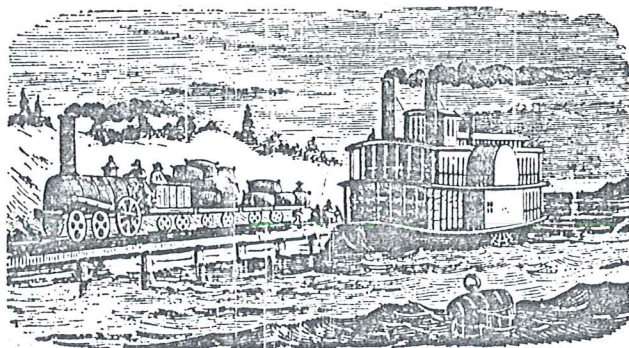


by Civil War and Reconstruction historians, then I think we may add a major new dimension to our understanding of the period.⁶⁷

Subject to the reservations expressed by Professor Foner on these approaches, most of which I share, I wholeheartedly agree with McCrary's analysis. Let me close by saying that a critical overview of the Civil War and Reconstruction era in a brief paper was an intriguing, exasperating, exciting and impossible thing to ask anyone to do. Nevertheless, it needed to be done. I only wish that some themes that were only alluded to, mentioned in passing, or omitted altogether could have been elaborated upon. Compression has its advantages—in fact, several—which, I hope, will compensate for some of its inherent, unavoidable liabilities.

⁶⁷ McCrary to R. O. Curry, Oct. 4, 1973.



THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: Triumph through Tragedy

Phillip S. Paludan

IN 1968 THE NATION SEEMED to be coming apart. Black riots had recently wracked the major cities of the nation. Assassination had struck down Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy within weeks of each other. The Democratic convention had practically been a battleground where peace protesters clashed with Vietnam war supporters and police while delegates decried "gestapo tactics on the streets of Chicago." College campuses shook with the protests of students and faculty against the war and racism, the Kerner Commission warned of a society rapidly becoming two nations. Congressmen snarled bitterly at an administration that seemed willing to add to the over 40,000 American and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese dead in a cause of dubious validity and even less hope of success. Still the war went on and the racial crisis burned.

In this environment John S. Rosenberg, a young graduate student at Stanford University, one of the most militantly antiwar campuses in the nation, wrote an article which was published in the Spring 1969 issue of the *American Scholar*. It was time, Rosenberg asserted, to move "Toward a New Civil War Revisionism." Admitting that his opinions were colored by the problems of contemporary America he urged historians to recognize that over one hundred years after Appomattox blacks still had not achieved full freedom. Further, he suggested that the evils of the nation's Vietnam involvement might give new insight into discussions of the merits of the Civil War. Faced with such present realities Rosenberg insisted that the Civil War had gained little of lasting merit. Of its two achievements, union and emancipation, the first had been dubious, the second hollow. The 600,000 dead in the conflict had died in vain.¹

Coming at such a time it is hardly surprising that Rosenberg's article should have contained the conclusions it did. Historians do not escape the events of their age. Neither do they erase from their writings the signs of their experience. Rosenberg, like Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is "one

¹ John S. Rosenberg, "Toward a New Civil War Revisionism," *The American Scholar*, XXXVIII (Spring, 1969), 250-272. The article has been reprinted in Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias, *Interpretations of American History* (New York, 1972), pp. 459-79 and *Annual Editions, Readings in American History '73-'74* (Guilford, Conn., 1973), pp. 262-68.

of us." Yet if the article was understandable it is not for that reason defensible. Historians as sensitive human beings can hardly escape making moral judgments about the events of their time. But even as historians profoundly opposed to both war and racism, they do have a responsibility to describe and assess events not just with compassion or outrage but with their most critical intelligence. Rosenberg's humanity overwhelmed his professional judgment. The consequence is harmful not only to the writing of history but to the very causes he seeks to serve today.

