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## THE CHANGING LOYALTIES OF JAMES HENRY HAMMOND: A RECONSIDERATION

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Although there were South Carolinians who either opposed secession or equivocated on the issue until it was too late to take a positive stand, historians have correctly been more interested in evaluating the political activities and in understanding the motivation of the vast majority of Carolinians who supported co-operative or single state secession. Early historical works detailed political behavior and studied intellectual and propagandistic writers, while current scholars have dealt with complex internal racial and psychological motivation and attempted to grasp the meaning of the total material culture.<sup>1</sup> When historians have applied their methods to the so-called Unionists, they have concluded that similar reasons, especially planter fear of losing economic and social status, motivated the Unionists of South Carolina.<sup>2</sup> A reconsideration of those political leaders who questioned the *means* used to achieve secession, the so-called Unionists, especially regarding the interaction between political activity and the political ideal, could put the complex secessionist movement in South Carolina into sharper historical perspective.

While the actual political power of the planter aristocracy remains debatable, historians have justified their concentration on those planters with fifty slaves or more, because so many of them were supposedly in the vanguard of the secession movement.<sup>3</sup> Certainly the slaveholders and those rising young politicians who sought planter status felt that they had the most to gain or lose from the disruption of the Union. The planters were also reputed to have had a set of values which placed

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<sup>1</sup> For example, compare Harold S. Schultz, *Nationalism and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1852-1860* (Durham, 1950), and Charles E. Cauthen, *South Carolina Goes to War* (Chapel Hill, 1950), with Eugene Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made* (New York, 1969), and Steven Channing, *Crisis of Fear* (New York, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1964), pp. 36-37; Channing, *Crisis of Fear*, pp. 369-371.

<sup>3</sup> See Ralph A. Wooster, *The Secession Conventions of the South* (Princeton, N. J., 1962), chap. 2; Ralph A. Wooster, *The People in Power* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1969), pp. 36-37.

a priority on political service and duty, although few of them bothered to articulate those values in any works on political theory or to rationalize secession in political terms. Half of the secession convention delegates owned at least fifty slaves, and at least twenty-four owned more than a hundred slaves. But there were more than 450 planters who owned over 100 slaves and, though there were reasons for those planters to have avoided the convention, if service and vested interest in loss of status were major factors in leading planters to secession, then there should have been a larger contingent of planter aristocrats active in the secession movement. At least three of the 450 have been classified as so-called Unionists, and many other planters either equivocated or refused to participate in any of the political events which led to secession.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly some of those planters were fearful of any change, but were they Unionists?

The most perplexing behavior of any South Carolina planter-statesman, whose career shall serve as a model for the other Unionists, was that of James Henry Hammond, a lifetime secessionist who, as United States Senator from 1858 to 1860, established a reputation as an equivocal Unionist. A tall, handsome, arrogant man, given to portliness in old age, Hammond had been a precocious student, having rushed through South Carolina College by the time he was nineteen, who had turned to law and newspaper editing on the eve of nullification. He quickly caught the notice of John C. Calhoun and George McDuffie, became an advisor to those radical leaders, then made a fortunate marriage to an heiress and retired to the pleasant contemplation of a lifetime fortune in planting. Calhoun requested that he resume public duty, and at the age of twenty-eight, Hammond was elected to Congress, where he made a reputation as an opponent of the abolitionist petitions. In the midst of his success Hammond developed an illness which required him to travel abroad, where he sharpened his political views and bought wine and paintings in the manner of a medieval baron. In 1842 Hammond was elected governor and joined another secession group, Robert Barnwell Rhett's Bluffton Movement, which had been precipitated by Texas annexation and the tariff struggle. Hammond's faction lost the battle for a state secession convention to the now more moderate Calhoun, and because of a personal scandal Hammond again

<sup>4</sup> Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *The Last Foray* (Columbia, S. C., 1971), *Passim*; Lillian A. Kibler, "Unionist Sentiment in South Carolina in 1860," *Journal of Southern History*, IV (Aug., 1938), 356, 361. The term so-called Unionists is used to follow Kibler's characterization and connotes my skepticism over calling them Unionists.

retired from public life. As a delegate to the Nashville Convention of 1850, a movement for unified Southern opposition to compromise over the extension of slavery, Hammond again found himself on the wrong side of a secession struggle, though he had finally moved from single state to an advocate of united Southern secession.<sup>5</sup>

