

his Christian principles, Garrison contributed much to the American reform tradition, in his own day and for the future. It can only be hoped that this unity of action, effective for the most part in the trying times before the Civil War, will remain a lively heritage.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the time will come when abolitionists of the Garrison persuasion will earn our respect if never our affection. These cantankerous, incorrigible, self-satisfied, moralistic and irascible reformers were tough old birds. They enjoyed their unpopularity. As Garrison once said, "Hisses are music to my ears." Yet, he did expect more recognition than he so far has received: "I look to posterity," he said, "for a good reputation."<sup>62</sup> He still looks in vain.

881-883; "A Message to the American People," *Complete Works of Count Tolstoi* (New York and Boston, 1904-1905), XXIII, 462; also *ibid.*, 122-123 and XX, 6, 12; Henry Raymond Mussey, "Gandhi the Non-Resistant," *The Nation*, CXXX (1930), 608-610; Wendell Phillips Garrison to L. N. Tolstoi, Mar. 1, 1905, Wendell Phillips Garrison MSS, Houghton Library, Harvard; Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Amedabad, 1951), pp. 30-31; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Amedabad, 1958-), VII, 217-218, 228-230, 304-305; George Hendrick, "The Influence of Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience' on Gandhi's Satyagraha," *New England Quarterly*, XXIX (1959), 462-471; Clarence A. Manning, "Thoreau and Tolstoy," *ibid.*, XVI (1943), 234-243; Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Non-Violence* (Amedabad, 1960), foreword by Martin Luther King; Mulford A. Silbey (ed.), *The Quiet Battle, Writings on the Theory and Practice of Non-Violent Resistance* (New York, 1958), pp. 76-78, 82-83, 177-178 on Gandhi, and p. 72 on Thoreau.

<sup>61</sup> The best articles on the romantic and religious content of American antebellum reform: John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly*, XVII (1965), 656-681; and his "Antislavery and Utopia," *Antislavery Vanguard*, pp. 240-269; Ralph Henry Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth Century America," in Grady McWhiney and Robert Weibe (eds.), *Historical Vistas, Readings in United States History* (Boston, 1963), I, 407-419; William G. McLoughlin, "Pietism and the American Character," *American Quarterly*, XVII (1965), 163-186.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted by Russel B. Nye, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Humanitarian Reformers* (Boston, 1955), pp. 200-203.



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## THE UNION AS IT WAS: A Critique of Recent Interpretations of the "Copperheads"

Richard O. Curry

AMERICANS LIKE TO THINK of themselves as rational, egalitarian, and God-fearing people whose generosity exceeds only their passion for individual liberty and freedom of conscience. Much of American history justifies this point of view. But a recurrent theme in our society, especially during periods of national crisis, is the sacrifice of democratic ideals to a devil theory of politics and history—whether in the form of Bavarian Illuminati, the "Great Beast" of Rome, the Anarchists, Radicals of the early 1920's, or Communism.

Contemporary historians, as a rule, deal with the politics of hysteria in a detached and objective manner. One major exception has been the treatment accorded by many writers to those conservative opponents of the Lincoln administration commonly called "Copperheads," "Butternuts," or "Peace Democrats."

"Copperhead" was a loosely defined epithet coined by Republicans to characterize northern Democrats who criticized Lincoln's war policies. Copperheads condemned confiscation acts, arbitrary arrests, suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the Emancipation Proclamation, the passage of federal conscription laws, and violations of freedom of the press. They wanted no part of what they termed "abolitionist fanaticism," and called for the restoration of "The Union As It Was" before the war began. In their view, the Radicals were subverting the Constitution, destroying civil liberties, and undermining the established social order by propagating poisonous theories of racial equality.

To Radicals, such a position was not only unenlightened and reactionary, but disloyal. Conservative rhetoric was little more than a diversionary tactic by which Copperheads tried to conceal treasonable motives. Failing in their attempt to seize political power in the North by peaceable means, so the story goes, traitors and rebel sympathizers turned to organizing secret societies—Knights of the Golden Circle, Sons of Liberty, Corps de Belgique, containing thousands of members, perhaps as many as 500,000—which discouraged enlistments, aided

desertion, circulated disloyal literature, recruited for the enemy, and eventually plotted revolution in the North itself.<sup>1</sup>

Under the pressure of war, charges and countercharges leveled by Republican and Democratic partisans against each other are neither surprising nor unprecedented. Radicals and Copperheads occupied polar positions on slavery and the nature of the Union. War hysteria and the tendency of Republicans to equate opposition to the war policies of the Lincoln administration with treason produced an explosive, and at times, irrational political situation. Conservative northern Democrats, most of whom were not willing to acquiesce in Confederate independence as the *sine qua non* of peace, were on the defensive throughout most of the war, and "Waving the Bloody Shirt" remained a favorite Republican campaign device well into the 1880's.

