ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Fire-Eaters

By **David S. Heidler & Jeanne T. Heidler**

When Confederate president-elect Jefferson Davis arrived in Montgomery at 10:00 PM on February 16, 1861, a cheering throng waited at the Exchange Hotel. Also at the hotel was an imposing man with a strong chin, dark brow, and broad mouth. William Lowndes Yancey stood at Davis's side when he spoke from the Exchange's balcony, but Davis was exhausted, and his voice showed it. As Davis quickly concluded and left, Yancey spread his arms to silence the cheers and then made some remarks of his own. He was not in the least tired, and his voice boomed, its clarity and carry among the chief reasons for his celebrity. Yancey proclaimed, "The man and the hour have met," a felicitous phrase that he possibly lifted from Sir Walter Scott or in the highest of ironies from the abolitionist Harriet Martineau.[1] If he did borrow that part, Yancey continued with his own flourish. He was certain that "prosperity, honor, and victory" were to mark the happy course of the Confederacy under Davis's stewardship.[2]

When Confederate fortunes flagged in the next four years, growing numbers had reason to question those happy sentiments, but one man in Montgomery that very night despised Jefferson Davis "before he had time to do wrong." Robert Barnwell Rhett "had howled nullification, secession, &c so long . . . [He] felt he had a vested right to leadership."[3] Yet nobody aside from a handful of stalwart friends could conceive of Rhett in the post.[4] Davis's reputation for measured thought and calm deliberation made him the logical choice for the Confederacy's first president, especially since the first wave of secession that winter had not included the Upper South and Border States. Only prudence could coax the people of those crucial places to join the new nation, and their presence or absence was likely to be the difference between its success and failure. Robert Barnwell Rhett was anything but reassuring. Rhett was a fire-eater.

[1] Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering, or The Astrologer*, originally published in 1815 and popular in both the northern and southern United States, has a character respond to a sentinel's query, "Because the Hour's come, and the Man." See page 206 of the 1906 edition published by Thomas Nelson and Sons. If Harriet Martineau's *The Hour and the Man: A Historical Romance* (London: Cassell & Cassell, Ltd., 1839) was the source of the quotation, it would be doubly ironic. Her novel is about Toussaint L'Ouverture, the black leader who transformed Haiti from a slave society into an independent state.

[2] Montgomery *Daily Post*, February 18, 1861.
[3] C. Van Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 142.
[4] Secessionist R.M.T. Hunter and fire-eater Yancey were at least mentioned for the presidency, but never Rhett. See Lowell (Massachusetts) *Daily Citizen and News*, February 4, 1861.

It was a colorful name to describe colorful characters. Fire-eaters were radical southern secessionists who had long been committed to the dissolution of the United States. Their goal was to protect slavery, and they seized on the idea of separating from the Union before anyone else considered it possible, in fact before almost anyone considered it at all. Despite the long shadow of slavery over their cause, fire-eaters preferred to frame their complaints around the principle of states' rights. Yet their regard for federalism was capricious and opportunistic. The overarching goal was to protect slavery as an institution, and states' rights became a means to that end.

Fire-eaters managed to tap into a venerable American political tradition that considered localism as liberty's foundation and bulwark. The desire for local control of affairs had fueled disgruntled colonists to resort to independence when they could not curb remote authority by other means. It was not the first instance of American secessionism: splintering Protestant denominations in New England had been the first expression of locally controlled affairs taken to its microscopic extreme in an individual's conscience, but the American Revolution was unique in formalizing secession as a deliberate political process. Before that the fragmenting of polities had usually been an organic act, the drifting apart a centrifugal event. In consciously pursuing separation through formal procedure, Americans made revolution a legitimate form of political expression. If grievances are burdensome enough to rouse the will to redress them, bad political systems, like bad rules, are made to be broken.

Despite its resonance for oppressed peoples everywhere, the theory is not without problems. In fact, localism all but foiled the creation of an American union, especially after victory over Britain removed the need for collective action against an existential threat. The Articles of Confederation celebrated the idea of local control so thoroughly that the document formed a debating society rather than a government. But even its flaws did not convince all Americans that it needed reform. After the Constitution was ratified and the federal government became a functioning concern, local suspicions easily transformed into sectional jealousies. Sometimes they gave rise to secessionist sentiments. In the republic's early years, areas that felt isolated from or neglected by the rest of the country considered separation. Westerners openly flirted with Spain until the United States quelled hostile Indians and secured navigation of the Mississippi River. Thomas Jefferson's election to the presidency and the Louisiana Purchase made New Englanders anxious over their waning political influence. When the War of 1812 worsened the region's disaffection, Yankee discontent resulted in the Hartford Convention, which turned out to be the last gasp of the region's secession movement when it vanished along with the decline of the discredited Federalist Party. In fact, the end of the War of 1812 coincided with a surge of nationalism that all but obliterated routine sectional animosities over slavery and commerce. Unfortunately, the "Era of Good Feelings" was to last only a few years before familiar troubles reappeared.

In just four years the argument over slavery began eroding nationalism. Increasingly isolated as a "peculiar" southern institution, slavery made the crisis of admitting Missouri to the Union especially perilous because the famous compromise

postponed rather than resolved the core disagreement. The problem of slavery was doomed to reappear periodically like a very bad penny sometimes disguised as something else—the tariff in South Carolina or expansionism in Texas—but it was always disruptive, and as the years passed it became increasingly unmanageable.[5] Unlike western or New England's separatists, Southern secessionists had a chronic complaint that remained a source of serious arguments for four decades until it finally led to the Civil War. At the end, continuous abrasions over slavery had made nerves raw and slave-owners ready for a convulsive response to Abraham Lincoln's election, the ultimate calamity as seen by Southerners. With a known opponent of slavery poised to become president, they ceased to deride the fire-eater as a wild alarmist. His prescriptive remedy suddenly had an unexpected appeal.