During five years of semi-retirement, he continuously lectured throughout the state on agricultural and political topics. Hammond also studied history and added to his writings on political theory, though much of his work was disorganized. A dogmatic, self-praising, and self-deceiving individual, Hammond had acquired a reputation as the most able political mind and most statesmanlike politician in the South after the death of Calhoun. In the fall of 1857 South Carolina's legislature elected Hammond to the United States Senate, because of his intellectual status and because he was the compromise between disputing political factions in the state. Neither James L. Orr's National Democrats nor Rhett's radical secession faction was certain of Hammond's position, but each thought that he favored its respective views.<sup>6</sup> Hammond served in the Senate until November 11, 1860, when he resigned his seat after cautioning the state legislature against precipitant action. He then refused to serve in any public capacity to achieve secession. In the Senate Hammond had acquired a mixed reputation in South Carolina; for a few he was a dedicated secessionist, for many a confirmed Unionist, and for some a practical co-operationist. Though the author largely agrees with those scholars who have evaluated Hammond's Senate career as that of a cautious but committed secessionist, a reconsideration of Hammond's exact political behavior from 1857 through 1860 should place his motives and his indecisiveness into clearer perspective.<sup>7</sup>

Hammond went to Washington early in 1858 as a committed Southern consolidationist, determined that a unified South could rule the Union or "send it to the devil." Though he immediately developed a

<sup>5</sup> This biographical material is taken from Hammond's own self-analysis. See Hammond to William Gilmore Simms, July 8, 1848, Hammond Papers, Library of Congress (hereinafter cited HPLC); Hammond to Beaufort Taylor Watts, Nov. 24, 1845, to Marcellus Hammond, Nov. 26, 1846, Hammond Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (hereinafter cited HPSC); *Thoughts and Recollections, 1852-1853*, HPSC. Also see Elizabeth Merritt, *James Henry Hammond* (Baltimore, 1923).

<sup>6</sup> For an account of the political divisions in South Carolina, see Schultz, *Nationalism and Sectionalism*, chap. 7, and Laura A. White, "The National Democrats in South Carolina, 1852 to 1860," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXVIII (Oct., 1929), 379.

<sup>7</sup> See Laura A. White, *Robert Barnwell Rhett* (Gloucester, Mass., 1965), p. 147; Merritt, *Hammond*, pp. 139-141; Cauthen, *S. C. Goes to War*, pp. 58-59.

distaste for the poor quality of the Southern leaders whom he found there, Hammond realized that he had to overcome a personal reputation as a radical as well as to reform the radical image of his own state before he could hope for a united South.<sup>8</sup> To head off any radical movement in South Carolina he became involved in a scheme to purchase the Rhett-owned *Charleston Mercury*. This scheme, which never succeeded, nevertheless gave him an opportunity to advise young radicals in Congress such as William Porcher Miles and helped to moderate the radicalism of both Miles and the Rhett family.<sup>9</sup> Hammond voted for the Lecompton Constitution, which would have admitted Kansas as a slave state, and he spoke against Stephen A. Douglas' squatter sovereignty program in hopes of defusing a volatile issue which divided Democratic leaders in Congress. In his "Mud-Sill" speech, which claimed the need for a servant class to free the leaders to pursue their governmental duties, he favored recommitment of the entire Kansas bill in order to calm those Southern Congressmen who had begun to talk of civil war. Making a direct pitch for Southern harmony, Hammond boasted that the South already controlled the Mississippi River, and he affirmed that common economic and social institutions united and prepared the South to control the direction of the Union.<sup>10</sup>

Some Southerners seemed to understand that Hammond was advocating moderation in order to give the rest of the South an opportunity to solidify, but most South Carolinians were incensed over his views and demanded an explanation for his apparent unionist behavior. Back home at Beech Island, in the summer of 1858, Hammond claimed that the Kansas climate could hardly tolerate slave labor and that unplanned expansion negated the more important issue of unifying the Southern people. He compounded the felony by discounting the Republican party as a threat to the South at that time.<sup>11</sup> His friends felt that he had erred

<sup>8</sup> Hammond to Simms, Dec. 19, 1857, Jan. 20, March 24, 1858, HPLC; also see J. H. Means to Robert Barnwell Rhett, July 20, 1857, Robert Barnwell Rhett Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina (hereinafter cited SHC).

