1858; Richard Sutcliffe, "The Breeding of Slaves for Sale and the Westward Expansion of Slavery, 1850–1860," in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, 1975), 173–210; Ronald T. Takaki, *A Pro-Slavery Crusade: The Agitation to Reopen the African Slave Trade* (New York, 1971), 44–45; Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978), 124–25. It should be noted that James DeBow, who in the early 1850s urged tropical acquisitions as a safety valve for the South's black excess population, by the late 1850s was advocating a resumption of the African slave trade. Durden "DeBow," 457.

A review of the historical roots of safety valve thought is pertinent here. It must be remembered that the safety valve theory was not the monopoly of the Southern Caribbean expansionists. Historically such reasoning had been utilized with much more frequency by nationally minded expansionists who needed to fashion an American consensus behind the expansionist thrust. Contentions that new acquisitions would eventually induce the disappearance of slavery within the United States, rather than strengthen the slave system as would have undoubtedly occurred had new areas conducive to slave labor been acquired, enabled nationalistic expansionists to parry claims that imperialism would benefit the slavocracy. Some Northern Democrats supporting the annexation of Texas in the 1840s had even argued that the safety valve dynamic might serve to rid the North of free blacks.<sup>21</sup> Major Wilson, furthermore, has shown that there was considerable ideological confusion within the antebellum South concerning the applicability of Malthusian reasoning to the expansion process. Southern anti-imperialists occasionally inverted the safety valve rationale and contended that there would be no problem if slavery were confined, but that expansion would either lead to a damaging drain of slaves out of the South into new territories (causing such an absence of slave labor that now ascendant non-slaveholders could abolish the institution), or would drain off too many entrepreneurially minded whites to tropical lands and produce commercial stagnation in the Old South.<sup>22</sup>

It is questionable whether soil exhaustion and land shortages in the Old South were as extensive as the safety valve school would have it. Some scholars have argued that cotton, the region's main market crop, did not

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Merk, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 23–27; Roy F. Nichols, *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (2nd ed., rev., Philadelphia, 1969), 131; Eric Foner, "Racial Attitudes of the New York Free Soilers," *New York History*, XLVI (October 1965), 311–29. Jonathan Mills Thornton, III, further points out the essentially propagandistic purpose of safety valve theory in "Power and Politics in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1806–1860," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1974), 297–98. The safety valve was previously employed by Virginians in 1798 arguing against a Federalist motion in Congress which would have prohibited slavery in the Mississippi Territory, and by Northern politicians at the time of the Missonri Compromise debates, to justify to their constituents their support of Jesse Thomas' amendment which permitted slavery south of 36°30' in the Louisiana Purchase territory. Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765–1820* (New York, 1971), 390; Ronald F. Banks, *Maine Becomes a State: The Movement to Separate Maine from Massachusetts, 1785–1820* (Middletown, Conn.), 199. Antislavery elements rejected the logic that allowing slavery to expand into the tropics would eliminate the institution in the South. Washington *National Era*, January 28, 1847.

<sup>22</sup> Major L. Wilson, "The Controversy Over Slavery Expansion and the Concept of the Safety Valve: Ideological Convulsion in the 1850's," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XXIV (Spring 1971), 135–53; Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, 244–45; Robert Benson Leard, "Bonds of Destiny: The United States and Cuba, 1848–1861," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1953), 252.

overly deplete soil minerals, that better cultivation methods were being introduced as the Civil War neared, and that improved acreage was outstripping population growth in the cotton belt in the 1850s. Actually, evidence is very sparse that Southern expansionists had genuine intentions to migrate to new acquisitions in the tropics. It is surprising how rarely Southern expansionists referred to emigration plans in their correspondence. In the massive mail of John A. Quitman regarding Cuba filibustering, there were few references which even anticipated such an eventuality. Quitman himself never spoke in personal terms about settling in Cuba, although his son did exclaim in February 1851, following a brief visit to Cuba: "Oh! how dearly I would like to live in such a paradise." This is not to say that migrations might not have followed annexations nor to deny that expansionists might have harbored subconscious emigration plans, but only to suggest that the lack of such references sheds doubt on the concept of land hunger as the prime motive for rendering support to the expansion movement. More credit can be given to commercial profit as an inducement for expansion advocacy, but here, too, caution must be used. For some, new annexations might have spelled economic hardship rather than economic gain. Cuba's annexation would have meant a lifting of Spanish tariffs and regulations which inhibited Cuba-United States trade, but such annexation, for this very reason, would have undermined the value of American sugar plantations. This possibility was starkly expressed in Texas representative Guy M. Bryan's alert to his brother in 1858:

If we remain in the Union Cuba will be purchased or taken possession of during the administration of Mr. [President James] Buchanan. In that event I have no doubt that sugar lands & sugar plantations will go down. Now I advise you & fast to sell out on the first favorable opportunity & move to cotton country. Keep this however to yourself & never breathe the subject to anyone but when you have a favorable opportunity sell & sell mine too. . . .<sup>23</sup>

The essence of the Southern Caribbean movement was political and related to the South's position within the Union rather than without. To understand why this was so, we have to consider this agitation within the context of the historical struggle for political power between the North

<sup>23</sup> F. Henry Quitman to Eliza Quitman, February 24, 1851, A. W. Hobson to John Quitman, June 20, 1854, John Quitman Papers, MDA; Guy M. Bryan to Austin Bryan, February 8, 1858, Guy M. Bryan Papers, Barker Texas History Center Archives, University of Texas, Austin; Herbert Weaver, *Mississippi Farmers* (Nashville, Tenn., 1945), 45–46, 80, 86–87; Wright, *Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 17, 33–34, 42, 132–33. In 1838, more than a decade prior to Quitman's involvement in Cuba filibustering, a correspondent of his did write him at length from Havana about crop yields and land prices in Cuba. C. M. [?] Mills to John Quitman, October 12, 1838, John Quitman Papers, MDA.



and the South which plagued the United States from the very founding of the Republic. Southern expansionists felt that the approximate equilibrium between the two sections in existence at the time of the Constitution's adoption had disappeared, and that the best way to make the South's position in the Union sound once again was through the acquisition of new slave territory and a resultant restoration of the balance of power.

Although sectional friction never totally engrossed the national political dialogue, even in the 1850s,<sup>24</sup> sectional distrust plagued the American Republic from its very inception. Such disharmony seriously affected the working of the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention; sectional argument continued to prove a formidable problem in subsequent years. Divergent issues such as representation in Congress based upon numbers of slaves, the locale for the national capital, debt, tax and tariff policies, diplomatic concerns (particularly the right to navigate the Mississippi River), and various policies affecting slavery seriously threatened the American experiment. Each section manifested fears that the other section would get such control over the federal apparatus that the national government would be manipulated to the benefit of one region and to the detriment of the other.<sup>25</sup>

Given the structure of the American political system, the issue of the admission of new territories and states into the Union became vital. New admissions, because they signified additional senators and representatives to fight for a region's interests, held the key to whether the equilibrium of power would be altered. The South ratified the Constitution partly because its delegates to the Convention assumed that the evolution of the territorial admissions process would favor Southern interests. In the late 1780s, Kentucky and Tennessee, settled primarily by Virginians and North Carolinians, were booming, while the Old Northwest remained Indian country. Marietta, the first settlement in the Old North-

<sup>24</sup> See particularly Joel H. Sillbey, *The Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841-1852* (Pittsburgh, 1967).

<sup>25</sup> Albert F. Simpson, "The Political Significance of Slave Representation, 1787-1821," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (August 1941), 315-42; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, 131-377; John Richard Alden, *The First South* (1961; reprint ed., Gloucester, Mass., 1968), *passim*; Joseph L. Davis, *Sectionalism in American Politics, 1774-1787* (Madison, 1977), 8, 66-67, 71, 125; Staughton Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution* (New York, 1967), 135-83; Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States During the Confederation, 1781-1789* (New York, 1950), 74, 173; Norman K. Risjord, *The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 1965). Glover Moore argues in *The Missouri Controversy, 1819-1821* (Lexington, 1953), 1-2, that there was considerable latent sectionalism even in the colonial period.

west, was not established until 1788.<sup>26</sup> Because the first article of the Constitution provided for a census within every ten years to determine enumeration for House apportionment purposes, it was assumed by many that the South would soon dominate the expansive process. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, with Jeffersonian Republicans in power, the Mississippi Territory consecrated to slavery, and the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase with slavery protected therein by the Louisiana Ordinance of 1804, it looked like such calculations were on target. New England criticism of the Louisiana Purchase, the Embargo of 1807, and the War of 1812 related, in no small degree, to feelings that such policies emanated from a Southern-controlled federal government, grounded in the slave representation clause of the Constitution.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, there were Southern apprehensions, from the beginning, that the North might prove the ultimate victor in the competition for political control. Southern opposition throughout the 1780s delayed the admission of Vermont since her creation as a state could conceivably impair Southern interests. In the War of 1812, Southern leaders calculated the political implications of the potential acquisition of Canada, and expressed apprehensions about its annexation.<sup>28</sup> A sense of the vitality of this issue is conveyed dramatically in a letter from Congressman James A. Bayard:

... Southern Gentlemen are alarmed by a point very seriously insisted upon by the northern—that in case Canada be conquered, that it shall be divided into States and inalienably incorporated into the Union. You will see the great and permanent weight which such an event would throw into the northern scale. No proposition could have been more frightful to the southern men. . . . The consequence has been that they now begin to talk of maritime war, and of the ocean being the only place where G. Britain is tangible. What I am telling you is not an affair generally or publicly spoken of. It has existed but a short time and passes as yet in whispers and a semi confidential way.<sup>29</sup>

Until 1819, however, this sectional competition for control over territorial admissions was more latent than expressed. The issue surfaced spo-

<sup>26</sup> Alden, *First South*, 75; Lynd, *Class Conflict*, 173-75.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, 264-82; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York, 1932), 27-30; Winfred E. A. Bernhard, *Fisher Ames: Federalist and Statesman: 1758-1808* (Chapel Hill, 1965), 339-42; James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, 1970), 84-121.

<sup>28</sup> Edmund Cody Burnett, *The Continental Congress* (New York, 1941), 543-44; Lynd, *Class Conflict*, 170, 191; Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (New York, 1925), 135-52.

<sup>29</sup> James A. Bayard to Andrew Bayard, May 2, 1812, in Elizabeth Donnan, ed., "Papers of James A. Bayard," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1913*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1915), II, 196-97.



radically, but did not yet consume the American political context.<sup>30</sup> Since there was not, as yet, a powerful antislavery movement in the North pledged to eradicate the institution throughout the United States, Southerners were wary, but not as wary, as they would later become over the admission of new free states. Because of military ineptitude, moreover, the acquisition of Canada in the War of 1812 never had to be seriously confronted.

The Missouri debates of 1819–1821 changed all this. From February 13, 1819, when New York representative James Tallmadge, Jr., introduced his amendment to the Missouri enabling bill which would have gradually ended slavery in the Missouri Territory as the price for its statehood, Southerners came to sense that their whole way of life had become inextricably bound up with the future path of territorial admissions. The debates did more than indicate that a movement was afoot to limit the future political power of the South. It also revealed that the American West was splitting on a North-South axis over the slavery issue. Southern politicians had initially approved the Northwest Ordinance, with its clause denying slavery, in the hope that Southerners would dominate emigration into the area and establish states sympathetic to Southern interests. Now it was apparent that such anticipations had been misguided. When the House voted on Tallmadge's amendment, six of eight representatives from the Old Northwest supported the provision that the further entry of slaves into Missouri should be prohibited, and four of the Old Northwest representatives backed the clause which would have gradually freed all children of slaves already in Missouri. Thus the American balance of power was becoming the simplest form of a bipolar balance structure, in which no prospective alliances could be formed with independent third interests, and territorial gains to one section would immediately become the other section's loss.<sup>31</sup> The effort of some Southern politicians a decade later in the Webster-Hayne debate to rekindle a once functioning South-West alliance, would prove futile.

<sup>30</sup> Pertinent here is Sara McCulloh Lemmon's *Frustrated Patriots: North Carolina and the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill, 1973), 6–9, which observes that although North Carolinians favored acquiring Florida more than acquiring Canada, expansionist sentiment in general in the state was muted.

<sup>31</sup> Charles S. Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819–1848* (Baton Rouge, 1948), 31, 117–18, 120–33; Moore, *Missouri Controversy*, 52–53; George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York, 1952), 201–202; Lynd, *Class Conflict*, 190–91, 209–10; Avery O. Craven, *The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848–1861* (Baton Rouge, 1953), 26–27. Ernest B. Haas explains in "The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept or Propaganda?" in Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., ed., *Politics and the International System*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1972), 454–55, 464, that one of the eight distinct meanings applied to the term *balance of power* is "an exact equilibrium of power between two or more contending parties."

The Missouri debate, as George Dangerfield explains, "summoned the South into being," because it opened the spectre of a possible Northern war upon slavery through domination of the federal government. Many Southerners harbored fears of the eventual abolition of slavery and the destruction of their economy and way of life, and resultant race war, as liberated slaves sought revenge upon and control over their former masters. The 36°30' compromise line drawn across the unorganized Louisiana Purchase territory, which helped resolve the Missouri question, could not dissipate such apprehensions, because it did not guarantee an even division of new states in the future between North and South. The line merely established a division of land along a geographical line which deeded considerably more land mass to the North than the South. Southerners, therefore, had to be vigilant that slavery would secure its due in the admission of new states. This mission acquired increased urgency in the 1830s and 1840s with the emergence of an organized abolition movement and political antislavery in the North. Although freesoilers generally disavowed intentions to attack slavery within the Southern states themselves, few Southerners accepted such professions at face value. And, as Richard Sewell has convincingly shown, many Liberty Party leaders, Freesoilers, and, later, Republicans looked upon halting slavery expansion as a major step toward the eventual eradication of slavery via the increase in Northern congressional power.<sup>32</sup> Abolition efforts in the 1830s to end slavery in the District of Columbia served as a harbinger of the uses to which abolition influence in Congress might be put.