Yet even at the end, and no matter how unexpected, secession as remedy came with troubling warning labels about possible side effects, civil war being foremost among them. It was the reason that the final, impulsive embrace of the fire-eaters' cause was so long in coming, and had it relied on the character and influence of radicals alone, likely would not have come at all. Fire-eaters could trumpet the substance of antifederalist warnings about the seeds of tyranny sprouting from central authority, and they could portray themselves as successors to the Founders by comparing their spirit of resistance to the Spirit of '76, but Northerners dismissed the comparison as preposterous. Worse for the fire-eaters, many Southerners saw their rhetoric as a cheap trick, a cynical bid for influence that was exploitative and self-serving rather than altruistic and virtuous. It was the impression the fire-eater created for many years, and it was not a good one.

In fact, the cadre of men collectively called fire-eaters achieved their brief popularity and coherency by virtue of events rather than their ideas or exertions. Their refusal to compromise on almost everything, whether core or ancillary principles, alienated potential allies and put off those inclined to agree with their complaints, if not their methods. They found the nuts-and-bolts work necessary for cobbling together coalitions difficult in turbulent times and impossible in calm ones. As a consequence, fire-eaters only resembled a group advancing a movement, while in reality they were individuals in broad agreement about the need for a separate South. Otherwise they so significantly differed about how to achieve it that they can be only loosely categorized. They were certainly not people working together to advance their common interests.

The man at Davis's side in Montgomery that February night, and the one brooding across town were arguably the most famous fire-eaters. William Lowndes Yancey and Robert Barnwell Rhett became iconic secessionists, but almost every Southern state had its own radicals, whether homegrown or transplanted. In their personal differences and variations of temperament, Rhett and Yancey illustrated the fractiousness that rived radical efforts. The South Carolinian Rhett was a doctrinaire Southern localist, while the Yankee transplant Yancey (he was raised in New York) first rose to

[5] South Carolinian James Hamilton described Nullification as "a battle at the outposts, by which, if we succeeded in repulsing the enemy, *the citadel* [of slavery] *would be safe.*" See Hamilton to John Taylor, et al., September 14, 1830, in Charleston *Mercury,* September 29, 1830.

prominence in South Carolina and Georgia as a Unionist. The changeability called into question the durability of Yancey's stand on any issue. After he settled in Alabama, abolitionism's growing influence in the North is said to have transformed him into a fire-eater, but then again, some evidence suggests a more personal motivation, such as psychological pressures caused by his disgust over his (abolitionist) stepfather's cruelty. In any case, the trace of opportunism that seemed to vein Yancey's politics caused fellow Alabamians to suspect his motives, while the inflexible Rhett alienated almost everyone sooner or later with his rigidity. In those behaviors lay the Manichaean dilemma of southern secessionism.

Fire-eaters were heedless of disunion's danger, even when the federal system was superintended by a willful steward such as Andrew Jackson. That was the lesson of the 1832 Nullification crisis for rational South Carolinians as well as the rest of the South. Isolated from more cautious neighbors and menaced by federal coercion, the Palmetto State had to back down from its headstrong refusal to collect the tariff, and the result was nullifiers in disarray and Nullification discredited. Almost nobody forgot this humiliation, and the chilling potential for reckless men to repeat it kept reckless men in check for almost a generation. It was telling that Rhett could not move on from Nullification as a realistic remedy. Ten years after Jackson's Proclamation and Force Bill had cooled Carolinian ardor with the threat of federal invasion, Rhett tried to revive Nullification with his stillborn Bluffton Movement. It was a sign of the other great divide in the Southern Rights cause, one that coincided with the problems of differing philosophy by blunting a concentrated movement with problems of differing tactics. Men like Rhett remained convinced that separate state action—South Carolina, for example, striking out on its own to enact Nullification or commit secession—held no significant perils. "To reach us," Robert Barnwell Rhett once observed about South Carolina, "the dagger must pass through others."[6] Other radicals were no less committed to Southern secession, but they recoiled from the likely result of the single state running afoul of federal authority. Rather, they wanted cooperation as a prelude to separation from nothing more sophisticated than the maxim that strength lay in numbers.

When Pennsylvania Democrat David Wilmot proposed to exclude slavery from any territory acquired from the war with Mexico, he not only set off a storm of angry southern protests but also firmly planted the suspicion in southern minds that abolitionism was edging into the mainstream of northern politics. Fire-eater reaction was swift and passionate, enduring beyond the immediate disruptions caused by the Wilmot Proviso, which never passed but did not need to: the damage was already done to the polity by what it suggested. With some hard evidence now in hand, the fire-eater was able to counter claims that all was the same as before. Their warnings were that sooner or later—and after 1846 it seemed likely to be sooner rather than later—the enemies of slavery would mount an open attack on the institution. The effort to restrict its growth was the vanguard, and the ultimate goal was the elimination of it where it existed. Armed

[6] Charleston *Mercury*, April 15, 1851.

with what seemed proof of northern intentions, the fire-eaters' political shortcomings became less obvious.

Out of the heated debates and troubling votes on the Wilmot Proviso, the 1848 presidential election provided the forum for William Lowndes Yancey to present his way of reconciling separate state action with cooperation. The tie binding North and South was the mutual reliance on the routines of politics, meaning the process of winning elections. Moderating extreme opinions to achieve that goal was the bane of radical secessionists, and in 1848 the innovation to accomplish that moderation was the promotion of Popular Sovereignty as a way to avoid disruptive differences between the northern and southern wings of the Democratic Party.

Popular Sovereignty was a reaction to problems caused by the Mexican Cession. The doctrine held that because slavery was not within congressional purview, the people in the territories should decide their domestic arrangements. The idea had an almost sensual appeal for traditional politicians. Popular Sovereignty could be portrayed as the reasonable center between the extremes of those wanting to restrict slavery and those wanting to expand it. Lewis Cass trotted out the idea and gave it the more elegant label of Popular Sovereignty (heretofore it was generally called squatter sovereignty) as part of his presidential bid in 1848. He began the initiative with a letter in 1847 to Tennessee supporter A. O. P. Nicholson, one of those private communications that was actually the equivalent of a modern press release.

Yet for all its pretensions of statesmanship, Popular Sovereignty was really nothing more than a contrivance to make it seem that politicians were taking on a difficult issue that they were actually avoiding. Slavery threatened Democratic Party unity when Southern demands for slavery in the territories conflicted with the northern wing's need to accommodate antislavery constituencies.