It is not Rosenberg's presentism and ethical concerns per se which betray him. It is a poorly executed presentism. Historians can and should choose topics which reflect their profoundest concerns as citizens, but that choice need not shape the results of their scholarship. In fact when they warp the past to suit their present hopes they may damage the cause they hope to advance. Topics such as the condition of the Negro or the Indian in America, the origins and dimensions of poverty, the sources of American wars are vastly preferable in terms of an ethical or socially responsible use of time to the irrelevances which too often attract us. That we should choose topics of modern concern however, does not mean that our research should demonstrate that Negroes, and Indians were always wise, brave, and noble that the rich are evil and the poor virtuous or that wars are always as despicable as the war in Vietnam.²

History can serve as a tool for understanding contemporary crises. It can provide alternative experience to weigh against our own. It can raise questions about analogous situations. But it cannot do these things if we do not tell even the harshest truths about our past. It cannot do so if we persist in shaping the past to satisfy our fondest hopes for the present or to verify our outrage against current national misdeeds. Events themselves, their causes and consequences, need to be studied not to support our prejudices but to question them and hence enlarge our choices, to free us from our individual pasts by providing other pasts to understand.

Rosenberg's form of presentism is enslaving, not liberating. It betrays him most fundamentally when he fails to distinguish between war in the nineteenth and war in the twentieth century. Modern war is and must be relatively indiscriminate in its victims. The weapons with which both sides fight make it inevitable that innocents as well as soldiers will be killed. Long range rifles, artillery, napalm, and high altitude bombing do not permit discrimination in victims even if soldiers, pilots and their superiors may wish to discriminate. In addition the targets of modern war are not just individuals but the war-making capacity of nations. These targets are struck from hundreds or thousands of yards away

² My argument here relies on Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History* (Boston, 1970), pp. 5-56; Paul Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg, *The Heritage and Challenge of History* (New York, 1971), ch. 12; David Hackett Fisher, *Historians' Fallacies* (New York, 1970), conclusion.

usually by men who cannot see them. If a major criteria for a just war is that the people killed should be either likely to kill you or personally responsible for the threat to you, then it is indeed difficult to justify modern war.³

But the Civil War was not a modern war in this sense. Its victims overwhelmingly were soldiers. Even Sherman's march through Georgia, ruthless in its destruction of property, still produced directly no civilian deaths. There were murders of civilians in the guerrilla activities in the border states, Kansas and Missouri in particular. In the most dramatic incident of this kind, William C. Quantrill led a force into Lawrence, Kansas and murdered over 150 unarmed men. Yet the outrage provoked by this brutality suggests its uniqueness and it should be noted that no women or children, Negro or white, were harmed. Albert Castel has termed the Lawrence massacre "the most atrocious act of the Civil War." Cruel as it was we can only wish that modern war was equally restrained. This is not to minimize the suffering of civilians North and South, but their torments can hardly be compared to that endured by innocents in Hamburg, Hiroshima, Rotterdam, or throughout the thousands of nameless villages and rice paddies of Southeast Asia.⁴

The Civil War did produce a brutal slaughter. Union dead of approximately 360,000, Confederate deaths almost equaling that figure; 275,175 Union wounded and perhaps an equal number of rebels wounded—these numbers are overwhelming. Lincoln as usual hit the mark when he said, "What I deal in is too vast for malice." More—the dead were not just numbers—they were fathers, husbands, sons and brothers. They represent the personal anguish of millions of survivors, dreams shattered, security destroyed, lives warped beyond comforting. More—these deaths cost the nation, not just the families—inventions, solutions, creations, alternatives were all ripped from a future which they might have ennobled.⁵

But American Negro slavery, dead also in the war, was brutal on an even larger scale. Approximately four million men, women and children were enslaved as of 1860. And when we speak of slavery it is also not just numbers that are in question. Murder, rape, torture, kidnapping, the destruction of families and marriages took their daily toll, depriving children of love and examples, men and women of comfort and

³ Donald A. Wells, "How Much Can 'The Just War' Justify?," *Journal of Philosophy*, LXVI (Dec., 1969), 819-829; Paul Ramsey, *The Just War* (New York, 1968), 143-145.