Southern endeavors to maintain adequate political power in Washington centered on the United States Senate. Northern preponderance in the House of Representatives, already established by the Missouri debates, grew in subsequent years as a disproportionate number of immigrants made the North their home. Between 1820 and 1850 the South's percentage of the total national population declined from 46.7 percent to 41.5 percent, and its seat holdings in the House correspondingly declined from 42 percent of the total to 38 percent.<sup>33</sup> The Senate, however, had an exactly equal number of slave and free states (both immediately before and after the passage of the Compromise legislation) and it had been the

<sup>32</sup> Dangerfield, *Era of Good Feelings*, 201; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837–1860* (New York, 1976), 90–95, 198–99, 294–95, 308–20, 358–59; Diary of John Quincy Adams, November 20, 1841, in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams Comprising Portions of His Diary From 1795 to 1848*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1874–1877), XI, 29; *Washington National Era*, January 28, 1847.

<sup>33</sup> Jesse T. Carpenter, *The South as a Conscious Minority, 1789–1861* (1930; reprint ed., Gloucester, Mass., 1963), 21–22.

Senate which had blocked the Tallmadge amendment after it had cleared the House.

Even before the Missouri Compromise, there had been a tacit North-South understanding that new states should be admitted in pairs—one slave, one free—to perpetuate the sectional equilibrium in the Senate. After the Northern challenge over Missouri, however, this quest for Senate equilibrium became a sectional mission. Some Southern politicians opposed the Adams-Onís Treaty, acquiring Florida, because it forfeited American claims to Texas, which one day might prove essential for preserving the equilibrium. Later, after Mexican independence from Spain, as its acquisition became a salient issue, the pursuit of equilibrium was a facet of continuing Southern interest in Texas. Governor Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi, for instance, announced in his inaugural address in January 1844 that Texas was needed to offset the admission of Iowa and Wisconsin to statehood. Southern concern for parity was reflected in the third section of the joint congressional resolution annexing the Republic of Texas (which passed Congress on February 27, 1845). This section provided for the possible subdivision of Texas into four additional states in the future, if Texas consented. All such new states below 36°30' were to be slave; since the great bulk of Texas' claimed boundaries at that time (and the entire modern Texas lay) below that line, this was a clear concession to Southern demands for equilibrium. Satisfied with these terms, the Vicksburg *Sentinel* predicted that Texas' northern reaches would remain in Indian possession, while the "inhabited" parts of Texas would be open to cotton and Southern expansion. The same concern for parity influenced Southern hostility to the organization of the Oregon Territory without slavery (approved by Congress in August 1848), and provoked "the intense hostility of southerners to the Wilmot Proviso." As Chaplain Morrison explains, Southerners interpreted the Proviso as evidence of "the determination of this growing [Northern] power to appropriate the territories to itself, destroying the sectional balance of power and leaving the slave-holding states in its thrall."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Moore, *Missouri Controversy*, 344–45; Carpenter, *South as a Conscious Minority*, 105–12; James E. Winston, "The Annexation of Texas and the Mississippi Democrats," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXV (July 1921), 8; *Cong. Globe*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., 193, 363; Vicksburg *Sentinel*, February 13, 1845; R. Alton Lee, "Slavery and the Oregon Territorial Issue," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, LXIV (July 1973), 119; Chaplain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 59–61. The potential subdivision of Texas continued to be brought up from time to time. In August 1856, for instance, Representative Orasmus Matteson of New York introduced a resolution pertaining to the status of slavery in Texas should the Lone Star state be subdivided as initially provided for. John J. McRae's 1858 speech, cited earlier, also spoke of subdividing Texas. *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 2 Sess., 23; Natchez *Free Trader*, September 23, 1858.