<sup>9</sup> Hammond to Simms, Feb. 7, March 22, April 5, 1858, HPLC; I. W. Hayne to Hammond, April 17, 21, 1858, William Porcher Miles Papers, SHC.

<sup>10</sup> James Henry Hammond, *Letters and Speeches* (New York, 1866). pp. 301, 303, 305, 307, 308, 311; for earlier plans see *Russell's Magazine*, I (1857), 77.

<sup>11</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, July 26, Aug. 9, 1858; Hammond to Simms, July 3, 1858, HPLC. For reaction to the speech, see Milledge L. Bonham to his brother, Aug. 14, 1858, Bonham Papers, South Caroliniana Library (hereinafter cited S. C.); John Cunningham to Hammond, Aug. 2, 1858, William Henry Trescot to Hammond, Aug. 15, 1858, and Governor John A. Means to Hammond, Oct. 9, 1858, HPLC.

on the side of unionism, and they advised him to clarify his views again. Speaking at Barnwell Courthouse in October, Hammond took the offense against those who feared attachment to national parties by condemning all local politicians whose desire for personal gain divided the South. He said that he had once believed that the South's only safety was in dissolution of the Union, but he had come to feel that "we can fully sustain ourselves in the union and control its actions in all great affairs." In an attempt to conciliate the radicals he concluded that he had always regarded the Union as a policy rather than a principle.<sup>12</sup>

South Carolinians reacted with mixed emotions toward their new senator. Miles alleged that even the co-operationists had begun to doubt Hammond's veracity. Radicals such as Governor John Adams and Maxcy Gregg felt betrayed. The Unionist Benjamin F. Perry said that the senator had dealt the death blow to disunion and revolution.<sup>13</sup> But a handful of astute politicians discovered a pattern of behavior which led them to believe that Hammond was correct in claiming "that our fellow Southern States are not yet ready to move." When the moderate James Chesnut was elected to the Senate with largely Co-operationist support, the *Mercury* noted that Hammond's strategy of achieving unity and calm in South Carolina has succeeded.<sup>14</sup> Hammond, who hardly had cause to show confidence in Southern leadership, was advocating their co-operation, which would lead the South to secession.

Early in 1859 Hammond explained much of his practical behavior by saying that while a private man could hold extreme views, a representative man, forced to work with national politicians, had to present a moderate position "so as to maintain flexibility for future action." He had found Southern leaders ignorant, cunning "Blackguards whom the vulgar have placed in high places," who were in no position to discuss united action. Therefore, though he had always loathed national parties and had resented South Carolinians' joining any national caucus, he called for Southern politicians to work with the National Democrats. His proclamation of patriotic Buchanan Democratic fervor for expansion

<sup>12</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 334, 328, 335, 353, 356-357.

<sup>13</sup> Lillian A. Kibler, *Benjamin F. Perry* (Durham, 1946), pp. 291-292; William P. Miles to Hammond, Nov. 10, 1858, Hammond to Marcellus, Nov. 28, 1858, HPLC; Maxcy Gregg (ed.), *An Appeal to the State Rights Party of South Carolina* (Columbia, 1858), pp. 25-36.

<sup>14</sup> *Mercury*, Feb. 11, 1859; *Russell's Magazine*, III (April, 1858), 96; R. B. Rhett, Jr. to Hammond, Nov. 5, 1858, James Gadsden to Hammond, Nov. 19, 1858, HPLC.

into Central America must have sickened even his loyal supporters.<sup>15</sup> South Carolina's radicals schemed to keep Hammond from joining the Douglas Democrats, but there was never a reason to believe that the Senator had any intention of supporting Douglas. Orr and his Democratic cronies knew this because Hammond had opposed their attempts to elect a moderate Congressman from Charleston by defeating the radical anti-National Democrat William P. Miles.<sup>16</sup> Hammond's support for the Democratic party was based on his desire to use that party as an instrument for sectional unity and in no way signalled his capitulation to unionism.