Yet precisely because Popular Sovereignty was a cynical decision not to decide on how slavery would be treated in the territories, it gradually troubled discerning observers who pointed out that it could not possibly work if slavery gained entrance to a territory in the first place. Abraham Lincoln ultimately concluded this as Popular Sovereignty's most implausible feature in the wake of the 1857 Supreme Court decision in *Scott* v. *San[d]ford*. Yet even in 1848, Popular Sovereignty made more than a few southerners uneasy, and not all of them were radicals. Because it dodged the issue, it put slavery at risk, which increasingly became an unacceptable hazard for Southerners who saw such stances as a species of betrayal.

Yancey's opposition to Lewis Cass prompted him to bind the Alabama delegation to the Democrat Convention in Baltimore to another candidate and another idea. Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire was a dark horse who obliquely accepted Alabama's proposed endorsement, and the delegation was accordingly pledged to support him per

Yancey, despite misgivings about throwing in with a New Englander.[7] In any case, the animus was not so much directed at Cass as toward what he proposed. Yancey's alternative was spelled out in his Alabama Platform ("the proud and distinctive appellation," Yancey crowed),[8] which called for Congress to protect slavery in the territories from all possible obstructions, even local ones. The state convention told the Alabama delegation to oppose any candidate who did not embrace this policy.[9]

The initiative, however, was bewildering from several perspectives. Most obviously, it deserted the traditional southern defense of slavery as a passive exercise, one essentially of letting the sleeping dog lie. For years, the core of this stance had been the insistence that Congress had no authority to ban slavery in territories owned in common by citizens of all the states, including southerners. It was the reasoning behind the infamous "gag rule" that for years had established the routine of automatically tabling (i.e., procedurally killing) any antislavery petition that came before Congress. What Yancey proposed transformed the passive to an active defense, implying that Congress did after all have the authority to legislate for the territories. It was a strange and dangerous tactic. It required southerners troubled by the immorality of slavery to endorse it as a positive good, and it compelled northern Democrats to do so despite their having to campaign in antislavery districts. It was dangerous because it opened the door for congressional jurisdiction in territories where Congress could just as easily abolish slavery as protect it.

The Alabama Platform, however, was not designed to safeguard southern rights or make Levi Woodbury president. It was meant to destroy the Democratic Party. Northern Democrats could never accept it and expect to win local elections, and their rejecting it was supposed to trigger Alabama's withdrawal from the party, an act that would possibly spark a general southern exodus. Breaking open the convention was the easiest way to break the back of the party, whose moderate southern wing and antagonistic northern one had become an obstacle to the goal of radical secessionists.

Thus armed, Alabama went to Baltimore where Yancey's plans rapidly fell apart. His efforts to exploit a dispute in the New York delegation led him to proclaim "if New York does not choose to go with us, we shall go without her."[10] The talk was bold, but the sentiment behind it was too audacious for the South, and the New Yorkers settled their differences in any case. The platform committee avoided unruly debates by ignoring the Wilmot Proviso and salvaging planks from platforms in the previous two elections. Southerners alarmed by the prospect of a broken convention squelched Yancey's efforts

[7] Woodbury is sometimes described as writing a private letter to this effect, as in the Boston *Daily Atlas*, May 24, 1848. Yet his attitudes were apparently conveyed second-hand to Yancey by a Mr. Inge of Alabama who had visited Woodbury in the winter of 1847-48 and queried him about slavery in the territories. See New York *Herald*, May 15, 1848.
[8] Montgomery *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser*, April 18, 1848.
[9] "Journal of the Democratic Convention, Held in the City of Montgomery on the 14th and 15th February, 1848," Ibid, February 17, 1848.
[10] Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, 9 ed., 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1872-1877), 2:129-30.

to revive the Alabama Platform as a minority report with a resounding 216-36 vote. Yancey walked out of the convention, but only one other delegate followed him. The Alabama delegation stayed put.[11]

Despite the repudiation of the fire-eaters at Baltimore, the election of 1848 was a troubling portent of things to come. As it always had, slavery raised violent emotions that exposed the political system to disruption by even the clumsiest tacticians. Yancey in Baltimore deliberately courted discord but only with great difficulty was the convention able to shove him aside, even though the floor vote on his minority report could attract only 15% of the delegates.

Failed tactics lapsed for the time being, but the issue itself remained and by 1849 had gotten worse. A perfect storm of sectional discord created what Henry Clay called "five bleeding wounds," multiple points of controversy and disagreement that by 1850 had the potential to destroy the Union. Exploiting this crisis, fire-eaters abandoned the strategy of trying to derail the political process and instead entered it as a way to enact their secessionist agenda.

Southern alarm over the crisis of 1850 was palpable, but it was not easily harnessed. Efforts to assemble delegates in a sort of southern Continental Congress to be held in Nashville that summer sputtered from the start. In April, Georgia fire-eaters Henry Benning and Walter Colquitt could not persuade an assembly in Columbus to endorse a southern convention prior to a "hostile act" by the North. The reluctance made any move for disunion unlikely, an attitude mirrored by the state as elections in the spring attracted sparse turnout and overt expressions of support for the Union.[12]

The Upper South was much the same, as the example of Virginia showed. Fire-eater Edmund Ruffin was so disgusted by the results that he opposed his state's sending anyone to Nashville if they were instructed to argue against disunion. "Our politicians," lamented fellow Virginia radical Beverley Tucker, "have gone over to the compromisers.[13]

Tucker was among the most determined secessionists in 1850. By his own admission, he had despised the Union for decades. "I vowed then," he wrote of his attitude from the early 1820s, "and I repeated the vow, de diem de diem, that I will never give rest to my eyes nor slumber to my eyelids until [the Union] is shattered into fragments."[14] Tucker had little influence outside his classes at William & Mary where he

[11] Yancey was disingenuously to portray his position in Baltimore as opposing the United States government's right to establish slavery anywhere. See New York *Herald*, May 26, 1848. Yet this was a fine point on the issue: Yancey was prepared to oppose the doctrine of Popular Sovereignty because it violated the right of slaveholders to migrate to territories they owned as legitimately as did any non-slaveholder. See Montgomery *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser,* May 27, 1848.
[12] Columbus *Enquirer*, February 19, 1850
[13] Tucker to James H. Hammond, March 26, 1850, quoted in Henry T. Shanks, *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861*, (Richmond: Garnett and Massie, 1934), 31-2.
[14] Tucker to William Gilmore Simms, February 1851, quoted in Ibid., 69.