There was rarely anything subtle in Southern demands, during this period and after, for a balance of power. Southerners frequently employed the terms "balance of power" and "equilibrium" in describing their political objectives, having few reservations about applying what were usually concepts of international diplomacy to the domestic political scene. When it came to the particular issue of slavery, the North and the South were functioning by the 1840s as separate nations, and diplomatic methods were appropriate for their disagreements. Donald Spencer has wisely observed in his lucid study of Louis Kossuth's visit to the United States in 1851–1852 that "traditionally diplomatic terms such as *non-intervention*, *non-intercourse*, and *balance of power* were losing their international connotation and were more likely to headline a sectional dispute than a European crisis." Spencer is on purely speculative ground when he hypothesizes that the South was prone to this approach because power determined both master-slave relations and upper-class control of politics within her borders, but he is surely right in acknowledging that Southern thinkers had come to cling "to the doctrine of realpolitik."<sup>35</sup>

Southern insistence upon the sectional power balance in the Senate amounted to a rearguard crusade following the passage of the 1850 Compromise, which, as John Quitman put it, left a "sectional majority" aligned "against the weaker portion, on the slavery question. . . ." As late as the Oregon crisis with Britain in 1846, a substantial number of Southern leaders had endorsed northward expansion (Oregon to 54°40') on nationalistic grounds, disregarding the potential negative impact such expansion might have upon Southern strength in Congress. Now, however, California's admission as a free state (without a compensating slave state) indicated that Southern parity in the Senate was slipping away. The

<sup>35</sup> Donald S. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848–1852* (Columbia, Missouri, 1977), 65, 99–100. Despite that thrust in American foreign policy which had traditionally advocated aloofness from European diplomatic affairs, American foreign policy makers had always utilized balance of power thinking to various ends; the concept, therefore, was hardly foreign to American politics. Thus American leaders had traditionally endorsed the balance of power concept insofar as it could be applied toward the prevention of one-power dominance in Europe, but rejected the idea that European countries might apply such reasoning to the Western Hemisphere. James K. Polk was able to rally considerable public support for his expansionist policies by distorting the Anglo-French *entente cordiale* of the mid-1840s into an alliance to establish a "balance of power" on this continent to check our advancement." Lawrence S. Kaplan, "Jefferson, the Napoleonic Wars, and the Balance of Power," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XIV (April 1957), 196–217; Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley, 1970), 73, 78, 150; Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843–1849* (New York, 1966); Logan, *No Transfer*, 1–241. American rejection of the applicability of the balance of power stemmed, in part, from the American colonies having been pawns in the European balance of power struggle. Max Saville, *The Origins of American Diplomacy: The International History of Angloamerica, 1492–1763* (New York, 1967).

Compromise left the South, from the vantage of pessimists in that region, a minority in both houses of Congress, dependent upon the questionable goodwill and political party loyalties of Northern moderates. Southern public figures, according to the scenario of the pessimists, would be reduced to begging for handouts from Yankee presidents, and the South would become, in William Yancey's words, "the Ireland of the Union." The dying John C. Calhoun avowed that the admission of California as a free state "with the intention of destroying irretrievably the equilibrium between the two sections" was cause enough to warrant secession, because it served notice that Oregon, Minnesota, and three states from the Mexican Cession would also be admitted under free status.<sup>36</sup>

Had more Southern leaders concurred in 1850–1851 with Calhoun's assessment that the sectional balance had "irretrievably" been lost, the Confederacy might have been a product of the California crisis rather than of Abraham Lincoln's election. But while there was a Southern consensus that the admission of California as a free state portended problems for the South in the future, many Southerners did not comprehend that the pattern established by California's admission was to prove permanent. The expansion of the South into the tropics became one possible means of correcting the imbalance produced by the 1850 legislation, and complemented Southern interest in those areas of the Southwest which had been left open to the expansion of slavery by the Compromise. Thus Daniel Yulee of Florida could suggest the annexation of Cuba to Calhoun in 1849 as an alternative to disunion, so that the South would be "in a position to check any such increase of free States as would settle their reponderance in the Government." The Narciso López filibuster expeditions to Cuba, launched at approximately the same time as the California controversy, were perceived in at least some Southern circles as a means to recreate the equilibrium. Tropical expansion, therefore, became an antidote to the perceived dependent status imposed upon the South. With Mexico and Cuba annexed, asserted filibuster John T. Pickett, "the rights of the South are no longer at the mercy of fanatical Northern demagogues, or entrusted to the feeble hands of our compromising vacillating brethren [Northern Democrats]."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> John A. Quitman to New Orleans committee, March 10, 1851 [copy], Quitman Family Papers, SHC; John Hope Franklin, "The Southern Expansionists of 1846," *Journal of Southern History*, XXV (August 1959), 323–38; Thornton, "Politics and Power in a Slave Society," 287. For an argument that the admission of California did not subvert the sectional equilibrium in the Senate, see Lee Benson, *Toward the Scientific Study of History* (Philadelphia, 1972), 269–70.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel L. Yulee to John C. Calhoun, July 10, 1849, in Chauncey S. Boucher and Robert Brooks, eds., "Correspondence Addressed to John C. Calhoun, 1837–1849," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1929* (Washington, 1930), 517;