⁴ For a compelling description of one family's ordeal as a result of Sherman's march see Robert Manson Meyers (ed.), *Children of Pride* (New Haven, 1972), pp. 1220-1248; Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861-1865* (Ithaca, 1958), pp. 124-141; William Elsey Connelley, *Quantrill and the Border Wars* (Cedar Rapids, 1910), pp. 335-377.

⁵ William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War* (Albany, 1889), pp. 46-47, 554; Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-65* (Boston, New York, 1901), pp. 3-7.

encouragement, all of them of pride and the full development of their humanity. These brutalities had been going on for two hundred years, afflicting six generations of an ever growing enslaved population. There is little reason to believe that slavery would not have gone on for generations to come if Toombs, Davis, and even Crittenden had had their way. The words Dante saw over the gate of Hell might also have been encribed over the entrance to slavery, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."⁶

Rosenberg is not insensitive to the evils of slavery. It is his contention however, that these evils were not eliminated sufficiently to justify the carnage of the disunion conflict. This is a difficult assertion to deal with. No one can deny that the position of the Negro in America falls far short of equality. Segregated schools are still a reality for large numbers of blacks. Negro income is markedly lower than white. The median yearly income for black families in 1969 was almost \$4,000.00 lower than that of whites. In 1969, 9 per cent of the white population lived below the government established poverty level. 27.7 per cent of Negroes lived there. Many blue collar jobs remain closed to them as unions find ways to keep blacks out. The infant mortality rate for blacks in 1968 was 34.5 per thousand while for whites the figure was 19.2 per thousand.⁷

No one can be proud of this inequality. So long as we aspire to being a truly egalitarian society, to equal justice under law for all citizens, then we have much yet to do. But do these tragic statistics tell the full story? May we look at them and conclude that 600,000 men died in vain to end slavery? Although he recognizes that Negroes live better under freedom than they did under slavery Rosenberg still comes to this conclusion. "The question is whether the quantity and quality of freedom our society has been willing to grant is valuable enough to justify the death of one man for every six slaves who were freed." He answers his own question by asserting that the "new birth of freedom never occurred."

Developing a calculus which allows us to balance the deaths of over 600,000 men against the quality of freedom for over 4,000,000 men, women and children is an impossible task, of course. Was slavery worse than death? Patrick Henry and other revolutionary patriots claimed to think so. The slave mother, Margaret Garner, who killed her own children rather than have them returned to slavery obviously believed it was. But these examples are illustrative, not conclusive.

Are deaths in one generation ever compensated for by benefits to another? If not, what cause provides a better claim? None? Is there no

⁶ For signs that slavery was closing avenues of hope for the slaves see Ronald Takaki, *A Proslavery Crusade, The Agitation to Reopen the African Slave Trade* (New York, 1971); Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York, 1970); Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities, The South 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), pp. 243-282.

⁷ *American Almanac* (New York, 1971), pp. 55, 117-118, 319, 323.

cause which would justify death in battle? Is any peace better than any war? These are questions which Rosenberg does not answer and indeed there are no answers which would satisfy everyone.

What is objectionable in Rosenberg's argument, however, is the one-sided nature of his thought, his failure to do more than raise some of these questions, an unwillingness even to weigh the evidence of the gains which freedom brought to the Negro. Beyond random expressions of outrage and rhetorical questions about the relative merits of ghettos and slave plantations he gives us nothing with which to measure what freedom meant.