What is surprising is the fact that a number of modern historians accept as valid many of the charges leveled by Radical Republicans against their conservative antagonists. Included in this group are Leonard Kenworthy, whose biography of Daniel W. Voorhees appeared in 1936; Wood Gray, George Fort Milton, F. L. Grayston, and Samuel A. Pleasants, who wrote in the 1940's; Bethania Smith and Frank C. Arena, whose work appeared in the 1950's; and John Niven, Frederic S. Klein, John E. Talmadge, and Stephen Z. Starr, whose writing has appeared since 1960.<sup>2</sup> Gray's study, *The Hidden*

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the report by Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt to Edwin M. Stanton, Oct. 8, 1864, in U.S. War Dept., *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. II, VII, 930-953; Benn Pitman (ed.), *The Treason Trials at Indianapolis Disclosing the Plans for Establishing a North-Western Conspiracy* (Cincinnati, 1865); and Winslow Ayer, *The Great Northwest Conspiracy*. . . . (Chicago, 1865). Among the more sensational "treason" exposés in Republican newspapers were those in the *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 26, 1862, and the *Indianapolis Journal*, Jan. 19, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Kenworthy, *The Tall Sycamore of the Wabash: Daniel Wolsey Voorhees* (Boston, 1936); Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War: the Story of the Copperheads* (New York, 1942); George Fort Milton, *Abraham Lincoln and the Fifth Column* (New York, 1942); F. L. Grayston, "Lambdin P. Milligan—a Knight of the Golden Circle," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XL (1947), 379-391; Samuel A. Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York* (New York, 1948); Bethania M. Smith, "Civil War Subversives," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XLV (1952), 220-240; Frank C. Arena, "Southern Sympathizers in Iowa During the Civil War Period," *Annals of Iowa*, XXX (1951), 486-538; John Niven, *Connecticut for the Union* (New Haven, 1965); Frederic S. Klein, "The Great Copperhead Conspiracy," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, IV (1965), 21-26; John E. Talmadge, "A Peace Movement in Civil War Connecticut," *New England Quarterly*, XXXVIII (1964), 306-320; and Stephen Z. Starr, "Was There a Northwest Conspiracy?" *Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, XXXVIII (1964), 323-339. See also unpublished theses by Andrew W. Renfrew, "Copperheads, Confederates, and Conspiracies on the Detroit-Canadian Border" (M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1952), and Jasper W. Cross, "Divided Loyalties in Southern Illinois during the Civil War" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1942).

*Civil War* (1942), remains, however, the most extensive modern restatement of the traditional or "Radical" interpretation of Copperheadism, and is *the* book on which nearly all subsequent traditionalists draw heavily in their variations on themes of obstructionism, subversion, defeatism, and treason.

Copperheads began their obstructionist policies, Gray argues, even before the outbreak of war. Many Democratic "opponents of the war" favored "peaceable division" rather than the use of force to suppress rebellion. In fact, many "Peace Democrats" talked seriously of organizing a separate Northwest Confederacy, either allied with, or having "very friendly connections" with the South. While making "full allowance for the individual nature of such statements," Gray concludes, "there remained a residue of true intent, ominous in import."<sup>3</sup>

Gray admits that once Lincoln called for volunteers, Democrats as well as Republicans responded enthusiastically to the war effort; but he dismisses this apparent contradiction by arguing that many Democrats "had never been altogether sincere in their support of the war policy." According to Gray, Democrats, in all probability, had bowed temporarily "before the weight of public feeling and threats of mob action." Or perhaps they succumbed for the moment to the "influence of Douglas."<sup>4</sup>

As the war progressed, Gray continues, Democrats defined their military and political objectives in Unionist terms; ". . . winning the war, stamping out fraud and graft in the purchase of military supplies, the checking of arbitrary arrests, and the legal punishment of the leaders of the rebellion, as contrasted with the Republican purpose of a sweeping and indiscriminate confiscation of the property of a whole section." But such protestations of loyalty undoubtedly were mere subterfuge. For example, the fact that the Illinois legislature voted "men and money" for the war in 1862 proved only that the Copperhead majority "lacked the nerve" not to do so.<sup>5</sup>