Upon returning home Hammond found that most Carolinians believed him too vociferous a defender of the Union and too little concerned over the election of a Republican President. Letters published in the *Mercury* denounced his loyalty to the Democrats and questioned his value to the South.<sup>17</sup> In the wake of such criticism, and after learning that the fall session of the state legislature had turned into a series of meaningless debates rather than being devoted to the development of serious plans for action, a sick and tired Hammond resolved to forego the 1860 Congressional session in Washington. But he was a leader whose sense of duty, especially after the John Brown raid, forced him to return to the Capitol to politic for the election of a Southern Democrat as President.<sup>18</sup>

Hammond's public political behavior during most of 1860 should have put doubt in the minds of those who insisted upon calling him a Unionist. He worked actively against Douglas' nomination and attempted to unite Southern Congressmen around the candidacies of either Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia or John C. Breckenridge of Kentucky. Though he publicly stated that the Democratic party could serve as an instrument for uniting the South, behind the scenes Hammond instructed the South Carolina delegation to the Democratic convention to leave the convention after a sizable and unified delegation from other Southern

<sup>15</sup> Congressional *Globe*, 35 Cong., 2 sess, p. 1525; Hammond to Simms, April 22, July 30, 1859, HPLC; F. W. Pickens to Milledge Bonham, April 2, 1859, Bonham Papers, S. C.

<sup>16</sup> Trescot to Miles, Feb. 8, 1859, Miles Papers, N. C.; Orr to Hammond, Sept. 17, 1859, HPLC.

<sup>17</sup> John Cunningham to Hammond, Oct. 14, 1859, HPLC. See letters to editor in *Mercury*, Aug.-Dec., 1859.

<sup>18</sup> Hammond to Spann Hammond, Dec. 5, 1859, HPSC; Hammond to Watts, Dec. 6, 1859, Beaufort Taylor Watts Papers, S. C.; D. H. Hamilton to Miles, Dec. 9, 1859, Miles Papers, N. C.

states had resigned.<sup>19</sup> Unable to attend the Charleston meeting for the election of delegates to the Richmond convention, he telegraphed the members to forsake any pretense of co-operation with the National Democrats, and he advised Southerners to form their own party behind Breckinridge. When the senator discovered that most Southern Congressmen still distrusted Rhett, he asked Rhett to avoid any open support of Breckinridge in the *Mercury*.<sup>20</sup> In his last Senate speech, countering Douglas' attempt to divide Southern Democrats on the issue of a territorial slave code, Hammond reminded the North that South Carolina's failure to secede in 1850 had resulted in the movement for Southern co-operation.<sup>21</sup>

When Hammond returned home from Washington, he wanted to retire from the political life of coercing and educating the South's leaders, but his constituents demanded his views on pressing public issues. His request that those who urged disunion create a positive program probably resulted in a secret meeting at his plantation to discuss the best means of achieving secession.<sup>22</sup> Most significant was Hammond's long letter in response to a request from the state legislature for his views on secession, in which he flatly stated that he would follow his state, "whenever she determined to dissolve the union," though he was convinced that the election of a Black Republican President would not result in secession. He feared that the internal squabbling of unprincipled politicians in search of the spoils of revolution made secession over the election of 1860 impossible. Strategically, he cautioned that the rest of the South had never forgiven South Carolina's irresponsible radical leaders of the past, and he advised his own state to follow rather than lead. When South Carolina's radical leaders debated plans to disrupt the upcoming presidential inauguration in Washington, Hammond told the legislature that "I fear in the organization of a new Government our own Demagogues at home, more than all our enemies abroad." To that end Hammond insisted that South Carolina's secessionists meet in a Southern convention and accept the United States Constitution for the Confederacy without any modification. He concluded

<sup>19</sup> Merritt, *Hammond*, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> Hammond to Miles, July 16, 1860, Trescot to Miles, May 8, 12, 1860, Miles Papers, N. C.; Hammond to Simms, July 10, 1860, HPLC; also see *Mercury*, May 21, 1860.

<sup>21</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 365-368; also see *Charleston Daily Courier*, June 8, 1860.

<sup>22</sup> Hammond to I. W. Hayne, Sept. 19, 21, 1860, Hammond to Marcellus, Aug. 30, 1860, HPLC; Hammond to Bonham, Oct. 30, 1860, Bonham Papers, S. C.; *Courier*, Nov. 7, 1860. Also see Merritt, *Hammond*, p. 140.



his letter by saying that the American Revolution had required years of work by intelligent leaders who had never submerged their judgments to the popular excitement.<sup>23</sup> When it was finally time for action, Hammond's analysis of the poor quality of Southern leadership had led him to believe that the South was hardly prepared for secession.