Yet there were gains, both in the nineteenth century aftermath of slavery and of course today. These gains encompassed every aspect of Negro life. Not the least of these was education and literacy. In 1860, for every hundred of the population there were 59.6 whites enrolled in school and 1.9 non-whites. By 1880 white enrollment was 62 per hundred but non-white was 33.8. In 1870 11.5 per cent of the white population was illiterate; 79.9 per cent of the non-white population was. By 1890 these figures read 7.7 per cent and 56.8 per cent. At the end of the next twenty years 5 per cent of the white population was illiterate and the non-white figure stood at 30.5 per cent. In other words, the difference in the literacy of the two populations had diminished from 59.9 per cent to 25.5 per cent by 1910. As of that date there was sufficient literacy to support 146 Negro newspapers in former slave states. By 1952 the difference in literacy was 8.4 per cent with only 10.2 per cent of non-whites illiterate. Under slavery, it should be remembered, it was a crime in all of the slave states as of 1860 to teach a slave to read.⁸

Advances in the economic sphere were more impressive. With emancipation large numbers of freedmen gained the opportunity to become farmers who worked for themselves and felt the satisfaction that comes from having some control of their economic destiny. In state after state blacks acquired land (never so much as they wished or deserved, of course) and thus escaped the status of being the virtual automatons of their masters' whims. From 1870 to 1900 in Virginia, for example, Negroes acquired 1,031,331 acres encompassed in 25,566 farms with an average acreage of 40 acres. The land and buildings on these farms was assessed at \$12,915,931.00. By 1920 Virginia rural blacks held over 1,900,000 acres assessed at \$69,203,453.00. By 1891 Virginia's urban blacks owned property assessed at over \$3,000,000.00. In South Carolina's five blackest townships Negro gains were also appreciable. By 1876 2,937 Negroes were tax payers who owned over 62,000 acres of land and had over \$7,000,000.00 in property. By 1912 the acreage owned by blacks was down to almost 51,000, a sign that they were moving to

⁸ *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington, 1961), pp. 213-214; (W. E. B. DuBois, editor) *The Common School and the Negro American* (The Atlanta University Publications, No. 16, Atlanta, 1911), pp. 22-25; (W. E. B. DuBois, editor) *Social Betterment Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta University Publications, No. 14, Atlanta, 1909), pp. 114-117.

the city where they increased the number of town lots they owned from 367 in 1876 to 885 in 1912. Still these blacks had increased their personal wealth by \$20,000,000 in these years. By 1908 North Carolina Negroes had accumulated over \$21,000,000 in property, Georgia blacks over \$27,000,000. In the whole South Negroes gained increasing control over their economic life. By 1900 there were 746,717 black farmers and over 187,000 of these owned their farms. The rest were tenants who shared the crops with the land owners, yet even these latter were improving their position. In the early years after the war the freedmen got anywhere from 1/5 to 1/3 of the crop. By 1910 their share was usually 1/2.⁹

Emancipation certainly did not launch the freedmen into full equality. The imprint of slavery was too deep on both white and black to be easily removed. Southern governments were eager to secure the Negro's labor and passed black codes to maintain an environment as much like slavery as they could provide. Violence against "uppity" blacks was frequent, riots in several southern cities were signs that whites opposed too lengthy strides away from slavery on the part of blacks. The onset of congressional reconstruction did bring improvement in the black man's status. During the years up to 1877 these Reconstruction governments witnessed Negro voting, involvement by blacks in government as legislators, judges, sheriffs, and justices of the peace. Still, when the southern states were "redeemed" control of government returned to white hands, black voting dwindled and the techniques of local terror returned the former slave to the lowest level of southern society. Ahead lay years of hardship and harassment: of virtual debt peonage for many blacks, of economic deprivation, and segregation which only the New Deal and then the Second World War would significantly alter. (It might also be noted that poor whites as well as blacks were victims of the first two of these afflictions.)¹⁰

Admitting these things, must we conclude as Rosenberg does that the war brought no changes worth the cost paid in lives? To do so is to limit the meaning of freedom to civil and political contexts on the one hand and to demand economic advances which transcend possibility, though not justice. I have suggested above that real progress was made economically by the blacks. Liberty surely was better than slavery in