After Clement L. Vallandigham's arrest, exile to the Confederacy, and unsuccessful bid for the governorship of Ohio in 1863, many Peace Democrats at last became convinced that "they must resort to revolution if they were to succeed in realizing their aims." Draft evaders, deserters, and "other desperate men constituted a nucleus for revolt." Thus it was, according to Gray, that in 1864, a secret, semi-military society, the Sons of Liberty, in combination with Confederate agents, conceived a fantastic plot, the "Great Northwest Conspiracy." Liberated Confederate prisoners, along with thousands of members

<sup>3</sup> Gray, *Hidden Civil War*, pp. 44-45, 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 125, 142, 147.

of the Sons of Liberty, were scheduled to rise in armed rebellion, seize the governments of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, and establish, if possible, a separate Northwest Confederacy. If this failed, an armed revolt would at least "undermine morale" and force the withdrawal of "troops from the South to crush it."<sup>6</sup>

Somehow, the uprising failed to materialize. Gray is at a loss to explain why—as indeed are George Fort Milton, Stephen Z. Starr, F. L. Grayston, Frederic S. Klein, and Bethania Smith, who have written similar accounts of the "conspiracy"—except in terms of a lack of organization and leadership, and a loss of nerve by "revolutionary" leaders.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence documenting the existence of such a conspiracy is limited, Gray writes, coming largely from accounts of two Canadian-based Confederate agents, Thomas H. Hines and John B. Castleman, "virtually the only sources of any value on the matter." But, "these men wrote of their experiences under conditions and at a time [1886-1887 and 1917] when they had no cause to distort what had occurred."<sup>8</sup>

Far-reaching conclusions based on Confederate memoirs, however, are open to serious question. Castleman, in his book *Active Service* (1917), claims to have written both accounts,<sup>9</sup> and a careful examination of his evidence reveals little besides the fact that Confederate authorities were misled by Republican charges of widespread disaffection among northern Democrats. At Chicago, while the Democratic National Convention of 1864 was in session, Castleman and several other Confederate agents apparently made contact with a few southern sympathizers, reputed to be "commanders" of the Sons of Liberty, who, according to Castleman, "were appalled by the actual demand for overt action. . . ." Even so, there was "little reason to doubt that a large percent of the strangers in Chicago belonged to the semi-military Order of the Sons of Liberty." The trouble, Castleman concludes, was that "they were distributed amongst a vast multitude and there was no organization." Disillusioned, about a third of the agents went back to the Confederacy, while the remainder returned to Canada. Confederate dreams of fomenting an armed uprising in the North thus came to an inglorious end.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164ff, 264n, 276n; quoted material is from pp. 164, 168-169.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; Milton, *Fifth Column*; Starr, "Northwest Conspiracy"; Grayston, "Militiam"; Klein, "Copperhead Conspiracy"; and Smith, "Civil War Subversives."

<sup>8</sup> Gray, *Hidden Civil War*, p. 264n.

<sup>9</sup> Castleman states that he, not Hines, wrote the articles that appeared in the *Southern Bivouac* in 1886-1887. "I wrote these to the joint credit of Hines or myself," says Castleman, "or in his name as I saw fit." *Active Service*, p. 138. See also, *Southern Bivouac: a Monthly Literary and Historical Magazine*, II (1886-1887), 437-455, 500-510, 567-574, and 669-704.

<sup>10</sup> Castleman, *Active Service*, p. 158.

Concrete evidence substantiating other charges of subversion and treason is also lacking. Time and again, Gray and other traditionalists cite statements based on accounts in Republican newspapers of which the following are typical examples. In southern Illinois, the Knights of the Golden Circle "were thought to be" aiding men bound for the Confederacy. "It was asserted" that the KGC was burning homes of Union men. "Officials feared" that "dangerous, subversive forces were at work." Vallandigham was "understood to threaten war in the North." The "rumor circulated that. . ." And so on.<sup>11</sup> Such evidence clearly attests to bitter partisanship and war hysteria in the North; but that it constitutes proof of treason or treasonable intent may reasonably be doubted.