Later, because the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 opened parts of the Louisiana Purchase to slavery which had been previously closed to the institution by virtue of the 36°30' line, Southern anxiety about westward slave expansion escalated. Jefferson Davis, in 1855, for instance, wrote that abolitionists, through domination of Congress, were on the threshold of making the South "tributary" to the North, and urged that Southerners make an effort to "counteract" this dominance by colonizing Kansas and New Mexico. However, there were doubts in the South concerning the adaptability of slave labor to the West, and there was stiff freesoil opposition to westward slavery extension. On the other hand, it was an axiom of Southern expansionist thought that slave labor was appropriate—indeed fundamental—to cultivate tropical soils. Many Southern leaders hoped that the Kansas legislation would open things up for slavery expansion, because it acknowledged the principle that resident peoples could decide for themselves the status of slavery. It was clear that any referendum in Cuba would endorse slavery, and Southern expansionists hoped that other tropical areas where slavery was not present at that time could be converted to the institution.<sup>38</sup> The fundamental motive behind the varied strains of Southern expansionism was the same: to discover a middle-of-the-road alternative to "submission" to Northern freesoilism or secession. If antislavery power in the Senate via the admission of new free states could be held at bay or offset by new slave states, there would be little chance of legislation subverting slavery and the Southern way of life, and the Union could prevail.

In the end, it hardly mattered just where the new slave states and new slave state senators derived from, just so long as they turned up in the Capitol, took their appropriate seats, and tipped the balance in what Thomas J. Green of Texas labelled "*the last conservator of the south*." Green advised President-elect James Buchanan in November 1856 that,

Natchez *Free Trader*, August 6, 1851; *Arkansas Gazette and Democrat*, May 19, 1854; John T. Pickett to John A. Quitman, March 20, 1854. John Quitman Papers, MDA. David Potter, however, hypothesizes that the South probably sacrificed Cuba by its insistence upon the Kansas-Nebraska Act. According to Potter, the North would probably have acquiesced in the acquisition of Cuba had not passions been aroused by the Kansas legislation. Potter suggests that, because of this, the South probably conceded more than it gained by the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 198. For the continuing optimism of Southern radicals regarding slavery expansion within the Union during the 1850 crisis, see Major L. Wilson, "Ideological Fruits of Manifest Destiny: The Geopolitics of Slavery Expansion in the Crisis of 1850," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, LXIII (Summer 1970), 140.

<sup>38</sup> Jefferson Davis to William R. Cannon, December 7, 1855, quoted in Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession, 1856–1861* (Baton Rouge, 1938), 26–27; *Sumter County (Alabama) Whig*, November 14, 1855; *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 620; *Documents of the First Session of the Fourth Legislature of the State of Louisiana*, 1858, 13 (message of Governor Robert Wickliffe to the state legislature).

were Kansas admitted as a slave state, the South would care little for Cuba; but were Kansas admitted as a free state, Buchanan had better get Cuba, for an "equal number of southern & northern senators" was "indispensable" to the South. Since, by the late 1850s, there were indications that the South was falling a number of states behind in the competition for control of the Senate, some Southern expansionists hoped that an American Cuba could be subdivided into more than one slave state.<sup>39</sup>

California, in other words, need not have been the final determination of the equilibrium. But time was of the essence. Southerners needed to know soon what they might expect in terms of enhanced political power, before the North became so predominant that the South forfeited all ability to resist. As John Tyler, Jr., explained regarding Cuba in 1851,

I look to the acquisition of Cuba as of great importance to the South. Through its acquisition the question as to the abidance of the North, *honestly & fairly*, by the provisions of the Constitution as to slavery, would be tested while the South have the power of resistance & the privilege of seceding. This point is of consequence looking to the graphic increase of the Free Soil States & their abolition population.<sup>40</sup>