⁹ Thomas J. Edwards, "The Tenant System and Some Changes Since Emancipation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XLIX (1913), 38-46; *Negroes in the United States* (Washington, 1904), pp. 81-2; James S. Russell, "Rural Progress on the Negro in Virginia," *Journal of Negro History*, XI (Oct., 1926), 556-562; Neils Christiansen, "Fifty Years of Freedom: Conditions in the Seacoast Regions," *Annals of American Academy*, XLIX, p. 63. This volume of the *Annals* is entitled, *The Negro's Progress in Fifty Years* and contains twenty-four articles on this subject. (W. E. B. DuBois, editor) *Efforts for Social Betterment among Negro Americans* (Atlanta University Publications No. 14, Atlanta, 1909), pp. 12-16.

¹⁰ Thomas D. Clark and Albert D. Kirwan, *The South since Appomattox* (New York, 1967), pp. 92-93, 104.

that realm. Although civil and political inequality remained the predominant pattern after Reconstruction, focusing too narrowly on these aspects of freedom severely limits perception of the dimensions of liberty.

While involvement in government and the political processes is certainly a vital aspect of life, one which enriches participants it certainly is not the sole or even the most crucial measure of the value of freedom. In the range of life in which most people live, even those who are politically involved, politics plays only a minor role. Elections happen only once a year and take at most a month or two of active involvement. But the consistent pattern of life is not politics—it is the day to day struggle to make a living and to be a part of a social community—to be a father, a mother, a daughter or a son. It is to have your spiritual needs provided for and to share one's faith with fellow seekers. It is to create from your own community groups which educate and sustain young and old, care for the sick, feed the hungry, bury the dead, share your joy, hope, and sadness.

It was the Negro church which performed these functions most faithfully in freedom as Negro religion had done under slavery. The difference, of course, was that under freedom organized religious activity was possible. Blacks no longer had to sneak to hidden prayer meetings at night. They could gather publicly and worship, join together to act as good Samaritans to each other and to the poor and needy among them. By 1906 blacks were organized in almost 37,000 individual churches. In these churches were approximately 3,700,000 communicants who owned over \$56,000,000.00 in property.¹¹

The statistics of liberty might be multiplied of course to include numbers of blacks in college, entrance into skilled and unskilled occupations, participation in many charities, creation of works of literature, music and art, organization of women's clubs and men's fraternal lodges, acquisition of homes and other property, migration to places of promise or away from places linked to sorrow or disappointment. To this listing might be added numbers of black voters at various time throughout the South, numbers of offices held, types of legislation passed in the Reconstruction era.

None of these figures would describe the quality of freedom and all would have to be seen in the light of a vast and powerful prejudice which denied to blacks even greater exercise of their rights. Yet the fact would remain—none of these accomplishments was possible on any meaningful scale under slavery. After emancipation, but not before, the mass of blacks could decide to have and to keep their wives, husbands, and children, to gather peacefully with their friends when they desired, to pray openly and collectively to their God, to create and nurture their own socio-religious community, to go to school, to choose their occupa-

¹¹ W. E. B. DuBois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," *American Historical Review*, XV (July, 1910), 781-2.

tions, to possess the land and the fruits of their labor.¹² They could also avoid brutality by staying "in their place" whereas their place in slavery justified and guaranteed that they would be victims of brutality. Freedom for the Negroes was, of course, not equality, but it emphatically was not slavery either. Reviewing recent literature on the post Civil War era Herman Belz has said that, "No one who studies Reconstruction can quite come to [the] conclusion . . . that the new birth of freedom of which Lincoln spoke never occurred, that the Civil War dead died in vain." One must add to this the further conclusion that no one who studies the history of the Negro after Reconstruction can adopt this attitude either. Whatever the tragedies, and there were many, there were triumphs too, triumphs impossible without the war.¹³

Rosenberg does not, however, accept the idea that only the bloodletting of the Civil War would free the slaves. He posits as an alternative a slave uprising in which bondsmen rip freedom from their master's hands. Perhaps another Nat Turner rebellion is what he has in mind. The attractive feature of this event for Rosenberg is that it would have compelled whites to view blacks not as the docile recipients of white men's gift of freedom, but as powerful initiators of their own emancipation. Few would deny that the latter image is preferable to the former. But at what cost? Of the fifty-five victims of Turner's revolt fifteen were women and thirty-one were children. Would anyone be willing to substitute for the deaths of armed soldiers in the Civil War the deaths of women and children in a massive race war? If so then we must acknowledge the validity of a comment in Vaclav Havel's, *The Memorandum*: "Where the good of mankind is at stake, nothing will make us sick."

