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# *The North, the South, and the American Revolution*

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN

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THE historiography of the War for Independence during the half century following the close of the struggle can hardly be regarded as notable. The onerous task of gathering and publishing the official documents was pursued with commendable industry. Soldiers of every rank dutifully undertook to record their recollections of the conflict. Before the end of the century at least one enterprising historian had attempted to write the history of his own colony's role in the war.<sup>1</sup> A few had even essayed a comprehensive history of the war, but not even the contemporary critics viewed these accomplishments with pride.<sup>2</sup> Neither the highly colored and blissfully inaccurate lives of the Founding Fathers nor the new nationalistic writings following the War of 1812 succeeded in inspiring any of the nation's writers to focus their attention on the days of glory when the nation won its independence. As late as 1826, fifty years after the Declaration of Independence, Jared Sparks could assert with accuracy that no complete history of the Revolution had yet appeared.<sup>3</sup>

The observation by Sparks was a call for increased study of the Revolutionary years as well as a recognition of what had not yet been accomplished. He would set the example by publishing *The Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution*, *The Life and Writings of George Washington*, and numerous other works bearing on the Revolutionary era.

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<sup>1</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the Revolution of South Carolina, from a British Province to an Independent State* (2 vols., Trenton, 1785).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations* (2 vols., Boston, 1805).

<sup>3</sup> Jared Sparks, "Materials for American History," *North American Review*, XXIII (Oct. 1826), 276.

Others would follow. In 1822 the indefatigable Hezekiah Niles began to publish the sources of the Revolution, while William Tudor was publishing incidents of the war and biographies of the heroes. With Jonathan Elliott, Peter Force, and Timothy Pitkin joining the ranks, the Revolutionary era by 1840 had become one of the principal fields of study for American historians, publicists, poets, and novelists.<sup>4</sup>

These early histories of the American Revolution escaped almost entirely the influences of the new scientific methods that were just beginning to gain respectability in the continental universities. Displaying little imagination and written in the labored style so typical of the early nineteenth century, they showed little originality except in the liberties which the authors took with the manuscripts and other sources they used. They emphasized the unifying forces at work in the colonies, and they expatiated on the heroic sacrifices of the patriots. Some present-day anti-colonialists might well envy their powerful descriptions of the struggle for freedom against tyranny and the determination of the people to rid themselves of the control of a lecherous colonial power!<sup>5</sup> At times these historians of the New Republic reflected the ancient prejudices of Whigs against Tories. At other times, their works showed the pervasive influences of the Federalist-Republican struggle. On the whole, however, they tended to be nationalist in scope as in their prejudices.

Although a few southern historians had given attention to the War for Independence, there was no sustained interest in the subject before 1840. In 1785 David Ramsay published his two-volume *History of the Revolution in South Carolina, from a British Province to an Independent State*, which was described by one recent admirer as "the first substantial account of any phase of the Revolution and a foundation stone for all subsequent study of the Revolution in the South." Ramsay was not satisfied with this work that had been conceived during the period of his imprisonment by the British at St. Augustine. After four additional years of research and writing he published his *History of the American Revolution*, which would stand "unrivaled in American historiography until George Bancroft's great multivolume history reached the Revolutionary period in

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kraus, *A History of American History* (New York, 1937), 163-98. See also, Sydney G. Fisher, "The Legendary and Myth-Making Process in Histories of the American Revolution," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, LI (April-June 1912), 53-75.

<sup>5</sup> George Bancroft, *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent* (8 vols., Boston, 1858), VI, 527-28, VIII, 462-75. See also, David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884* (Chicago, 1960), 111-20.

the 1850's."<sup>6</sup> This tells us more about the status of scholarship on the American Revolution than it tells us about the quality of Ramsay's works.<sup>7</sup> But there were even few Ramsays in the South, and in the early part of the century southerners seemed content with the desultory pursuit of Revolutionary history largely by northern writers. Even in the years following the War of 1812 there is no discernible increase of southern interest in the Revolution.

Exceptions to this general inactivity were the biographies and personal memoirs that served to build up the reputations of the heroes and near-heroes of the Revolution. In 1802 Colonel William Moultrie published his memoirs, an apologia for his role in certain military operations.<sup>8</sup> A decade later General Henry Lee, the hero of several Revolutionary campaigns in different parts of the country, spent a portion of his time in a debtors' prison planning and executing the work that was one of the best personal accounts of the war ever written.<sup>9</sup> Biography soon became a principal vehicle for writing about the Revolution. Within a decade after his death the father of our country received the attention of no less than three biographers. And if Ramsay's work of 1807 was the soundest brief account and John Marshall's five volumes the most exhaustive, Parson Mason L. Weems' fanciful idealization was easily the most successful, especially after he added the cherry tree story in the fifth edition.<sup>10</sup> Weems, the Maryland book peddler, bestowed his ample talents on others such as General Francis Marion and Benjamin Franklin, but none was as successful as his life of George Washington.

Where pride in community, state, and section began to flourish, as it did when the South became more conscious of its position as a section, the

<sup>6</sup> Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "The American Revolution: Southern Founders of a National Tradition," Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick, eds., *Writing Southern History: Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green* (Baton Rouge, 1965), 40-41.