This concept of sectional political equilibrium surfaced constantly within the Southern tropical expansion persuasion, particularly in private letters. When expansionists were not explicitly stating the case for equilibrium, they used general language regarding the "political necessity" of tropical acquisitions. Even Matthew Fontaine Maury, for all his statements about the tropical safety valve, saw the urgency of the Senate situation. In early 1860 Maury proposed that the power disparity be resolved by giving a majority of Southern senators a veto on important legislation. It is clear from reading the correspondence of expansionists, that from their perspective the very *independence* of the South was at stake in the tropical expansion movement. The crisis in Congress was so universally felt in Dixie that it induced Southerners otherwise predisposed to anti-imperialism to find some virtue in expansion. Thus Josiah James Evans, United States Senator from South Carolina, argued in 1858 that Republicans through their preponderance in Congress would emancipate "our negroes or hold us in a state of dependence by the threat & ability to do so," and concluded:

<sup>39</sup> Thomas J. Green to Henry S. Foote, June 29, 1859 [copy], Thomas J. Green to James Buchanan, November, 1856 [draft], in Thomas J. Green Papers, SHC; Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, February 20, 1858; *Richmond Enquirer*, July 30, 1857.

<sup>40</sup> John Tyler, Jr. to John A. Quitman, July 31, 1851, Quitman Papers, Harvard. See also Chambers (Alabama) *Tribune* quoted in *Richmond Enquirer* March 13, 1860, and C. R. Wheat to Quitman, July 31, 1851, John Quitman Papers, MDA.

But for the belief that this is their object, I should care little for the extension of slavery or the admission of slave states. We have territory enough to occupy as many as we have or are likely to have for a long time to come. It is by the addition of new states alone that we can save ourselves from this final catastrophe.<sup>41</sup>

This same sense of desperation frequently emerged in the expansionist press:

The only hope for the South is in expansion. The equilibrium of power must be maintained or the united glories of this Union must be numbered among the relics of tradition. . . .

The equilibrium of power . . . *must* be maintained; and this can only be done by Southern expansion. The tropical regions—the Cubas—the Nicaraguas, Mexico and the whole Central American country is . . . the only hope for the South.<sup>42</sup>

Just when Southern expansionists concluded that the restored equilibrium was a delusive hope varied by individual. Such realizations, when they did occur, did not automatically trigger secessionist activity. Nevertheless, it is significant that by the late 1850s only the naïve could have failed to recognize that the days of slavery extension and equilibrium were over. Freesoil elements, by then, had proven that they had the power to stymie any attempts to introduce into the Union new slave territories from the tropics. The "antislavery section," as put by the Charleston *Mercury* in 1859, "is not prepared to buy and annex Cuba, as additional slave States in the Union, and never will be." The pattern in the West, moreover, was also clear. The admission of Minnesota in 1858, Oregon in 1859, and Kansas in January 1861, as free states, worsened an already intolerable Southern political position. By early 1861 antislavery Republicans exuded such confidence that they had triumphed in the territorial struggle, that they could agree to the organization of the Colorado, Dakota, and Nevada territories minus any formal restrictions

<sup>41</sup> A. Dudley Mann to Lawrence Keitt, August 21, 1855, Lawrence Keitt Papers, DU; A. Dudley Mann to John Perkins, January 26, 1856, John Perkins Papers, SHC; Matthew Fontaine Maury to Bishop James H. Otey, January 16, 1860, Matthew F. Maury Papers, Library of Congress; Josiah James Evans to Benjamin F. Perry, March 3, 1858, Benjamin F. Perry Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

<sup>42</sup> *Natchez Free Trader*, July 1, 1857; *Mobile Daily Register*, June 22, 1858, February 23, 1859; Tuskegee (Alabama) *Republican*, January 7, 1858. See also Luis Molina and Napoleon Escalante to Nasario Toledo, April 3, 1858, quoted in Thomas Schoonover, "Foreign Relations and Kansas in 1858," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XLII (Winter 1976), 345–52. Molina and Escalante, Costa Rican diplomatic representatives to the United States, wrote home that Southern aggressiveness toward Mexico, Cuba, and Central America could be attributed to the "desperation" by which the South sought to "prevent power from escaping its hands, and in order to reestablish equilibrium."

against slavery expansion.<sup>43</sup> Expansionist allies in the Northern Democracy, moreover, were of little comfort to the South on the equilibrium issue. While individuals such as Stephen Douglas were willing to countenance slavery expansion, they specifically rejected Southern assertions that the slave states had a constitutionally guaranteed right to a political equilibrium. Douglas rebuked Southern senators for voicing such claims, and Democratic expansionist Samuel Cox of Ohio bluntly argued in 1859 that the Constitution had nought a word about a "right of equality in the number of states," and that the "moment you claim equilibrium of States, that moment your honor is compromised."<sup>44</sup>