Yet less than a week later, on November 11, 1860, upon hearing that Robert Toombs of Georgia and James Chesnut had resigned from the Senate, Hammond also resigned, perhaps in the belief that such a symbolic act would unite the South.<sup>24</sup> After that, Hammond refused service in the secession movement, although he did advise South Carolina's secessionists to make certain that other cotton states were planning conventions and were prepared to secede. He suggested to a delegation of Georgia radicals that Georgians meet in convention and decide for secession before South Carolina met on December 17. In a letter to the *Mercury* he was adamant about South Carolina following the others, his practical reasoning being that his own state could not secede alone. When friends asked him to stand for election to the secession convention, he again refused.<sup>25</sup>

Hammond's final behavior, a combination of headstrong impulse and practical action, left many of his friends with the feeling that he had equivocated when he was most needed. For many Carolinians his actions were at best conservative; for others he was so cautious that they thought that he had become a unionist. His personal analysis was mixed; without explanation he confided to his diary that the Union was worth more than slavery, though publicly he said that he preferred secession.<sup>26</sup> However, his practical political activities revealed a man who had spent his Senate career trying to unite the South, only to be frustrated by what he considered to be faulty leadership. Hammond's continual carping about irresponsible politicians and his fears concerning the consequences of secession are clues to understanding his equivocation between secession and union. Perhaps a look beyond Hammond's practical behavior to his political theory and the code of service by which he lived could additionally clarify Hammond's changing loyalties.

<sup>23</sup> James Henry Hammond, "Rough of Letter to South Carolina Legislature," HPSC. The legislature suppressed Hammond's letter.

<sup>24</sup> Hammond to Simms, Dec. 12, 1861, HPLC; also see Edmund Ruffin Diary, IV, 92-94, Library of Congress. (Hammond was wrong on Toombs, but his error was uncorrectable.)

<sup>25</sup> Hammond to Committee in Georgia, Nov. 22, 1860, HPLC; *Mercury*, Nov. 30, 1860. Also see C. Fitzsimmons to Hammond, Nov. 29, 1860, HPSC; Watts to Hammond, Dec. 1, 1860, Watts Papers, S. C.

<sup>26</sup> Hammond *Diary*, p. 170, HPSC.

Parallel to the contention that men like Hammond opposed secession because they were disestablished by a new political elite is the theoretical argument that Hammond's political philosophy was so conservative that he could not bear change of any kind. On the other hand, a scholar has asserted that Hammond's political theory was based on controlling the masses, so that when his class was threatened, he had no choice but to support secession. Another, after studying Hammond's proslavery writings, has concluded that Hammond was a member of the new political elite and thus sought to please the established planters by lamenting the decline of aristocratic values.<sup>27</sup> Most have judged Hammond a conservative theorist without carefully evaluating the relationship between government and order, leadership and duty in Hammond's philosophy of politics.

Hammond considered the people the source of all power; their desires and needs formed the basis of his political philosophy. The instrument for controlling this power was ordered government. Therefore, people formed government to function as security for themselves and their property. If society created government, the history of western politics proved that government always became too strong, thus provoking a continuous battle for balance between freedom and security. Hammond also studied the science of human nature and found that the people often lacked reason and therefore were susceptible to coercion by those who would distort the true purpose of government. Popular government required responsible leaders to guide the people to their true interests.<sup>28</sup> In other words, government was important as an instrument of order imposed by the people on their society. Their leaders were to set the standards of compromise between freedom and order.

The fact that Hammond's governing order was adapted to the social system calls for comment on the contribution of slavery to the structure of government. Hammond called slavery a cornerstone of representative government. His most succinct statement of the role of slavery was in his Mud-Sill speech of 1858, where he related the leaders to the menials which "constitute the very mud-sill of society and of political government." The menials were called slaves, fortunately black and part of an "inferior" race. Every freeman was considered an aristocrat, and the

<sup>27</sup> Eaton, *Mind of Old South*, pp. 21-42; David Donald, "The Proslavery Argument Reconsidered," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXVII (Feb., 1971), 3-18.