<sup>7</sup> The quality of David Ramsay's works has been seriously challenged by one critic who charged Ramsay with plagiarism, among other things. Orin Grant Libby, "Some Pseudo Histories of the American Revolution," *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*, XIII (Madison, 1901), 419-25; and Orin Grant Libby, "Ramsay as a Plagiarist," *American Historical Review*, VII (July 1902), 697-703. See also, Page Smith, "David Ramsay and the Causes of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XVII (Jan. 1960), 52.

<sup>8</sup> William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, So Far as It Related to the States of North and South Carolina, and Georgia* (2 vols., New York, 1802).

<sup>9</sup> Henry Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1812).

<sup>10</sup> Mason L. Weems, *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington* (Philadelphia, 1800); David Ramsay, *The Life of George Washington* (Baltimore, 1807); and John Marshall, *The Life of George Washington* (5 vols., Philadelphia, 1804-1807).

people would not continue to remain indifferent to their past. As southerners began to see how northern writers tended to glorify the deeds of the heroes of their section, they began to realize that even under the most favorable circumstances, southerners could not entrust to northerners the responsibility of recording something so important as the South's role in the American Revolution. And these were no favorable or even ordinary circumstances. Northerners were openly attacking southern institutions, and their writers were beginning to make distinctions between the North and South that showed no favorable disposition to the South. When Bancroft's first volume appeared in 1835, the reviewer in the *Southern Literary Messenger* was concerned that Bancroft claimed that the people of the colonies "formed one body politic before the Revolution." Against the proposition that Virginia and the South had no distinct and unique character and mission the reviewer felt "bound to protest. We hold ourselves prepared to maintain the negative against all comers and goers, with tongue and pen; and to resist the practical results, if need be, with stronger weapons."<sup>11</sup> Whatever Bancroft's intentions it is doubtful that he expected to provoke such a response. When the fourth volume of Richard Hildreth's *History of the United States* appeared in 1851, it drew the fire of *De Bow's Review*. It was a clear example, the editor said, of sectional bias. So "keen and bitter are the prejudices and antipathies of the author towards the South, and everything Southern; towards Mr. Jefferson, and the whole republican party afterwards, and so delighted is he to dwell upon any points which may be tortured to their disadvantage, that we can place but little confidence in his integrity as a historian, and none whatever in his feelings as a man."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, as the South prepared to defend itself from northern attacks on its institutions, it discovered almost simultaneously that it needed to give more attention to its past. By that time northern writers were attacking on a wide front, bringing into question the South's past performance—even during the Revolution—as well as its present conduct.

In 1847 Lorenzo Sabine, the Massachusetts historian, published *The American Loyalists or Biographical Sketches of Adherents to the British Crown in the War of the Revolution*. In earlier studies of the Revolution there had been some reference to colonists who would not join the patriots and to some who even supported the crown. The work by Sabine, however, was the first ambitious and comprehensive study of the subject. By the time it appeared, many Americans were interested to learn who

<sup>11</sup> *Southern Literary Messenger*, I (Jan. 1835), 591.

<sup>12</sup> *De Bow's Review*, X (May 1851), 599.

among the colonists were subversive and treacherous enough to support the British. In one place in his book Sabine observed, quite incidentally, that the loyalist sentiment in the South was so strong that the section's contribution to the winning of independence was extremely limited and, on the whole, without effect. In singling out South Carolina the author conceded that there was some patriotic zeal in that colony, but then cautioned that "'One swallow does not make a summer,' nor 'One feather make a bed;'" and so, a Laurens, father and son, a Middleton, a Rutledge, Marion, Sumter, and Pickens, do not prove that the Whig leaven was diffused throughout the mass of her people." He added that one of the reasons for the southerner's inability to commit himself more fully to the Revolutionary cause was the presence of large numbers of slaves who might become troublesome during a time of upheaval.<sup>13</sup>

If Sabine had deliberately planned it, he could not have wounded the pride of southerners more deeply or evoked a more spirited retaliation. The provocation came at a time, moreover, when southerners were insisting that their position more nearly reflected a spirit of national unity and well-being than the disruptive activities of northern abolitionists. Southerners had also been pressing their argument that slavery, the cornerstone of their civilization, greatly contributed to the stability and prosperity of the entire country. The Sabine attack appeared to southerners to be part of a grand northern design to impugn their loyalty and challenge their institutions. They could not ignore it any more than they could ignore the frontal assaults of the abolitionists. They would refute Sabine and his kind in the press, on the platform, in the pulpit, on the floor of Congress, and even in the North.

Literally scores of southerners insisted that their ancestors were the leaders in the War for Independence. Virginians were responsible for securing Illinois from Britain, Elwood Fisher told his Cincinnati audience; and then they magnanimously ceded it to the Confederation. Another argued that the number of southern enlistments and the length of service by southerners clearly proved that they "suffered more of the privations of war than their Northern co-patriots."<sup>14</sup> One proud southerner said that the Revolution in South Carolina had been "conceived and organized by the native population" and that from the first the people "neither wavered

<sup>13</sup> Lorenzo Sabine, *The American Loyalists or Biographical Sketches of Adherents to the British Crown in the War of the Revolution* (Boston, 1847), 30, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Elwood Fisher, *Lecture on the North and South, Delivered before the Young Men's Mercantile Library Association of Cincinnati, Ohio, January 16, 1849* (Charleston, 1849); and Edward B. Bryan, *The Rightful Remedy, Addressed to the Slaveholders of the South* (Charleston, 1850), 87.

nor faltered throughout its progress." Southern troops, another argued, were more loyal than New England troops, who would not march into Virginia with Cornwallis "until they had received in hard money, one month's pay in advance."<sup>15</sup>