taught law and encouraged disunion with some success among his students. Elsewhere he was regarded as little more than a "political harlequin."[15]

Tucker was lonely, withdrawn, and self-conscious over a speech impediment that limited his public appearances to the controlled environment of his classrooms. He was a tireless correspondent, however, and kept close contact with men such as Thomas R. Dew, Edmund Ruffin, William Harper, James Henry Hammond, and William Gilmore Simms. With Simms, Tucker shared a literary aptitude that made them diligent letter writers, and both produced novels, Simms prolifically and Tucker with the more pointed aim of broadcasting his political views. These works are almost always criticized for their torpor as well as their message, but at the time Edgar Allen Poe described Tucker's *George Balcombe* as "the best American novel."[16] His most famous work was *The Partisan Leader* that he published under a pseudonym in 1836 as a reaction to Andrew Jackson's overbearing executive power. In Tucker's story, Martin Van Buren has completed Jackson's executive usurpation, sparking Virginia's secession, its occupation by Van Buren's forces, and a war between Old Dominion patriots and the federal government.[17]

Resistance to tyranny is *The Partisan Leader*'s most overt message, but the book also provides a window on how Tucker's saw human affairs. His reliance on Scottish literary models excluded moral ambiguity and cynicism to have him create flawless heroes and irredeemable villains, a technique in romantic fiction that for Tucker translated into political and moral questions, which always consisted of stark polarities. It was much the way he viewed the sectional dispute between the North and the South.[18]

As the national political system haltingly tried to right itself with compromise proposals in 1850, the fire-eater overplayed his hand, overstated his case, and forfeited the temporary credibility gained during the insoluble crisis that slowly became soluble, however imperfectly. In fact, the efforts of statesmen like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster had made the Nashville Convention largely irrelevant by the time it convened in June.

It was the only time before 1860 that fire-eaters congregated and aired their views without the varnish of moderation, but the convention's intentions seemed foolish rather than menacing, and its ties to the Democratic Party, no matter how tenuous, had the potential to taint Democrats with the appearance of incompetence and recklessness. Tennessee was embarrassed by the gathering and accordingly registered its disapproval through meetings across the state advocating for the compromise even as delegates were arriving in Nashville. Every state but two had shown reluctance to send delegates, and

[15] Robert T. Brugger, *Beverley Tucker: Heart over Head in the Old South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), xiii.
[16] See Poe's review in *Southern Literary Messenger* 3 (January 1837), 49-58.
[17] Despite the pseudonym, Tucker was for years known to be the author. Natchez *Courier*, August 5, 1850.
[18] Arthur Wrobel believes that Tucker's technique stemmed from a fear of breaking with literary conventions established by Sir Walter Scott. See "Romantic Realism: Nathaniel Beverley Tucker," *American Literature* 42 No. 3 (November 1970): 325-35.

confirmed Unionists filled most of the delegations. Virginia had five Unionists in stark contrast to the firebrand Tucker. Texas managed to scare up only one delegate, and fifteen of the thirty-six Alabamians slated to attend stayed home. Yancey boycotted the meeting in protest of the state's instructions to avoid extreme measures. The South's version of the Continental Congress came together brandishing olive branches.

South Carolina and Georgia were the exceptions to the rule of restraint, and in that they irritated and finally exasperated the convention. At first, the Carolinians realized their delicate situation and for a time resolved not to appear too resolute, but Rhett could bridle himself for only so long. He drafted the convention's address and gave it a tone that was unpopular from the start. He lectured Southerners about their complacency and snarled at Northerners for an unrelenting march against slavery that had been going on for almost two decades.[19]

Beverley Tucker's mood was no better as he gained the floor to reveal a vision so fantastic it confirmed for many that the old man had lost his mind. His speech did him a little credit and his cause little good. Swept up by the moment, he predicted that Southern secession would persuade Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania to leave the Union as well. The resulting confederation would attract Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Jamaica, fracturing European colonialism into the bargain, something that Spain and Britain would not for some reason try to thwart. He capped this astonishing performance with an astonishing description of these events producing a frisson similar to sexual intercourse.[20]

A second convention was planned for the fall, and when it gathered again at Nashville, the city's inhospitable manner reflected the changed situation throughout the country. Opening on November 11, 1850, the second gathering was smaller and more radical than its predecessor, and thus even more embarrassing and divisive.[21] Eccentricity was more on display. Georgia delegate James N. Bethune, for example, was a member of an outfit formed by Walter Colquitt that styled itself the "coffin regiment" from its pledge to defend the Missouri Compromise line to the death, bringing along caskets to prove the promise. The radical resolutions that emerged showed the angry mode of their authors when South Carolina's Langdon Cheves bluntly declared that southern secession was "the only remedy for aggravated wrongs" committed by northerners who had defiled the Framers' vision. "The carcass may remain, but the spirit has left," Cheves thundered about the Constitution, "It stinks in our nostrils."[22]

The Tennessee delegation tried to quash this kind of talk but was ultimately unsuccessful. Alabama supplied a preamble, and Mississippi wrote the resolutions that endorsed secession as a political right while condemning the compromise for good

[19] Friendly press reports told of the address passing unanimously and even claimed that several states opposed it because it was too moderate. *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, June 26, 1850.
[20] Brugger, *Tucker*, 184-87.
[21] The delegates are listed in the *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 27, 1850.
[22] Philip May Hamer, *The Secession Movement in South Carolina, 1848-1852* (Reprint: Da Capo Press, 1971), 71; Thelma Jennings, *The Nashville Convention: Southern Movement for Unity, 1848-1851* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1980), 195.

measure. Moderate protests were gaveled down by the presiding officer, Georgian Charles James McDonald, and the gathering hastily adjourned having recommended the calling of a general Southern Congress.

That recommendation would never be acted on. Most radicals not in Nashville had invested little hope in either of the conventions because the first was foreordained to moderation and the second came in the wake of successful compromise efforts in Washington. If anything, the fiery sectionalism that emerged from the meetings was harmful to the fire-eater cause. Rhett's address troubled conservatives worried that its real victim would not be the Union but the Democratic Party. Resolutions from the second convention simply heightened the distrust between moderates and radicals that made a unified South politically unlikely. At that point, only a major blow could shatter the wariness of moderates and force the camps to come together.