Other traditional interpretations of Copperheadism, in the Middle West and elsewhere—those of Richard C. Arena, John Niven, Samuel A. Pleasants, Leonard Kenworthy, and John Talmadge—are so similar to Gray's that detailed analysis would be repetitious. It is sufficient to say, for present purposes, that Niven and Talmadge view Connecticut conservatives as members of the "disloyal opposition";<sup>12</sup> Kenworthy characterizes Congressman Daniel Voorhees of Indiana as a "rebel sympathizer. . . tinged with Copperheadism";<sup>13</sup> Pleasants pictures Fernando Wood of New York as a corrupt politician who came "dangerously close to treason";<sup>14</sup> and Arena concludes that Copperheads in Iowa had two major objectives, . . . "embarrassing . . . the Northern pro-Union government" and helping "the Confederacy . . . achieve its aims."<sup>15</sup> Arena also argues that a number of "inactive people" harbored "treasonable thoughts."<sup>16</sup> How such a conclusion about apparently anonymous and inarticulate individuals can be substantiated is not at all clear.

By no means, however, does the traditional point of view command universal support. Kenneth M. Stampp's *Indiana in the Civil War* (1949), was the first major study to challenge the validity of the Copperhead stereotype. In recent years, moreover, a number of revisionist books and articles have reached print, and it is now possible to place the aims and objectives of conservative northern Democrats in a more rational and meaningful perspective. In addition to Stampp, Frank L. Klement, Robert Rutland, David Lindsey, Justin E. Walsh, John D. Barnhart, and A. B. Beitzinger all analyze midwestern Democratic opposition to Lincoln's war policies in Unionist, if not entirely

<sup>11</sup> Gray, *Hidden Civil War*, pp. 71, 76, 43, and *passim*. See also, Arena, "Southern Sympathizers," and Smith, "Civil War Subversives."

<sup>12</sup> Niven, *Connecticut for the Union*; Talmadge, "A Peace Movement in Connecticut."

<sup>13</sup> Kenworthy, *Voorhees*, pp. 67, 69.

<sup>14</sup> Pleasants, *Wood*, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> Arena, "Southern Sympathizers," 538.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

sympathetic terms.<sup>17</sup> The same holds true for Charles L. Wagandt's study of emancipation in Maryland, Richard O. Curry's analysis of statehood politics in West Virginia, Nicholas B. Wainwright's treatment of Philadelphia conservatism, and Maurice Tandler's interpretation of politics in Civil War New Jersey.<sup>18</sup>

Some of these writers raise as many questions as they answer; but before differentiating between revisionist viewpoints, it is necessary, first of all, to discuss common characteristics which set these historians apart from traditionalists.

First, they reject the idea of conspiracy, treason, or treasonable intent on the part of significant numbers of northern Democrats. Most revisionists also agree that Democrats were often as guilty as Republicans of employing partisan tactics to achieve their goals. Democratic editors and politicians tried to win votes by appealing to Negrophobia; and they attempted, during wartime, to rekindle old fears of class or sectional domination on such issues as the tariff, internal improvements, and banking legislation. Moreover, when Democrats were in control of midwestern legislatures, especially Indiana and Illinois, they tried to gerrymander opponents out of office; they interfered with the executive prerogatives of Republican governors; and even though they voted men and money for the war effort, they often appeared as much interested in gaining or retaining the spoils of political office as they were in winning the war itself.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago, 1960); Rutland, "The Copperheads of Iowa: a Re-examination," *Iowa Journal of History*, LII (1954), 1-54; Lindsey, "Sunset" Cox: Irrepressible Democrat (Detroit, 1959); Walsh, "Radically and Thoroughly Democratic: Wilbur F. Storey and the Detroit Free Press, 1853-1861," *Michigan History*, XLVII (1963), 193-225; Barnhart, "The Impact of the Civil War on Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LVII (1961), 185-224; and Beitzinger, "The Father of Copperheadism in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XXXIX (1955), 17-29. Studies by two other historians, H. H. Wubben and William F. Zornow, are somewhat problematical. While both believe that charges of treason or treasonable intent have been exaggerated, neither occupies a clearcut revisionist position. See Wubben, "Dennis Mahoney and the Dubuque Herald, 1860-1863," *Iowa Journal of History*, LVI (1958), 289-320; Wubben, "The Maintenance of Internal Security in Iowa, 1861-1865," *Civil War History*, X (1964), 416-433; and Zornow, *Lincoln and the Party Divided* (Norman, 1954).

<sup>18</sup> Wagandt, *The Mighty Revolution: Negro Emancipation in Maryland, 1862-1864* (Baltimore, 1964); Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* (Pittsburgh, 1964); Wainwright, "The Loyal Opposition in Civil War Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXVIII (1964), 294-315; and Tandler, "The Political Front in Civil War New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, LXXXIII (1965), 223-233. Attention should be called to Leonard Curry's revisionist article, "Congressional Democrats, 1861-1863," *Civil War History*, XII (1966), 213-229.