As for the slaves, southerners insisted that they were an asset during the Revolution. Even when whole districts of the country were left entirely to women, children, and slaves, the bondsmen, "far from proving treacherous, or deserting their masters, continued their labours upon the plantation, and no faithful watch-dog was ever more true in giving the alarm, on the approach of an enemy. . . ."<sup>16</sup> They vehemently denied that their slaves deserted them and went over to the British. They claimed that the only slaves that the British obtained from the southern colonists was by seizure.<sup>17</sup> Judge Augustus Baldwin Longstreet said that he had never heard of such a thing as slaves taking sides against their masters. "But I heard of thousands of instances, wherein they served them in battle, took care of the wives and children, [and] bore them away from peril. . . ."<sup>18</sup>

The argument over the South's valor and the role of her slaves in the War for Independence finally found its way to the floor of the United States Senate. Among the ardent defenders of the South's contribution to the War for Independence was South Carolina's Senator Andrew P. Butler. As early as 1850 he had declared that the "quarrel of Boston was espoused without calculation by the people of Charleston"; and he expressed the view that it would now be strange indeed "if those who had a common history should be the parties to destroy the bonds of a union formed in a spirit of cordial confidence."<sup>19</sup> During the debates on Kansas, when Butler spoke against the move to make Kansas a free state, it was Charles Sumner who answered him:

But it is against the people of Kansas, that the sensibilities of the Senator are particular aroused. Coming, as he announces, "from a State"—ay, sir, from South Carolina—he turns with lordly disgust from this newly-formed community, which he will not recognize even as "a body-politic." Pray, sir, by what title does he indulge in this egotism? Has he read the history of "the State" which he rep-

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Massillon Keitt, "Patriotic Services of the North and the South," *De Bow's Review*, XXI (Nov. 1856), 491-92; and Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences, Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South* (Charleston, 1851), 556.

<sup>16</sup> Bryan, *The Rightful Remedy*, 47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>18</sup> Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *A Voice from the South: Comprising Letters from Georgia to Massachusetts, and to the Southern States* (Baltimore, 1847), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew P. Butler, *A Speech of A. P. Butler, of South Carolina, on the Bill Providing for the Surrender of Fugitive Slaves. Delivered in the Senate of the United States, January 24, 1850* (Washington, 1850), 11.



resents? He cannot surely have forgotten its shameful imbecility from Slavery, confessed throughout the Revolution, followed by its more shameful assumptions for Slavery since.<sup>20</sup>

Sumner had already overreached himself, but he went on to make remarks against Senator Butler that offended most southerners. This led to the well-known episode, the caning of Sumner on the Senate floor by Butler's cousin, Representative Preston Brooks. Butler, however, made his own reply by suggesting that "ingratitude is the monster of vices, and when it is associated with injustice, it ought to be condemned by the consuming indignation of even those who may tomorrow be our adversaries. . . . The man who now reproaches South Carolina . . . is a degenerate son reproaching the dearest and nearest comrade with his mother. You cannot get over the errors he has committed in history; you cannot obviate the malignity with which the arrow has been shot. . . . I challenge him to the truth of history. There was not a battle fought south of the Potomac which was not fought by southern troops and southern slave holders. . . ." <sup>21</sup> There was no rebuttal, for Sumner lay critically ill from the thrashing that Brooks had given him.

William Gilmore Simms, South Carolina's leading novelist and man of letters, had watched this tragic dispute for years, and his temper rose with every exchange between the North and South. He had been among the first writers to praise the South's role in the War for Independence, and as early as 1843 he delivered a lengthy oration on the subject. On that occasion he said that the history of South Carolina did not need to be written. "It is deeply engraven upon the everlasting monuments of the nation. It is around us, a living trophy upon all our hills. It is within us, an undying memory in all our hearts. It is a record which no fortune can obliterate—inseparable from all that is great and glorious in the work of the Revolution."<sup>22</sup> Simms, the Unionist of the 1830s had by 1843 become one of the South's most ardent champions.<sup>23</sup> When Sabine's book appeared Simms was no longer certain that South Carolina's role in the Revolution did not need to be written. He had published a history of his state in 1840, and

<sup>20</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 543 (May 20, 1856).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 627-28. See also Andrew P. Butler, "The South's Sacrifices in the Revolution," *De Bow's Review*, XXI (Aug. 1856), 197-98.

<sup>22</sup> William Gilmore Simms, *The Sources of American Independence: An Oration, On the Sixty-Ninth Anniversary of American Independence, Delivered at Aiken, South-Carolina, Before the Town Council and Citizens Thereof* (Aiken, 1844), 22.

<sup>23</sup> John W. Higham, "The Changing Loyalties of William Gilmore Simms," *Journal of Southern History*, IX (May 1943), 210-23.



he had given much attention to the Revolutionary era.<sup>24</sup> Apparently that was not enough. He would set the record straight, once and for all.