The likelihood of this grisly alternative may itself be questioned, indeed its possibility of success borders on the unimaginable. Under slavery the whites controlled all the guns, ammunition, and other supplies. The black population was located in easily accessible areas and was obviously readily identified. It lacked intellectual leadership, efficient means of communication, effective outside material support. Its ranks were replete with potential traitors. In addition the whites outnumbered

¹² John Blassingame and George Rawick have recently described the ways in which the slaves avoided dehumanization by nurturing family life and maintaining a sense of community through attention to African origins, mutual work and suffering and covert religious activities. It has long been known that many slaves avoided the severest degrees of slavery and learned to read, engaged in work of their own choice, and participated in religious activities. But the vast majority of slaves were at the mercy of their masters at least from sunup to sundown and even the fortunate few might have their privileges snatched from them whenever their masters decided to do so. John Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (New York, 1972); George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup* (Westport, Conn., 1972); Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, 1956); Eugene Genovese, "American Slaves and Their History," *New York Review of Books*, Dec. 3, 1970, pp. 34-43; Genovese, "Getting to Know the Slaves," *New York Review of Books*, Sept. 21, 1972, pp. 16-20.

¹³ Herman J. Belz, "The New Orthodoxy in Reconstruction," *Reviews in American History*, Vol. I (March, 1973), p. 107.

the blacks in the South 7,034,000 to 4,097,000 as of 1860. Further, the Constitution of the United States in Article I, Section 8 and Article IV, Section 4 promised federal forces to put down "insurrections" and "domestic violence." In the history of the world what minority similarly situated has successfully revolted? What minority has even attempted revolt in such circumstances? One may long for a Haitian revolution in the United States (if one has a sufficiently strong stomach) but one does so as a visionary not as an historian. The wish is father to this thought, not the evidence.¹⁴

Which leads us to the question of whether or not one can foresee a death of slavery outside the war. Here again the alternative seems most unlikely. If the southern states had been allowed to secede is there any reason to believe that they would have ended slavery on their own? Would they voluntarily end an institution that they were willing to fight four years to preserve? Would they abandon an economic system which provided them with a profitable way of life? Would they yield a system which kept under control a "biologically inferior" and perhaps dangerous and revengeful population that was over half as large as the whites? Would they abandon a system which was the foundation for a whole way of life? Slavery paid, was adaptable to mining and industry as well as agriculture, was the means of control of the feared slave population, and served profound social and psychological needs as well. The peculiar institution's grip on the South, tragically, was too tight to be loosened except by the imposition of outside force.¹⁵

The death of slavery was not the only result of the war. The Union was preserved. (Indeed it was the passion of northerners to save the Union which made the death of slavery a possibility.) Does this latter fact justify the deaths of the Civil War? This is not a question that the twentieth century is well equipped to answer. The meaning of the Union does not have for us the meaning it had in the nineteenth century. We take for granted the nation they died to preserve. In addition, the predominant historiography of the Civil War era impedes our understanding. Faulty parallels between the revolutions of 1776 and 1860-1, recollections of the bloodbath of wars, improper assessments of Reconstruction as a mistake all encourage a de-emphasis of, or lack of interest in, the unionism of the past. Vastly more historians devote their attention to the meaning of emancipation than to the meaning of the

¹⁴ In a reply to a critic Rosenberg admits that a strong argument against the idea of a slave insurrection is possible in terms of its unlikelihood. However, he insists still that "My point was not so much that an insurrection would have been desirable as that one was possible." In addition he seems to prefer this sort of violence to that of the Civil War. See *American Scholar*, Vol. 38 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 731-2.