<sup>28</sup> Because Hammond left no organized body of writings, it has been necessary to create a composite topical study of his theory. Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 88-91, 217, 299-300; *Mercury*, Nov. 4, 1847; Hammond to Simms, Nov. 18, 1853, HPLC.

dichotomy provided for the best organization of society. In Hammond's system, slaves had no political influence, nor did their existence determine the structure of government. Rather they freed whites to recognize their political interests in preserving a stable and well-ordered government.<sup>29</sup>

If slavery in Hammond's theoretical system freed whites to compete for office, this did not imply a democracy of leadership. Throughout most of his life Hammond believed in an aristocracy of political leadership, based on intellect and ability rather than on wealth or status. His old professor Thomas Cooper had taught him that throughout history, intelligence and aptitude made harmony in leadership, and Calhoun's dedicated and brilliant public service seemed to epitomize the essence of quality leadership. Hammond's system allowed for the self-made man of talent, and he prided himself on recognizing that in a world of opportunity, knowledge was king.<sup>30</sup> With the death of Calhoun and the scramble for political gain, Hammond grew pessimistic about the quality of the rising leadership class. He was most disturbed that members of established planter-aristocratic families, as they felt competition from the intellectual leaders, relied on fawning and demagoguery in order to gain political power.<sup>31</sup> His reputation as a conservative probably stems

<sup>29</sup> Hammond's views of how slavery freed the whites to form representative government become confused, because as senator he said that he was willing to give up slavery in order to preserve the republican system. Until historians have studied the relation of government to slavery in the manner in which Eugene Genovese has studied the relation of the labor system to the social system, this important subject will remain confused. See Eugene Genovese, *The World . . .*, p. 136. For an interesting view, see George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York, 1971), chap. 3; Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 318, 45, 129; William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1935), pp. 197, 286-288.

<sup>30</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 208-209, 227, 268; Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, "Hammond's Eulogy upon Calhoun," *Southern Quarterly Review*, n. s. IV (July, 1851), pp. 107-117; Richard A. Sterling, *Sterling's Southern Fifth Reader* (New York and Greensboro, N. C., 1866), pp. 321-324; *College Lecture Book*, 1822-1825, HPSC; Hammond *Diary*, Jan. 2, 1851, HPSC; Hammond to Simms, April 26, 1850; N. Beverly Tucker to Hammond, April 19, 1851, Hammond *Diary*, 1846, pp. 3-9, *Diary*, 1850, pp. 63-69, *Diary*, 1852, pp. 119-126, *Occasional Thoughts*, April 30, 1837, HPLC.

<sup>31</sup> For the established role of some planter aristocrats in the secession movement, see Ralph A. Wooster, *Secession Conventions . . .*, p. 20; Ralph A. Wooster, "An Analysis of the Membership of Secession Conventions in the Lower South," *Journal of Southern History*, XXIV (Aug., 1958), 362-368, and Roser Howard Taylor, "The Gentry of Antebellum South Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XVII (April, 1940), 114. Hammond's own analysis of the leadership calls for further investigation of the entire movement. He pointed out three groups of political leaders:

from the fact that at times he faulted republican institutions for succumbing to such leaders. Given the ideal characteristics of office holders for his system of government, is it any wonder that Hammond became fearful of faulty leadership in the late 1850s?

Hammond found fault with the leaders, but did he, as most scholars believe, blame the ignorant masses for the general decline in quality? He had always believed in a natural variety of classes based on ability, but he had also considered universal suffrage "a necessary appendage to a Republican system" of government. As a student of history he recognized that the last two centuries had brought the great middle class to a knowledge of its rights and hopefully of its duties.<sup>32</sup> He quibbled over how far the popular vote should be extended, but in most cases he believed that the people, when properly led, made correct decisions. During his term as governor, in line with his theory that government should provide for the security of its constituents, Hammond offered a comprehensive reform for the state's educational system. His plan was to provide a thorough education for every child, rich or poor, who possessed energy and worth. As one who had risen from the ranks, he wished to keep those ranks open. He also believed that an educated electorate was in a better position to elect the most able candidates.<sup>33</sup> Although he finally faulted popular pressure for undermining the political leverage of qualified leaders, he blamed irresponsible politicians for using the people.

The question of quality leadership certainly affected Hammond's fear of what the political revolution (for so he regarded rapid change in government) of secession would do to the South. While constructing

the established old-family planters, the self-made intellectual elite, and the newly ambitious young politicians. See Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, p. 356; Hammond to George McDuffie, Dec. 27, 1844, Hammond *Diary*, 1851, pp. 55, 97, HPLC; Hammond *Diary*, pp. 38, 95, HPSC; and Francis W. Pickens to Beaufort T. Watts, Jan. 24, 1854, Watts Papers, S. C.