First, Simms made a blistering attack on Sabine in his review of *The American Loyalists*, which appeared in two issues of the *Southern Quarterly Review* in 1848. He asserted that the present generation of public men of South Carolina had no doubt that the colony's "patriotic devotion in the revolution was inferior to none and was superior to most of the states of the Confederacy." Sabine had found this not to be so, but he did not prove his claim because he could not do so. "The claims of Carolina to the distinction which her public men assert," said Simms, "may be slurred over by ingenuous misrepresentation, but she cannot be defrauded of them. They are to be estimated relatively with the difficulties with which she had to contend, the deficiencies of her numbers, the purity of her purpose, the rancor of her enemies, the spirit and wisdom of the favorite sons who swayed her councils and fought her battles, and the severity and frequency of her fields of fight." Simms then proceeded to argue that the southern army was composed largely of men from the five colonies of Virginia, Maryland, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. Not a dozen patriots from New England fought in the South; and the generals from the North who led southern armies, Lincoln and Greene, were surely not extraordinary.<sup>25</sup>

Next, Simms contributed an essay, "The Morals of Slavery" to the *Pro-Slavery Argument*, which appeared in 1852. This was a revision of an article that had first appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1837. In the revised version Simms gave special attention to the role of slaves during the Revolution. Despite the efforts of the British to lure the slaves away, they were unsuccessful, Simms contended. "The entire mass of the slave population adhered, with unshaken fidelity, to their masters—numbers followed or accompanied them to the field, and fought at their sides, while the greater body faithfully pursued their labors on the plantation, never deserting them in trial, danger, or privation, and exhibiting, amidst every reverse of fortune, that respect, that propriety of moral, which did not presume in adversity, and took no license from the disorder of the times. . . ."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> William Gilmore Simms, *The History of South Carolina, From its First European Discovery to its Erection into a Republic: With a Supplementary Chronicle of Events to the Present Time* (Charleston, 1840). More than one half of the book treats the period from 1775 to 1783. *Ibid.*, 133-319.

<sup>25</sup> William Gilmore Simms, "South Carolina in the Revolution," *Southern Quarterly Review*, XIV (July 1848), 45-51; and *ibid.* (Oct. 1848), 261-337.

<sup>26</sup> *The Pro-Slavery Argument; As Maintained by . . . Chancellor Harper, Governor Hammond, Dr. Simms, and Professor Dew* (Charleston, 1852), 243.

Then, in 1853 Simms brought out, in revised and extended form, his article on Sabine's book, which was itself a book. The intervening years had not cooled Simms' ardor or quieted his temper, and he launched into a bitter personal attack on Sabine. He was not prepared, he said, to quarrel with the "taste, or passion for novelty, which of late, seems disposed to busy itself in rescuing the memories of the American loyalists from the appropriate obscurity. . . ." Perhaps it was natural or even necessary for the person to engage in such work. He admitted, moreover, that such researches were essential to the "unity and completeness of our records, if not to their authority and value. . . . But to employ history, as Mr. Lorenzo Sabine seems to have done, as a sort of universal dragnet; and to arrest, and to preserve together in the reservoir, without discrimination, the fish, flesh and fowl, of this mixed multitude, is to make a 'hell-broth' of it, indeed, such as the witches of Shakespeare and Middleton might be led to admire and to envy for the various loathesomeness of the ingredients." Simms, tempted to dismiss the whole Sabine undertaking, said that the entire exercise was a waste of type and paper and declared, "That Mr. Sabine's book will be found readable in the proportion of one page to fifty, is quite beyond the range of literary probability."<sup>27</sup> Small wonder that some years later a biographer of Simms concluded that his "petulance and want of courtesy" led him to "gross indiscretions and injured his own cause."<sup>28</sup>

Finally, Simms decided to take the fight into the North. In his younger years he had lived there for an extended period. As he gained prominence in literary circles, he cultivated a large group of New York friends, including William Cullen Bryant, Bancroft, and James Lawson of Scribner's. He eagerly accepted the invitation that was extended by his friends to give three lectures in New York City in November 1856. He was frank to say that he hoped to "disabuse the public of the North of many mistaken impressions which do us wrong."<sup>29</sup> En route to the great city Simms agreed to speak in Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse.

On November 11, 1856, Simms addressed a Buffalo audience of more than 1,200 on "South Carolina in the Revolution." The material for the lecture, which he would repeat in Rochester and New York City, was drawn from his several works on the subject. One reporter said that the

<sup>27</sup> [William Gilmore Simms] *South-Carolina in the Revolutionary War: Being A Reply to Certain Misrepresentations and Mistakes of Recent Writers, In Relation to the Course and Conduct of this State* (Charleston, 1853), 2-9.

<sup>28</sup> William P. Trent, *William Gilmore Simms* (Boston, 1892), 205.

<sup>29</sup> Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves, eds., *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms* (5 vols., Columbia, 1952-1956), III, 454.

lecture was interesting and instructive, and the only portion giving dissatisfaction "was his severe animadversions on a portion of the North." Another called it "an ill-digested, bitter and to at least nine-tenths of the audience, offensive defence of South Carolinian politicians of the Brooks school." A third reporter was even less restrained: "With an impudence unsurpassed, he comes into our midst and makes an harangue abusive of a Northern State and running over with fulsome and false praise of the least deserving State of the Union." Simms fared no better in Rochester, where an editor said that as a literary production the lecture was "destitute of merit," and as a lecture before a literary association it was "an imposition."<sup>30</sup>