¹⁵ Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery* (New York, 1965); Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, 1956), pp. 383-418; Robert Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York, 1970); Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, "The Economics of Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 65 (April, 1958), 95-122.

Union. In such an environment the temptation to trivialize the saving of the Union is strong.

Rosenberg succumbs to this temptation. For him the entire Union-saving effort is encompassed in the idea of the mission of the United States to help preserve democracy throughout the world. To be sure Lincoln himself spoke of the special mission of America—the “last, best hope on earth” he called us, a nation whose survival would determine the fate of government of, by and for the people throughout the world. At a time when similar words have been used to justify the Vietnam tragedy it is understandable, indeed, it is mandatory, to be suspicious of them. But our suspicion should be critical and rational. There are, after all, ways of fulfilling a national mission that do not involve B-52s, General Thieu, tiger cages, or massacres of civilians.

It remains to be proven that the sort of mission which Lincoln had in mind for the nation involved armed intervention into the politics and wars of other nations. The distinction between manifest destiny and mission has been drawn too clearly by Frederick Merk to allow one to forget it except at peril of distorting the character of the American past. The salvation of the Union was undertaken not to justify future invasions of foreign lands but to preserve here the example of what a self-governing people might do. Justification for saving the Union does not even have to rest on whether or not the United States had a duty to shape the world in its own image. National purposes alone can justify the war. Unity of commerce, harmony of interests among its peoples, convenience of governing and hence securing economic and social benefits for its citizens, the maintenance of an economy large enough and integrated enough to increase the standard of living, all these factors might endorse a union saving struggle. As a matter of fact one can even accept Rosenberg's internationalist emphasis and still argue that the salvation of the Union was worth it in terms of benefits to other countries. Our capacity to provide food, medicine and machinery to war-ravaged and underdeveloped nations of the world has depended, in large measure, on the fact that these states remained united and with them was secured a unified national economy. Our strength and wealth may be used to despicable ends, but they have also served to help millions, ourselves as well as others throughout the world.¹⁶

The saving of the Union is, of course, best justified in terms of immediate gains, not long term possibilities. Most crucial of those gains was the one that contemporaries paid the most attention—to the preservation of the democratic, republican form of government established in Philadelphia in 1787. In another place I have argued that the Civil War was a crisis in law and order. Men rushed to defend the Union because they believed that successful secession would destroy the precarious balance between liberty and order which they had personally

¹⁶ Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York, 1963).

helped create. Saving the Union gave them faith in the viability of self government at all levels. As Harold Hyman has brilliantly demonstrated, a Constitution doubted and in some cases despised proved capable of mobilizing a nation-saving effort without destroying civil liberties. The political system similarly proved its strength by continuing business as normal throughout the country's most abnormal time. The pressures and the imperatives of law and politics combined to produce at least a blueprint for equality, something unthinkable outside the crucible of war.¹⁷

The determination of the Union government and its peoples to preserve the nation rested on the powerfully held belief that the South had broken the law—literally had torn apart the institutional processes which allowed the nation to function. Rejecting the results of an open election, the South had insisted that it could destroy the government rather than follow the established means of changing it. Faced with such a crisis surely there is something to be said in favor of making sure that the nation's means of peaceful change is preserved. Although northerners (and many southerners as well) surely believed in this country's mission the issue here is not whether or not America carries with her the hopes of the world or the duty to be a city on a hill. One does not have to believe in America's special virtue or mission to believe that there should be within a nation healthy institutions which permit peaceful transitions of government to occur, which eliminate the possibility that bullets replace ballots whenever one side loses an election.