Meanwhile, the repudiation of radicals at the polls following successful compromise efforts shattered secession as a viable movement and forced them into the political wilderness for the rest of the decade. Rhett was an example of their fate but in a curiously unique way. The Compromise of 1850 helped calm the immediate furor, but the arrangement nevertheless left intact the belief among Southern Unionists as well as radicals that secession was a valid political recourse to intolerable transgressions by a willful majority. This was the essence of the Georgia Platform, which passed at the end of 1850 and became the guide of Southern Unionists for future conduct. An overt act of sectional aggression, and only an overt act, would merit even the consideration of separating from the Union. As effete a statement as this was, it actually meant that if sectional troubles reignited, Unionists would be ineffectual and differ with secessionists only about when and for what reason secession should be set into motion.[23]

Secession over the years had come to be identified with the Southern Democratic Party as a theoretical doctrine, but it remained acceptable only in the province of the theory. Any threat to invoke it, to apply the theory in practice, caused the majority of Southerners to pause and ultimately renounce it. Such wavering infuriated the fire-eaters, and for Rhett it would be a breaking point. The exception to the repudiation of radicals in southern elections that fall was the South Carolina legislature where a radical cadre forced an uneasy arrangement between cooperationists and separate state actionists to come to terms with moderates. The result was a radical majority that elected Robert Barnwell Rhett to replace Robert Barnwell in the United States Senate. For many, it was not a cause for celebration.

Strangely, the same could be said for Rhett. Rather than a triumph, his Senate tenure would make him singularly unhappy[24] On the whole, he acquitted himself better

[23] William Rutherford to Howell Cobb, April 16, November 3-4, 1850, Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., *Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander Stephens, and Howell Cobb*, American Historical Association *Annual Report*, 1911, Part 2.
[24] Elizabeth Rhett to Rhett, January 11, 1851, Robert Barnwell Rhett Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

than many expected by taming his temper and speaking in generally acceptable terms, but the taint of treason was so thick on him that Henry Clay bluntly alluded to it. He also did not endear him to fellow southerners fearful that at any moment he would kick over the traces and trample the Compromise. They were anxious to protect the Fugitive Slave Law and were correct in judging Rhett unfriendly to all facets of the Compromise, which he objected to as vigorously as any Northerner.

In the practical sense, Rhett did not think northern localities would enforce the law, and when petitions began appearing in Congress imploring small and then large alterations in it, Rhett denounced them as preludes to a move for its repeal.[25] He reminded his fellow Senators from the South of the action against the slave trade in the District of Columbia: first assailed by petitions, then criticized by resolutions, and finally eliminated in their precious Compromise of 1850.

Rhett agreed with the law's critics on principle as well, though not from a humanitarian standpoint but a constitutional one. The Fugitive Slave Law trod upon state sovereignty, and in this objection he was at least consistent in that he found nothing untoward in northern personal liberty laws as an acceptable form of state interposition, which was to say, nullification. Everyone had reason to hold his head in his hands as the fire-eater spun out those explanations.

Rhett did not last long in the Senate when it became clear that moderation was again on the rise at home in South Carolina. "All good men," said the Charleston *Mercury*, "can find something useful to do at home." Northern newspapers quoted this with a hint of sarcasm.[26] When Rhett resigned, he found little useful to do at home, however, and did not calm down so much as keep quiet because he had no choice. His unpopularity drove him from the public stage and left him only the occasional essay in the stray publication as a way to express any opinion about anything for almost eight years.[27] For all his reputation as a fulminator, he bore up under the exile relatively well, sustained by religious faith, abstemious habits, and a solid sense that he had done what was right.[28]

Others were not so sanguine and took little trouble to mute their scorn of moderates. Jefferson Davis announced in 1851 that he would answer in "monosyllables" any man who said he was a disunionist, leading John A. Quitman to retort, "I carry my State-Rights views to the citadel, [but] you stop at the outworks."[29] True as that may have been, the truth was cold comfort for discredited fire-eaters who could only offer up

[25] Milwaukee *Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, March 5, 1851.
[26] Cleveland *Herald*, May 7, 1852.
[27] Charleston *Mercury*, November 7, 1856; Boston *Daily Advertiser*, November 11, 1856; New York *Herald*, November 11, 1856.
[28] Rhett wrote an unsigned article for Simms' *Southern Quarterly Review* April 1852 issue. See Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves, eds., *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, 5 vols. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952-1956), 3:289n.
[29] *Mississippian*, September 19, 1851.

acid commentary about less principled Southerners willing to sell themselves for a place at the federal trough.

The destruction of the Whig Party caused by the Kansas-Nebraska Act seemed to favor the fortunes of national Democrats, but untethered Southern Whigs could not yet bring themselves to join the "mobocracy," and as a result the odd creation officially called the Native American Party—colloquially, the Know-Nothings—became their interim destination. The damage done to national unity by this development should not be measured in terms of elections won or representatives seated, both relatively few, or the brevity of the Know-Nothings' time on the political scene. Rather, the episode merely gave the appearance of solidifying nationalism in the Democratic Party while in reality planting the seeds for the future success of Republicans and fire-eaters. This would reveal itself later as the result of the Know-Nothings weakening Southern Whigs who should have been poised to realign into opposition against the Democrats. Baffled by the aimless decline of the Know-Nothings, Southern Whigs gravitated toward the Democratic Party, making the South a singularly uniform section just as the Republicans developed into a party exclusive to the North. This placed Northern Democrats in an increasingly untenable position as they had to cope with Republicans in local elections and thus found their Southern wing's agenda increasingly burdensome.

Another way the Know-Nothings damaged the political process was by boosting the fortunes of fire-eaters in places where the Democratic Party was vulnerable to manipulation and personal influence, which was the case in Texas where Sam Houston's dalliance with the Native American Party benefitted Louis Wigfall.