It was in New York that Simms hoped to make his greatest impression. There, he would be among friends; he had a distinguished list of patrons; and his lectures were to be delivered in Dr. E. H. Chapin's Universalist Church of the Divine Unity. The first lecture, on November 18, would be on "The South in the Revolution," while on November 21 and 25 he would lecture on southern scenery, life, and manners. On the first evening an audience of more than one hundred was "scattered through Mr. Chapin's Church." Simms spoke for an hour and a half, at the end of which he received "a round of applause."<sup>31</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that Simms alienated a considerable portion of his audience at the beginning of his talk when he mounted an attack on Sumner, still recovering from the assault by Brooks. For some eighty years, Simms began, the people of South Carolina had reposed securely in the faith that the fame of their ancestors was beyond reproach. It was not to be so, for there had been allegations made "by a Senator in the Senate House," and he had regaled his listeners of the unmanly deeds of South Carolinians who were "false to their duties & their country;—recreant to their trusts . . . traitors in the cabinet and cowards in the field!" And this cruel history "poured forth with a malignant satisfaction, seemingly with no other purpose than to goad and mortify the natural pride and sensibility of a hated party!"<sup>32</sup>

The remainder of the lecture sought to correct the notion that South Carolina had not contributed its full share to the winning of independence.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 456-58, 521-49.

<sup>31</sup> *New York Tribune*, Nov. 19, 1856. The *New York Herald* blamed the small attendance on "the unusual number and peculiar excellence of other places of attraction . . . and, to some extent perhaps, to the high price of the tickets," which were 50¢ per lecture or \$1.25 for the three. *New York Herald*, Nov. 19, 1856.

<sup>32</sup> William Gilmore Simms, "South Carolina in the Revolution. A Lecture," Oliphant, Odell, and Eaves, eds., *Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, III, 521-22.

Simms provided statistics to show how extensive South Carolina's commitment was to the War for Independence; and he recounted events to show the valor of the men of the South in their drive to defeat the enemy. In passing, he observed that his state had done nothing to cause anyone from Massachusetts to claim that South Carolina had not done its share.

Simms must have been stunned by the merciless attacks on him by the New York press. The New York *Tribune* took him to task for making no mention of South Carolina's Negroes "who, after all, were her greatest drawback, and, since they served as plunder, the chief instigation to the ferocious civil war, by which she was ravaged and disgraced."<sup>33</sup> The New York *Herald* asserted that the Simms lectures, a "quixotical undertaking," were "professedly to bolster up the much injured chivalry of South Carolina, and to palliate some of their recent exploits."<sup>34</sup> Although edited by Bryant, long-time friend of Simms, the most that the New York *Post* could say was that it was dismayed by the several instances of lack of courtesy shown Simms.<sup>35</sup> When less than twenty people came out for his second New York lecture, Simms not only cancelled any further New York appearances but all other engagements in the North as well. He told his hosts at Troy that he was compelled to forgo his engagements "in consequence of the singular odium which attends my progress as a South Carolinian, and the gross abuse which has already assailed myself personally, and my performances."<sup>36</sup> Shortly thereafter, Simms wrote a friend, he hastened home to his "forest cover, with the feeling of the wounded hart flying to the thicket."<sup>37</sup>

Simms was merely the best known and perhaps the most eloquent among those who debated the comparative valor of the North and South during the Revolution. And the debate made up in intensity and fervor what it lacked in numbers. Sabine had spoken categorically and uncompromisingly for the North or, more properly, against the South. Sumner had done the same and his words had brought down on himself the wrath of Brooks and the vilification of other southerners. But Sumner was not without his supporters in the Congress. Benjamin Wade of Ohio raised the question in 1856 of whether the country could indeed have secured

<sup>33</sup> New York *Tribune*, Nov. 24, 1856.

<sup>34</sup> New York *Herald*, Nov. 24, 1856.

<sup>35</sup> New York *Post*, Nov. 21, 1856. The New York *Times* called the lecture "eloquent and interesting" and said that William Gilmore Simms would always be listened to "courteously and respectfully. . . . These courtesies are the more creditable, because they are never reciprocated." New York *Times*, Nov. 19, 1856.

<sup>36</sup> New York *Post*, Nov. 26, 1856.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Trent, *William Gilmore Simms*, 224.

its independence had the slave power been in control. John Letcher of Virginia disposed of Wade by reminding him that at the time of the Revolution all the states were slaveholding. "Now, sir," he continued, "according to the gentleman's theory, is it not remarkable that, with all our colonies slaveholding, our arms should have been favored by Divine Providence, and our cause so eminently successful? How does he reconcile this glorious result with his theory of sin, guilt, and shame of slavery?"<sup>38</sup>

Sumner had another supporter in Anson Burlingame, a Massachusetts member of the Thirty-fourth Congress who did not hesitate to make statements that were as unequivocal as any that Sabine or Sumner had made. In June 1856, he told his colleagues in the House of Representatives that "Massachusetts furnished more men in the Revolution than the whole South . . . and more by ten-fold than South Carolina." Then, relying on data provided by Sabine, Burlingame argued that "More New Englandmen now lie buried in the soil of South Carolina than there were of South Carolinians, who left their State to fight the battles of the country." Perhaps the greatest insult he heaped upon the South was his assertion that General Benjamin Lincoln was compelled to give up the defense of Charleston because the people of the city would not fight.<sup>39</sup>

For every Wade or Burlingame who spoke for the North there seemed to be a dozen loyal sons of the South anxious to speak out in her defense. And after the attack by Sabine, their retaliatory efforts seem to have been well coordinated. William Porcher Miles of Charleston struck a keynote when he called on all brave southerners to stand together in their hour of peril. "Let us cherish . . . the recollection of our revolutionary glory as the highest and purest in all our past record. There we see no timidity or time serving—no want of faith or manly self-confidence—no superstitious attachment to old and revered sentiments on the one hand, nor the pursuit of wild and impracticable dreams on the other. There we see bold wisdom and wise bravery—prudence warmed by valor, and courage tempered and informed by reason."<sup>40</sup>

In the climate of the 1850s there was nothing more serious than the question of slave fidelity. They must be made to appear loyal both in 1776 and in 1850 if the North was not to have the upper hand in this all-important argument. In fact, Edward Bryan of Charleston argued that the

<sup>38</sup> John Letcher, *Speech of Hon. John Letcher, of Virginia, on the Political Issues Now Before the Country* (Washington, 1856), 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 655 (June 21, 1856).