Would successful secession, at gunpoint, have produced other secessions? Were the fears of a subsequent Balkanization of the United States justified? We cannot know for sure. But we should be most sensitive to our natural inclinations to cast off the possibility once the Civil War itself has removed it as an option. Without war, with a successfully established rebel government, the force of the prewar environment might reasonably be seen as encouraging and perhaps compelling subsequent divisions. Given the traditional propensity of aggrieved states to assert their sovereignty, the weakest central government of any major nation, a nation with many regional differences and at times strong antipathies (witness the Granger, Populist outrage against eastern financial influence), subsequent divisions do not seem far fetched, especially given a successful Confederate example. Admit that these antagonisms may not be as profound as that dividing North and South in 1860, still the success of the South might reasonably have encouraged other divisions for lesser reasons. And, if these divisions did create new nations what was to keep the once United States from becoming another Europe warring over boundaries, resources, escaping slaves,

¹⁷ Harold M. Hyman, *A More Perfect Union, The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the Constitution* (New York, 1973), *passim*; Phillip S. Paludan, “The American Civil War Considered as a Crisis in Law and Order,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 77 (Oct., 1972), 1013-1034.

or "oppressed" foreign nationals? These alternative histories seem much more plausible than that successful slave revolt proposed by Professor Rosenberg.

But the benefits of the Civil War are best calculated by what it produced in fact rather than what we can postulate might have happened without it. Based on the benefits mentioned above I believe that we must accept the war as the necessary instrument of order, strength, wealth and liberty. To recognize the benefits of the conflict is hardly to argue the blessings of war itself. It is to recognize that we cannot always pay cheap prices for things that are precious; that we cannot undo the evils of centuries without enduring the wrenchings and tearings of our enormous efforts, that while we must measure our efforts at liberty in terms of our dreams, we should measure our progress in terms of what was possible lest we lose faith in our ability to make progress at all.

As a result of the Civil War a "new birth of freedom" did occur. Like most births it was painful, and surely this one was more painful than most. The naive may have been disappointed that the infant was not full grown and perfect. But it would grow and, if it would never be perfect, without this particular bloody birth there would have been no child at all.



OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES: A Review of *Time on the Cross*

August Meier

THE ECONOMIC HISTORIANS Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman have made an important contribution¹ to the cresting tide of scholarship on slavery in the United States, and to the new perspectives on that institution which have flowed from the work of students of the subject like David Brion Davis, Eugene D. Genovese, John W. Blassingame, George P. Rawick, Philip Curtin, and Herbert Gutman. Employing the quantitative techniques of the new school of "cliometricians" Fogel and Engerman conclude 1) that American Negro slavery was a highly profitable economic system which, on the eve of the Civil War, was still thriving in both town and country, and in the older Atlantic slave states and in the newer Southwestern ones alike; 2) that large-scale plantation organization utilizing slave labor actually proved more productive and efficient than free white farm labor, North or South; 3) that slaves enjoyed a standard of living that compared favorably with that of free white industrial workers, and was considerably higher than that enjoyed by the freedmen after emancipation; and 4) that far from being a repressive system which struck at the slave's basic humanity, destroyed the black family, and drove the bondsmen either into supine passivity or into constant rebelliousness, the system actually provided considerable opportunity for the development of the bondsmen's human personality, the acquisition of skills, the exercise of managerial talents, and the development of "prudish" forms of sexual behavior and a stable, patriarchal family life.

All this is told in a breathless and polemical style, and in a format that seems designed to intimidate historians not expert in quantitative techniques. If the claims of the authors are to be taken literally it would appear that cliometricians, superlatively funded, armed with enormous masses of data, and possessed of sophisticated mathematical techniques, have produced a series of highly original conclusions that decisively disprove what is referred to as the "traditional" interpretation of slavery. Purveyors of this "traditional" interpretation would appear to include historians as different as Ulrich B. Phillips, Kenneth Stampp,

¹ *Time on the Cross*. Vol. I, *The Economics of American Negro Slavery*. Vol. II, *Evidence and Methods—A Supplement*. By William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1974. Pp. 286; 267. Vol. I, \$8.95; Vol. II, \$12.50.)