This firebrand was illustrative of unlikely ascendancy and achievement at the expense of enemies rather than from personal merit. Wigfall was a graduate of South Carolina College, a hotbed of radical sentiment, where he drank too much and fought too often. The rowdy student only barely grew out of it, and some would have disputed that he ever did. He settled in the Up Country district of Edgefield, read law, and developed a courtroom presence that made him a local star. He campaigned for the candidate opposing James Henry Hammond's run for governor in 1840, a decision that cost him the friendship of his old college roommate Preston Brooks whose family was supporting Hammond. Wigfall fought several duels with the Brooks clan, the last with Preston in which both suffered serious wounds. Wigfall's required a lengthy recuperation that ruined his law practice and prompted him to move to Texas in 1846. His Palmetto pedigree played well in the roughhouse of Lone Star politics, and his pugnacity made him a force in the state Democratic Party.[30]

He was, in fact, more than scrappy. "Wigfall chafes at the restraints of civil life," a friend once observed. "He likes to be where he can be as rude as he pleases."[31] Some thought that rather than rude Wigfall was a trifle unhinged. Edmund Ruffin thought him

[30] Greenville (South Carolina) *Mountaineer*, March 9, 1849.
[31] C. Van Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 12.

odd in his "extravagance" of expression.[32] Wigfall was extravagant enough to attack Sam Houston when the Hero of San Jacinto was seemingly at the height of his popularity. But Wigfall saw that Houston had seriously misjudged the strength of Know-Nothings in Texas when he openly denounced Democrats over their stand on Nebraska. Wigfall saw his salient and charged it, first by persuading the Texas legislature to censure Houston and then relentlessly criticizing his every move.[33]

Disillusioned by Southern Democrats, Houston gravitated to the Know-Nothings and though he never officially joined them, he might as well have for the damage it did to his standing in Texas. Wigfall profited from the breach and capped his rise by winning election to the Senate in the critical year of 1859. It was a shocking achievement for an outright secessionist who was both touchy and impulsive. Houston rehabilitated his political fortunes that year to reclaim the governorship, but his fling with the Know-Nothings had significantly impaired his influence to promote Unionism when it most mattered.

When northern states did in fact refuse to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act, fire-eaters thought it would be an opportunity to rile southerners, but per the Georgia Platform nothing short of outright repeal by the federal government would move the South after the scare of 1850. It was more because they lacked any other issue that some radicals unwisely began arguing to reopen the African slave trade in 1853, a project that would embarrass southerners and divide the radicals.

Nevertheless, Yancey, Wigfall, and Ruffin endorsed the plan by the close of 1854 even though the idea made little sense and was quite impolitic, confirming for the North that southern talk of state's rights was merely a cover for preserving slavery. The inconsistency struck many as worse than illogical, for Southerners on the one hand insisted that constitutional purity was the South's greatest protection, while on the other they were trying to change the Constitution. Southern legislatures routinely tabled calls for reopening the trade, but fire-eaters refused to abandon the contrivance. They promoted the idea at annual commercial conventions beginning in Savannah (1856), continuing in Knoxville (1857), and finally pushing so hard at Montgomery in 1858 that other Southerners finally pushed back.

Because neither the commercial convention nor the slave trade proved of any use both were abruptly abandoned. Throughout this entire fiasco, Rhett was notable for avoiding the controversial subject because he saw it as only irritating northerners and alienating southerners. He never tied secession to the slave trade. He was also similarly wary of another plan that appeared after the Montgomery Commercial Convention of 1858.

[32] William K. Scarborough, ed., *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, 2 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972, 1976), 1: 434.
[33] Charleston *Mercury*, July 27, 1857.

Chronic turmoil over Kansas seemed to present the best opportunity to stoke southern apprehensions, and Yancey aimed to do that with something he styled the League of United Southerners. Its charter described its purpose as actively opposing any more compromises that undermined southern rights, whether they were the product of a Democrat platform or political initiatives in state legislatures. The league did not plan to nominate candidates, which is to say that it was to be careful about mounting an organized challenge to the Democratic Party. Rather it was meant to pressure Democrats into nominating only the right sort of men.

Actually, the league's public posture was carefully designed to conceal its real function, which was to form a network that could "at the proper moment, by one organized, concerted action... precipitate the cotton States into revolution." Yancey disclosed as much in a letter that explained "no national party can save us" and "no sectional party can ever do it either."[34] This letter did not surface until 1860 when other events clouded the injury its seemingly conspiratorial tone might have otherwise caused. But in reality the league's prospects were always slim from the time Yancey conceived of it shortly after the Montgomery Convention. Edmund Ruffin was enlisted to found chapters in Virginia, and he reentered the sectional fray after having left it for several years to advance his first love of agricultural reform.

The political activity became therapeutic for Ruffin, in fact, as he battled depression, insomnia, and a failing memory. Yet the league never caught on in Virginia, and even Ruffin finally declared it stillborn. The six chapters that were set up were all in Alabama and had less to do with Yancey's exertions that those of William F. Samford, an intellectual who taught English literature and wrote protests of such persuasive power as to gain him the sobriquet "Penman of Secession." Samford was supremely principled—he condemned Kansas's proslavery Lecompton Constitution as an abomination born of a rigged election—but such consistency made him popular even among those who did not always understand him. Up to a point, he avoided politics as the sordid art of office-seeking, but by the late 1850s, he was disgusted with the "partyism" of hacks who placed their interests ahead of the South's.[35]

Samford was a persistent cooperationist, though, and his wariness about leaving the Union persisted until Lincoln's election persuaded him there was no other choice. Even then, he would support secession if it was undertaken in concert with other states. And he was never one to equivocate. While helping to found chapters of the League of United Southerners, he openly conceded it was the foundation for a political party to supplant the Democrats in the South. The admission killed the league and hurt Yancey's standing. Yancey protested, but nobody believed him, and he was defeated when he challenged Benjamin Fitzpatrick for Alabama's United States Senate seat despite

34 Yancey to Slaughter, June 15, 1858, quoted in William Garrett, *Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama for Thirty Years* (Atlanta: Plantation Publishing Company's Press, 1872), 685.
35 George Petrie, "William F. Samford, Statesman and Man of Letters," *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1899-1903,* Ed. By Thomas McAdory Owen (Montgomery: Alabama Historical Society), 475, 477.

enjoying the brief support of the Montgomery *Advertiser*. The setback made what happened in 1860 all the more remarkable.