<sup>40</sup> *Proceedings at the Inauguration of the Monument Erected by the Washington Light Infantry, in the Memory of Col. William Washington . . .* (Charleston, 1858), 37.

South's history, "like that of the ancient republics, shows that in war our slaves have been found faithful allies." This was certainly the case during the Revolution, he asserted, despite "British promises of the most enticing nature, and with the most sedulous instigations to revolt. . . ."41

On the general question of the South's contribution to the winning of the War for Independence, southern speakers and writers were of one voice that was loud and clear. William Trescot declared that the Revolution merely showed how proficient the South was, and it proved that "Southern armies subsist on their own soil, with half the trouble and expense that foreign foes must employ. The military experience of the country points to the South as emphatically the region of soldiers. . . ."42 In an address before the Fair of the American Institute in New York in 1851 James De Bow said that the southern states supplied about one third of the yearly enlistments in the War for Independence, and as the war moved South the region sent twice as many.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, Colonel Lawrence M. Keitt declared that "in the darkest hours of the Revolution, when the cloud of defeat hung from all the arches of our sky" it was the southern fighters who "kept the fires of independence brightly burning."<sup>44</sup>

It was a strange spectacle indeed. Here were two sections that were virtually at war with each other in the 1850s, not merely over the current problems that beset them but also over their comparative strengths and weaknesses during the War for Independence. And the arguments advanced by northerners and southerners were eloquent and moving, even if they did not win any new supporters from the other side. They seemed content to assert and reassert their firmly held positions, apparently believing that the very exercise itself would strengthen the validity of their arguments.

One wonders just how comfortable and smug it made Sabine and his colleagues feel to assert categorically that the South's contribution to the Revolution was less than one might have expected. In the 1840s and 1850s

<sup>41</sup> Bryan, *The Rightful Remedy*, 46-47.

<sup>42</sup> William H. Trescot, *The Position and Course of the South* (Charleston, 1850), 16.

<sup>43</sup> James De Bow, "The South and the Union," *De Bow's Review*, X (Feb. 1851), 160.

<sup>44</sup> Keitt, "Patriotic Services of the North and the South," 494. In an introductory note praising Lawrence M. Keitt's article the editor said: "Though we dislike such comparisons, when they are provoked, it is not our part to shrink from them." *De Bow's Review*, XXI (Nov. 1856), 491. For additional statements in defense of the South's role in the Revolution, see Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South* (Charleston, 1851); Robert Toombs, *An Oration Delivered . . . at Oxford, Georgia, July, 1853* (Augusta, 1853); John Randolph Tucker, *Address Delivered before the Phoenix and Philomathean Societies of William and Mary College, on the 3rd of July, 1854* (Richmond, 1854); and Henry Wise, "Gov. Wise's Oration at Lexington, Va., 4th July, 1856," *Southern Literary Messenger*, XXIII (July 1856), 1-19.



an increasing number of northerners were convinced that in the dispute then raging they had by far the more defensible position and that it had its foundation in the superior stance that the North enjoyed during the Revolution. To them the "shameful imbecility from slavery" during the Revolution led directly to the "horrors of human bondage" in the 1850s. But one must also wonder just how completely satisfied Simms and his colleagues felt in arguing that the South's contribution to the Revolution was greater than that of the North. In the decades preceding the Civil War many southern leaders were advancing the notion that the South's way of life was superior to that of the North and that the greater courage and heroism of southerners who fought for the cause of freedom during the War for Independence led directly to the undisputed advantage in culture and civilization that the South enjoyed in subsequent years.

As one reviews the charges and countercharges of dereliction during the Revolution advanced by both North and South seventy-five years after the Revolution, one gets the impression that the spokesmen for each section were engaged in a debate that was as pointless as it was fatuous. Neither side seemed concerned about the intervention of France or, indeed, the ineffectual stand of the British as factors contributing to the victory of the colonists. It is difficult to believe, moreover, that sectionalism had reached the point in 1776 where anyone was conscious of fighting as a northerner or as a southerner. Perhaps the Sons of Liberty in Massachusetts thought of themselves as sons of Massachusetts, but hardly as northerners. Perhaps the South Carolina patriots fought and acted as South Carolinians, but hardly as southerners. When Sabine and Sumner and Wade and Burlingame spoke with scorn of the role that the South played in the Revolution, they spoke as sectionalists of the 1840s and 1850s whose position scarcely represented those of the 1770s for whom they presumed to speak. Likewise, when Butler and Keitt and Letcher and Simms rushed to the defense of their section, they spoke in language that their forebears would scarcely have recognized at the time of the Revolution. Advocates on both sides were attempting to be relevant, but a better description of them is that their respective positions reflected an artless anachronism.