Southern unionism, by the late 1850s, was no longer buttressed by reasonable hope that a sectional equilibrium was still within the capability of the South, as had seemed possible in 1850. Had such hopes persisted, the Southern reaction to events such as John Brown's raid and Lincoln's election might not have been so extreme. The failure of the Crittenden Compromise in the winter of 1860–1861, with its provision that slavery would henceforth be guaranteed in all territory "hereafter acquired" south of the 36°30' line, simply reconfirmed that there would be no concessions from the North on the equilibrium issue at the last moment. Other compromises offered at the time won little favor with Southern expansionists, not because they necessarily failed to provide for better treatment in the future, but because they did not remedy what was perceived as a robbery of fundamental rights which had occurred in the past. The *Memphis Appeal* explained its rejection of Stephen Douglas' proposal that henceforth a two-thirds vote of each congressional house be needed to acquire new territory, by asserting that the "hopes of southern statesmen, who have long struggled to restore the equilibrium between the two sections, would be dashed."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Charleston *Mercury*, January 24, 1859; Charles Desmond Hart, "Why Lincoln Said 'No': Congressional Attitudes on Slavery Expansion, 1860–1861," *Social Science Quarterly*, IL (December 1968), 740; Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York, 1970), 213.

<sup>44</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973), 539; *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 2 Sess., 430–35.

<sup>45</sup> *Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 5, 1861; "Barbarossa" [John Scott], *The Lost Principle, or the Sectional Equilibrium: How It was Created—How Destroyed—How It May Be Restored* (Richmond, 1860), vii, 211–18, and *passim*. As with the Missouri Compromise, Crittenden's plan did not guarantee slavery extension. Had it been enacted, it might have inhibited future acquisitions of territory. Free-soilers, faced with the certainty that future expansion south of 36°30' was pledged in advance to slavery, probably would have tried to thwart such acquisitions. This helps explain why Southern opinion did not rally unanimously behind Crittenden's program. See, for instance, the speech of secessionist James P. Holcombe at the Virginia secession convention. George H. Reese, ed., *Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861*, 4 vols. (Richmond, 1965), II, 81–82. Douglas' plan, submitted to the special Senate committee of thirteen on December 24, 1860, can be found in *Senate Reports*, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 288, 9.

The secession that ensued, insofar as it related to tropical expansion projects, marked not so much a quest for empire outside the Union, as an admission that empire within the Union was impossible. Rhetoric was emitted regarding a potential tropical slaveholding empire after secession, but such rhetoric reflected more a need to woo undecided Southerners toward secession through visions of prosperity than it did any formulated programs to achieve such ambitions. It is possible, of course, that had the Civil War not intervened, Confederate expansionist efforts might have been initiated, for strategic, economic, and/or racial reasons. But the issue's vitality before the Civil War related to its potential for alleviating the necessity to secede in the first place.

The suggestion that Southern expansionism operated from an essentially defensive framework need not imply that Southern demands were reasonable. John Bassett Moore's caveat that most "designers" of power balances actually prefer preponderances of power, of course, applies to the Southern territorial quest; Allan Nevins' argument in his *Ordeal of the Union* that Southern security was far less endangered than the region's alarmists alleged also merits some respect. From the viewpoint of Northern free-soilers, Southern expansionists certainly intended far more than mere equilibrium. It would be an historiographical tragedy were we to resurrect Chauncey Boucher's oft-cited "*In Re That Aggressive Slavocracy*," which exonerated Southerners from all responsibility for the sectional struggle over the territories.<sup>46</sup> Rather, what is intended, is a recognition that Southerners approached slavery expansion with a defensive mentality, and that the failure of the expansion crusade *may* have put their "peculiar institution" in serious jeopardy.<sup>47</sup> Worrying over their shrinking political status in the Union, they rationally regarded Caribbean acquisitions as a means of reversing a dangerous trend, which dated from the Missouri debates. When understood from this perspective, it can be seen that Southern tropical expansionism in the 1850s constituted a last scene, or epilogue, to the play upon which James Tallmadge, Jr., had raised the opening curtain.

<sup>46</sup> John Bassett Moore, *International Law and Some Current Illusions* (New York, 1924), 310–11; Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, 8 vols. (New York, 1947–71), I, 282; Chauncey S. Boucher, "*In Re That Aggressive Slavocracy*," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, VIII (June–September 1921), 13–79. See also David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia, Missouri, 1973), 605–606, and Norman A. Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (New York, 1955), for effective rebuttals of the view that President James K. Polk's expansionism in the 1840s was the work of an aggressive slavocracy.

<sup>47</sup> Eric Foner, "Politics, Ideology, and the Origins of the American Civil War," in George M. Fredrickson, ed., *A Nation Divided: Problems and Issues of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Minneapolis, 1975), 31–33.