Meanwhile, the failure of commercial innovation and industrial expansion to gain a foothold in the Old South point to a cultural wellspring that became for the fire-eaters an unexpected bounty. The forces of modernism did not appeal to Southerners, but not because political radicalism undermined them. Both planter and merchant were traditionalists first and businessmen second, and their inability to compete with the North did not make them embrace secession to escape debts to Northern creditors. The South remained stubbornly agricultural because it wanted to. And it wanted to because it felt it had to.

Protecting slavery had almost everything to do with that, but it also stemmed from southern uneasiness over what seemed to be happening in the North and the wider world beyond. The fire-eaters found in that disquiet the greatest potential for reviving their moribund influence, for when they said in all sincerity that the Southern way of life was more exemplary than the North's with its decadence and corruption, they struck a vibrant chord. When they disdained northern politicians as serving the volatile interests of urban hordes, fire-eaters found veins of discontent that had fueled American colonial protests against the British system of patronage and influence, which everyone knew were euphemisms for graft and corruption. The North as much as the South had at one time rejected that way of doing political business, but something had happened to change all that, possibly as early as Alexander Hamilton's economic system that many Southerners believed was created to promote speculation and a perpetual public debt. Ruffin spoke in that vein of nostalgic patriotism when he declared, "This alone would be a sufficient reason for separation of the northern & southern states."[36]

Their perception that the evolving system was built on deceit became second nature for many Southerners, a proposition needing no other proof than the label "Yankee." Before he became one of Lee's lieutenants in the Civil War, D. H. Hill taught mathematics at North Carolina College using a textbook he had written titled *Elements of Algebra*. One problem read: "A Yankee mixes a certain number of wooden nutmegs, which cost him 1/4 cent apiece, with a quantity of real nutmegs, worth 4 cents apiece, and sells the whole assortment for $44; and gains $3.75 by the fraud. How many wooden nutmegs are there?"[37] The embedded lesson stalking the mathematical one was clear. Northerners were cheats who would do anything for money.

Their zeal for secession placed the fire-eaters on the most remote tributaries of the political mainstream, but their embrace of social, economic, and intellectual orthodoxy planted them squarely in the prevailing mood of the South. It was from that vantage that

[36] *Diary of Ruffin,* 1:24
[37] Hill, *Elements of Algebra* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippncott & Co., 1857), 124.

they could revive their flagging political fortunes among people weary of sectional strife and tired of constant agitation. As late as 1860 and not more than three months after John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry, Alexander Stephens was surprised that "there is really not the least excitement in the public mind upon public affairs."[38] It was a testament to how even real upheaval can lose its power to dismay, and fire-eaters trafficked rather heavily in upheavals of the dramatically imagined sort. While most southerners were not prone to radical policies, it was precisely their philosophical conservatism and their reaction when beliefs integral to their way of life were threatened that edged them to the fire-eater camp. They were people wary of change, so even the calm core of the majority simmered when northerners demanded it of them.

By standing fast in an increasingly nihilistic world, the South and it institutions were to be the guardians of stability and civilization, and that attitude infused proslavery Southerners with a missionary zeal. Planters were joined by yeomen and artisans by shopkeepers to protect slavery as part of a supposedly changeless system rooted in the agrarian world.[39] When the 1850s began to unroll its disturbing sequence of sectional crises, unity of white Southerners became even more crucial and thus even more compulsory. Hinton Helper's *Impending Crisis* proved with hard data rather than anecdotes that slavery was a crippling and wasteful form of labor, and that brought near universal denunciation from Southerners intent on killing the messenger. But it was Helper's potential to undermine the system with facts that posed the greatest danger.[40]

This is what ultimately made political moderation first suspect and then anathema in the South. The inability, or worse, the unwillingness to protect and preserve the system made moderates seem feckless, while political radicalism appeared at the end of the day the only effective way to save Southern culture. As the national government came under the influence of slavery's enemies and men inimical to the Southern way of life, a Southern confederation held out the promise of cultural security and economic stability. When Southerners became fearful enough of the potential for losing their influence in the national government, they would be more agreeable to creating one of their own.[41] That too had the effect of making the fire-eater seem a prophet.

For a time nothing the fire-eaters did in the practical arena of politics seemed to work, but events beyond their control were nonetheless bending affairs in their favor. One of the first was the breach that opened between Stephen A. Douglas and President James Buchanan over the Lecompton Constitution for Kansas, an estrangement that forced Douglas to campaign against Abraham Lincoln to keep his Senate seat in 1858.

[38] Stephens to J. Henley Smith, January 5, 1860, *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*.
[39] Drew Gilpin Faust examines this phenomenon in her study *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) and in "The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture in Antebellum South Carolina," *Southern Historical Quarterly* 45 (November 1979): 541-58; Also see Brugger, "Mind of the Old South," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 56 (Spring 1980), 288.
[40] Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York: Burdick Brothers, 1857).
[41] New York *Herald*, February 3, 1861.

The debates that resulted set up the occasion for Douglas's supposed misstep at Freeport, Illinois, when he answered Lincoln's question about how Popular Sovereignty could work in light of the recent Dred Scott decision. In short, how could slavery be excluded from a territory where it already existed and could not be barred because of the Supreme Court decision? Douglas responded that slavery could not exist where local law did not support it. It was not the first time he had said it, nor was it particularly seismic in its implications. But the so-called Freeport Doctrine became a remarkable weapon for fire-eaters who treated it as a new and more cogent reason to keep Douglas from receiving the Democratic nomination in 1860. Again as in 1848, the real purpose was to destroy the Democratic Party.

As a foreshadowing Douglas began clashing with Mississippi fire-eater Albert Gallatin Brown who used Douglas to undermine Jefferson Davis for control of the Mississippi Democratic Party. The moves were abetted by Mississippi's growing alarm over ascendant Republicans in the North, and when radicals won Mississippi elections in 1859, their success encouraged fire-eaters throughout the South, none more so than Rhett in South Carolina. That summer he made his first public appearance in eight years to deliver a speech that by his old standards of inflexible adherence to separate state action was a study in moderation. Rather than disdaining cooperation, Rhett advocated it. Would anyone believe he was sincere?