The one thing about which the sectional adversaries of the 1850s fretted most was the question of slavery. In their frenzy to establish the legitimacy of their current positions they summoned the Revolutionary experience to their support. But it would not work. Sumner could be outraged by the "shameful imbecility" from slavery in the southern colonies, but surely there was no clear distinction between the moral and ideological positions of New England and the South. It should not have been necessary for



Letcher to remind Sumner that at the time of the Revolution "all the states of this Union were slaveholding states."<sup>45</sup> Sumner and his associates should have known something of the bitter struggle of New England slaves to secure their freedom during the era of the Revolution. There were numerous cases in the courts in which slaves were suing for their freedom; and it is of more than passing interest that John Adams, who represented the British soldiers after the Boston massacre, was legal counsel for slave owners in four cases but never represented a slave petitioner.<sup>46</sup> Into the General Court of Massachusetts there was, moreover, a steady flow of petitions of slaves praying for emancipation; and Paul Cuffe and his brother went to jail because they refused to pay their taxes, arguing that since they were denied the franchise in Massachusetts they were being taxed without representation.<sup>47</sup> Sumner should also have known that down to the Revolution, New Englanders were deeply involved in the African slave trade. The rum they exported to Africa, representing three fourths of the total colonial export in 1770, greatly facilitated the slave trade in which more than a few New Englanders were engaged.<sup>48</sup>

The southern position was no better. Bryan could argue that South Carolina's slaves were an asset; and Longstreet could claim that slaves never took sides against their masters, but surely they had heard of Lord Dunmore's offer in 1775 of freedom to all slaves who joined "His Majesty's Troops . . . for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper sense of their duty to His Majesty's crown and dignity."<sup>49</sup> Washington did not share Longstreet's later view that slaves during the Revolution would remain loyal and faithful to their masters under any and all circumstances. He told General Richard Henry Lee that if Dunmore were not crushed immediately, his strength would increase "as a snow ball by rolling; and faster, if some expedient cannot be hit upon to convince the slaves and servants of the impotency of his design."<sup>50</sup> If his lordship's proclamation

<sup>45</sup> Letcher, *Speech of Hon. John Letcher*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Hiller B. Zobel, "Jonathan Sewall: A Lawyer in Conflict," *Publications of the Cambridge Historical Society*, XL (1964-1966), 131.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1961), 43-50. The best account of the Cuffe episode is in an unpublished biography of Paul Cuffe by Sally Loomis.

<sup>48</sup> Emory R. Johnson, T. W. Van Metre, G. G. Huebner, and D. S. Hanchett, *History of Domestic and Foreign Commerce of the United States* (2 vols., Washington, 1915), I, 118. See also Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944), 80; and James Pope-Hennessy, *Sins of the Fathers: A Study of Atlantic Slave Traders, 1441-1807* (New York, 1968), 231-41.

<sup>49</sup> Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., and Benjamin Quarles, eds., *The Negro American: A Documentary History* (Glenview, Ill., 1967), 56.

<sup>50</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799* (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944), IV, 186.

did not bring more than 1,000 into the British fold, it was clearly because the stiffened hands of the Virginia patriots made any wholesale flight of slaves impossible. Even so, wherever the British armies went they attracted many blacks, and Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina were especially alarmed over the future of slavery regardless of the outcome of the war. Thomas Jefferson estimated that in 1778 alone more than 30,000 Virginia slaves ran away. Ramsay asserted that between 1775 and 1783 South Carolina lost at least 20,000 blacks. It was estimated that during the war Georgia lost about 75 percent of its 15,000 slaves.<sup>51</sup> As late as 1781 Richard Henry Lee wrote his brother that two neighbors had lost "every slave they had in the world. . . . This has been the general case of all those who were near the enemy. . . ." <sup>52</sup> It is strange indeed that the southerners of the antebellum years appeared to have no knowledge of this side of the Revolution.

If the adversaries of the two sections failed to grasp clearly what had transpired during the Revolution, they did not do any better in coping with the issues of their own time. Regarding northern attacks on southern institutions, Simms warned in 1844 that the South could not always be patient. "The cup of wrath will one day fill to overflowing, and run over, it may be, in measureless retribution."<sup>53</sup> But neither Simms nor any of his colleagues was willing to concede that the rights for which the colonists, including some 5,000 blacks, fought in the Revolution should be extended to blacks. Virginia's George Fitzhugh put the matter quite bluntly in 1854 when he declared that "the Athenian democracy would not suit a negro nation, nor will the government of mere law suffice for the individual negro. He is but a grown up child, and must be governed as a child, not as a lunatic or criminal. The master occupies towards him the place of parent or guardian."<sup>54</sup> The black abolitionists, traveling in Canada and Europe in their campaign against slavery, and the well-to-do free Negroes of Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans needed parents and guardians

<sup>51</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution* (2 vols., Lexington, 1815), II, 291; E. Merton Coulter, *A Short History of Georgia* (Chapel Hill, 1933), 136; Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia 1763-1789* (Athens, 1958), 170-71; and John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York, 1974), 91-92.

<sup>52</sup> James Curtis Ballagh, ed., *The Letters of Richard Henry Lee* (2 vols., New York, 1911-1914), II, 242.

<sup>53</sup> Simms, *Sources of American Independence*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, 1854), reprinted in Harvey Wish, ed., *Ante-Bellum Writings of George Fitzhugh and Hinton Rowan Helper on Slavery* (New York, 1960), 88-89.

or, indeed, from Fitzhugh's point of view, should not have been free. One can only wonder what Fitzhugh needed and how really free he was.