<sup>32</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 213, 127. Historians have accused Hammond of being a conservative political elitist; see Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization* (New York, 1961), p. 21; James Petigru Carson, *Life, Letters and Speeches of James Louis Petigru* (Washington, 1920), p. v; N. Beverly Tucker to Hammond, Dec. 29, 1846, HPLC. For Hammond's own countering of this argument, see Hammond to N. J. Cunningham, Dec. 29, 1833, Hammond to Simms, Jan. 1, Nov. 10, 1846, Sept. 22, 1848, April 6, 1849, *Diary*, 1846, pp. 9-10, *Diary*, 1852, pp. 128, 131-132, HPLC; *Mercury*, Nov. 9, 1847; Hammond to Marcellus, July 24, 1832, Hammond, *Diary of European Trip*, Aug. 2, 1837, *Thoughts and Recollections*, 1852-1853, March 13, 27, 1852, HPSC.

<sup>33</sup> Those who have accused Hammond of agitating for elite education should examine Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 70-75.

his own argument for secession, he had always felt that the South's government and people were steady in principle and reluctant to change. His own first-hand observations of the results of the French Revolution left him with the feeling that no state had much to gain from anarchy and revolution. Only, he rationalized, when the enemy attempted to upset the governmental system by showing utter disregard for principles of political justice would he condone secession. But the movement that was growing in the South during the 1850s was ill-conceived, leaderless, and prone to disrupt social order. In short, it was revolutionary and hardly secessionist.<sup>34</sup> In 1860, the fear of failed revolutions caught up to him, and if the theory of an ordered governmental system had entirely determined Hammond's code of behavior, he would never have been able to support secession.

But there was one essential ingredient in Hammond's political code which temporarily forced him to allay his trepidations over change, and largely explains his Senate resignation. His concept of the leaders as servants of the state and of the people made Hammond overcome his fears of poor leadership and a changed governmental system. Simply, Hammond believed that a statesman's foremost responsibility was to guide and also to respond to the will of his constituents. Years earlier he had explained a foolish duel as part of a painful need to force an elected official to assume his duty. Time and again, despite personal anxieties and his desire to read and study, Hammond had accepted public office. He had even served in the United States Senate in the face of severe illness and family misgivings.<sup>35</sup> In 1860, Hammond's code left him no choice but to follow his state, because he could never default on that public trust.

James Henry Hammond was a practical politician who believed in his own political philosophy. He was hardly class-motivated, nor was he fearful of loss of social and political status in any conventional sense. He believed in an aristocracy of ability and integrity, leaders being duty-bound to serve their government and the people. His reverence for the past was hardly based on the self-deception of one who revered

<sup>34</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 103, 182; *Southern Quarterly Review*, XV (July, 1849), p. 274; Hammond to Simms, Oct. 11, 1851, Hammond *Diary*, 1851, p. 117, HPLC; Hammond to Harry Hammond, Sept. 21, 1855, HPSC.

<sup>35</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 63, 225; James Henry Hammond, *The Controversy between James Blair and James H. Hammond* (n. p., 1830), pp. 16, 19; Hammond *Notes*, Aug. 25, 1837, Calhoun to Hammond, April 18, 1838, Hammond to Simms, Feb. 19, 1846, Hammond *Diary*, 1850, p. 75, HPLC; Hammond to James L. Orr, June 19, 1854, Orr-Patterson Papers, SHC.

a mythical romantic aristocracy. He studied past political leaders because they, and especially those of eighteenth-century America, set a standard for behavior, intelligence, and obligation. Hammond's final indecisiveness resulted from his acquaintance with the leaders of the secession movement, whom he had found woefully unqualified to organize the South and to achieve its goal. History had taught him that precipitant revolution produced political chaos. He was also uncertain as to whether he wanted to live in a governmental system controlled by an ignorant, ambitious, demagogic aristocracy. Certainly he was too critical of the secession leaders, but he was hardly motivated by love of the Union. Only by implication was he one of the so-called Unionists. Unless one regards vacillation as action, Hammond's (and perhaps the many other so-called Unionist planters') inability and unwillingness to influence the secessionist leaders deserves to rank as one of the tragic events of the Old South.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> This article cannot begin to speak for all of the Old South's so-called Unionists. Perhaps a fresh look at the political activities and the theoretical codes of behavior of those men might reveal a more complex set of political alignments and lend some credence to the dichotomy of three groups of leaders on the eve of secession.