The question became less relevant because more than at any previous time, the radicals had all but a guarantee of success at the Democratic Convention in Charleston. In addition to Douglas's remarks, John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry stunned southern Unionists and raised the fire-eaters in the South's estimation. The long years of fire-eaters being scoffed at for warning about non-existent or exaggerated threats were coming to a close. By the end of the 1850s, southerners taking stock of Republican success in the North, the wavering of Democratic heir apparent Stephen A. Douglas, and the Harpers Ferry raid approved of by northerners caused even the most committed moderate to pause.

Alabama's Democrat Convention essentially reprised the hymns of 1848 to shove aside Douglas supporters and instruct its delegation to Charleston to secure the Alabama Platform or leave the convention. Prepared to reprise their version of the hymns of 1848, Douglas's operatives in Charleston planned to force radicals out of the convention to clear his path toward the nomination. The radicals in Charleston wanted to be purged, and that led to a strange series of separate collaborations that brought about the strangest consequences. Buchanan administration operatives still angry about Douglas's apostasy on the Lecompton Constitution were as determine to stop him as were the radicals, and an alliance between these disparate groups resulted.[42] What Douglas did not realize was how his tactics would cause a general southern withdrawal that made his nomination in Charleston impossible, the one he received in Baltimore worthless, and Abraham Lincoln's election virtually assured.

[42] Henry Wilson to Caleb Cushing, December 15, 1860, Bangor (Maine) *Daily Whig & Courier*, December 21, 1860.

The radicals seemed more organized than ever during the initial secession crisis after Lincoln's election. They were constant spurs to action wherever they appeared, but they also realized that the appearance of impetuous reaction could easily summon the forces of moderation, or as they would have put it, the old habits of hesitation. And in reality, even in this momentous time their moment was brief and their influence fleeting. Northerners noted "their anxiety to accomplish their object without delay, and their reliance on popular ignorance as to the true position of affairs."[43]

South Carolina left the Union first, but the Rhetts helped bring about that result by not pushing for it too aggressively. Alabama seceded despite Yancey rather than because of him, as was the case in most states where fire-eaters were most effective when they refrained from participating in debates. Florida's David Yulee, Mississippi's Albert Gallatin Brown, Texas's Wigfall, Georgia's Benning and Colquitt did not exert the level of power to shape policy that traditional politicians did.

For at the beginning and in the end, radical secessionists were wishful thinkers. Their predictions about the Border States showed this. Expectations that Kentucky and Missouri would rush to join the Confederacy were quite wrong, and Arkansas calmed down after its initial alarm over Lincoln's election. North Carolina's legislature even resolved that federal coercion was an appropriate response to secession. The second wave of secession changed minds in some of these states to take them out the Union in the wake of Fort Sumter, but never enough in the key western ones.

So it was that fifty years of unsettling chastisement from the North lay the groundwork for the convulsions of 1860-61, as the agonized explanations of secession conventions trying to justify their work proved. Fire-eaters claimed that secession was the implementation of a legitimate act by sovereign entities, and to be sure secessionists in 1860-61 who steered their respective state conventions were lawyers rather than planters. The apparent results seemed to stem from long-standing schemes made suddenly popular as well as plausible by the calamities Southerners saw as certain consequences of the 1860 election. But actually the events stretching back to the Wilmot Proviso, and for some as far back as the Missouri Compromise and Nullification, had accumulated in weight to create a desire for action. In that context, radicals had sustained their warnings over the years with consistency if not tact until the day when events rendered them seemingly prophetic.

Fire-eaters did not shaped these events let alone precipitate them. They did not have a part in keeping Wilmot's Proviso at bay, regular political forces did. They tried to use the crisis of 1850 for their own purposes but compromise in Congress calmed the controversy and made fire-eaters look foolish into the bargain. Traditional politicians brokered the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and Roger Taney's decision in *Scott* v. *San[d]ford* came from the pen of a Jacksonian Democrat, not a proslavery zealot. Douglas and the Buchanan administration had as much to with the destruction of the Democratic Party in Charleston in April 1860. Traditional and calm voices conveyed quiet warnings about

[43] Boston *Daily Advertiser*, November 20, 1860

Republican ascendancy, and the fact of that ascendancy in 1860 compelled action because of those warnings. If anything, it was at this juncture that fire-eaters popped into the picture with a plan while the Southern majority stumbled, stunned and uncertain. At that point, events outpaced rational thought.

Tempting as it may be to see a conspiracy guided by fire-eaters in the Gulf States that brought on the Secession winter of 1860, it flies in the face of the events that followed. The careers of the two iconic fire-eaters after secession displayed the same flaws that thwarted them before it. Rhett was a member of the South Carolina delegation to the Provisional Congress in Montgomery in early 1861, but he served only as the chairman of three committees of middling to no influence. As the chairman of the committee that presented Jefferson Davis to the Provisional Congress, he was reduced to a ceremonial function while others went about the business of staffing the government. As noted, Rhett rapidly became Davis's most spiteful detractor. Soon after the inauguration, Rhett began excoriating him as "egotistical" and "arrogant," a man most noted for "terrible incompetency and perversity." These criticisms remained forceful and constant in their vehemence throughout the war and were always personal.[44]

Davis did invite Yancey to join the cabinet, but Yancey refused and Davis sent him abroad on the Confederacy's first diplomatic mission.[45] It indicated either how little forethought marked the new president's conception of foreign affairs or suggested that taking Yancey off the stage as the Confederacy performed its opening act was the most prudent course. Davis was a reluctant secessionist, and his vice president Alexander Stephens was an unenthusiastic one. The Confederate cabinet represented varying shades of moderate southern opinion so thoroughly that only one radical—Alabama's Leroy Pope Walker—joined it and soon proved so incompetent at the head of the War Department that he quickly left it. It was a metaphor for the secessionist movement and the men who stubbornly tried to advance it for the first half of the nineteenth century. Success when it came taxed them beyond their competence, and they quickly lost influence and place. Like storm petrels they foretold the heavy weather but were only sheltered in the lee of the Confederacy while others steered the ship.

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[44] See almost any issue of the Charleston *Mercury,* from March through December of 1861.
[45] "By the suggestion of his friends, he prefers to represent the government in Europe." See New York *Herald*, February 22, 1861.