Meanwhile, the spokesmen for New England enlightenment had much about which to be embarrassed. Even as they taunted southerners for their inferior role in the Revolution and for their deep commitment to slavery, their own inconsistencies were showing. An example was the show of force and violence by Connecticut residents toward Prudence Crandall whose serious crime in 1833 was that she proposed to have one black student in her school. There were, moreover, the numerous northern merchants who were determined to do business with the South and get as much profit out of slave labor as possible. Nathan Appleton of Boston went so far as to invite Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia to speak in Tremont Temple to explain to New Englanders what southern civilization was all about.<sup>55</sup>

An even greater source of embarrassment was the long, dreary effort of blacks and their white friends to end segregation in the schools of Boston and in other northern communities. Negroes of Boston had long struggled against segregation in public education of that city. In 1844, when the school committee reaffirmed its policy of maintaining racially segregated schools, a group of blacks protested the action. In chiding the committee for its stand, they said that the maintenance of such schools was contrary to the laws of the commonwealth, and they would withdraw their children from the racially segregated school that had been "established in contravention of that equality of privileges which is the vital principle of the school system of Massachusetts."<sup>56</sup>

In 1849 Sumner joined the black parents in their effort to break down school segregation. In the celebrated case brought by a black pupil, Sumner, as counsel for the plaintiff, reminded the court that the equality he was demanding was the equality before the law that was "declared by our fathers in 1776, and made the fundamental law of Massachusetts in 1780. . . . The fact that a child is black, or that he is white, cannot of itself be a qualification or a disqualification. Not to the skin can we look for the criterion of fitness."<sup>57</sup> The supreme court of Massachusetts disagreed. Speaking for the court Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw said:

<sup>55</sup> For an account of Robert Toombs' visit to Boston, see John Hope Franklin, *Southern Odyssey: Travellers in the Antebellum North* (Baton Rouge, 1975).

<sup>56</sup> *Liberator*, XIV (June 28, 1844), 103, quoted in Albert P. Blaustein and Robert L. Zangrando, eds., *Civil Rights and the American Negro: A Documentary History* (New York, 1968), 111-12.

<sup>57</sup> *The Works of Charles Sumner* (15 vols., Boston, 1875-1883), II, 341, 359.

Conceding . . . that colored persons . . . are entitled by law . . . to equal rights . . . the question then arises, whether the regulation in question, which provides separate schools for colored children is a violation of any of these rights. . . .

In the absence of special legislation on this subject, the law has vested the power in the committee to regulate the system of distribution and classification . . . . The committee, apparently upon great deliberation, have come to the conclusion, that the good of both classes of schools will be best promoted, by maintaining the separate primary schools for colored and for white children. . . .<sup>58</sup>

It was not until 1855, after more agitation and protestation, that the legislature enacted a law providing that in determining the qualifications of students to be admitted to the public schools, no distinction was to be made on account of "race, color, or religious opinions. . . ."<sup>59</sup>

When the country fell apart in 1861, it was not because the North and South were at such great odds over their respective roles in the Revolution. They could have continued their arguments on the subject, however pointless and fruitless, almost indefinitely; and some would have continued to enjoy the forensics immensely. But those arguments, in both form and substance, betrayed a certain uneasiness on both sides regarding the soundness of their position in the antebellum years, as well as in 1776. Southerners protested too much their own patriotism, which they were beginning to redefine in terms of their adherence to principles instead of their loyalty to political or even legal institutions.<sup>60</sup> They also protested too much the fidelity of their own slaves who were to be trusted no more in 1856 than in 1776.<sup>61</sup> Northerners, apparently secure in the view that their own patriotism was beyond question, protested too much their adherence to the principle of equality for all peoples. The northerners of 1856 were not much more certain that they wanted to practice the principle of equality than were the northern slavers and slaveholders of 1776.

In a real sense these forebears of Revolutionary and antebellum times have provided a mirror in which, in 1975, we can see ourselves clearly. It was they who marked out the route by which we have traveled to this time and place. In doing this they were no more prepared or inclined to solve the difficult problems that they faced than we are. And as we look

<sup>58</sup> *Sarah C. Roberts v. City of Boston*, 59 Mass. 198 (1849).

<sup>59</sup> *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts in the Year 1855: Together with the Messages* (Boston, 1855), 674-75.

<sup>60</sup> For example, see *Southern Literary Messenger*, XIX (Oct. 1853), 645-46; *New Orleans Daily Delta*, July 17, 1855, April 9, 1857; and Governor William McWillie's declaration in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, Nov. 22, 1857.

<sup>61</sup> See Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *Journal of Negro History*, XXVII (Oct. 1942), 388-419; and Harvey Wish, "The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856," *Journal of Southern History*, V (May 1939), 206-22.

upon them, we see them preferring to argue about peripheral matters and passing on to us the stubborn, pervasive, and persistent problems that are central to our well-being as a nation and as a people. As we look upon them, we see ourselves mired in the same questions of justice and equality that our forebears evaded and, in doing so, transmitted to us a similar will to evade them. How long we can do so and survive as a viable and plausible democracy is a question that is as urgent as it is venerable. Perhaps we have said enough about the valor and heroism of the North and the South in the Revolution. The time has come for us to do something about living up to the principles for which both sides claimed to have fought.