<sup>19</sup> See especially, Klement, *Copperheads*, pp. 40-72, and Stamp, *Indiana Politics*, pp. 82-92, 148ff, 175ff, and *passim*.

But unenlightened partisanship is one thing; treason or "peace-at-any-price" something else again. Stamp's contention that "the triumph of Hoosier Democracy in 1862" represents "a repudiation of Republicanism," and not "a repudiation of the war for the Union" accurately reflects the views of other revisionists as regards Democratic victories at the polls in Indiana and elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

As Frank Klement observes, there was, in a sense, "a war within the war."<sup>21</sup> The reaction of Republican governors like Yates of Illinois and Morton of Indiana; of Union generals like Frémont, Rosecrans, Burnside, and Milroy; and of newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, the *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, and the *New York Herald-Tribune* to Democratic opposition was even more partisan, vindictive, and extreme than that of the Democracy.<sup>22</sup> What Stamp has called the "everlasting cry of treason" had meaning only in terms of Republican political strategy and war hysteria.<sup>23</sup>

It was a highly successful strategy in most states. John D. Barnhart characterizes the Democratic party in Indiana as one of the "near casualties" of the war,<sup>24</sup> while Robert Rutland writes that the "Copperhead label almost turned Iowa into a one-party state, and with few exceptions, wrecked the political future of the chief Iowa Democrats."<sup>25</sup> New Jersey was the only northern state to retain both a Democratic governor and an annually elected Democratic legislature throughout the war. Even here, Republicans finally succeeded in "redeeming" the state in 1865.<sup>26</sup>

If "rank partisanship" was one of the more obvious manifestations of Civil War party struggles, one must also recognize that partisanship, more often than not, is an expression of social, economic, or ideological differences, or a combination thereof, rather than a cause in itself. In the case of the Copperheads, charges of treason or of being pro-slavery serves only to obscure the real meaning to be derived by placing their major political and ideological tenets in historical perspective.

If the Republican party represented the wave of the future—that is, the triumph of nationalism, industrial capitalism, and the destruction of slavery—the inevitability of profound changes in the prevailing social and economic structure was neither obvious nor acceptable to

<sup>20</sup> Stamp, *Indiana Politics*, pp. 151-152. <sup>21</sup> Klement, *Copperheads*, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> See especially, Klement, *Copperheads*; Stamp, *Indiana Politics*; Curry, *A House Divided*; and Rutland, "Copperheads of Iowa."

<sup>23</sup> Stamp, *Indiana Politics*, p. 212.

<sup>24</sup> Barnhart, "Impact of the Civil War on Indiana," 224.

<sup>25</sup> Rutland, "Copperheads of Iowa," 2.

<sup>26</sup> Tandler, "Civil War New Jersey," 232-233.

all groups and individuals dedicated to the idea of Union in Civil War America. Considering the fact that a strict constructionist ideology has never been the private preserve of southerners at any time in the American political experience, it is surprising that so many modern historians fail to recognize that both Radical Republicans and conservative Northern Democrats could, during wartime, legitimately claim unwavering allegiance to the concept of Union, while disagreeing violently over the nature of that Union.

Only in terms of resistance to social change, of which partisanship was an essential part, and blind adherence to a vision of the past and a concept of Union that no longer existed can conservative Democratic opposition to Republican policies be understood. John J. Davis, a leading West Virginia conservative, expressed the Copperhead viewpoint well when he wrote to his fiancée:

I look upon secession and abolition as twin brothers—I am no extremist—I condemn, abhor and detest the abolitionists and all their unconstitutional schemes. . . . I do not want the South subjugated, but I do want those citizens in rebellion subjected—I mean subjected to the laws and made obedient to them. The doctrine of 'States' rights' as expounded by Yancey and Jeff Davis is a heresy, fatal to the existence of any government constructed upon such a theory—On the other hand the idea of 'Centralization,' or conferring upon the Federal Government unlimited power over the states is a heresy I do not countenance—Both dogmas are contrary to the spirit and letter of the Constitution. The present Congress in session at Washington is as much in rebellion against the government as far as words and legislation can constitute rebellion, as are the armed legions of Jeff Davis.<sup>27</sup>

Yet Davis, and thousands of Democrats like him, who dedicated themselves to the task of reconstructing the old Federal Union, expounded a futile idea no longer acceptable either to Confederates, or the vast majority of Republicans. The war itself transformed rigid adherence to strict constructionist ideas into anathema and anachronism—a vision of the past lost beyond recall.

The bankruptcy of conservative thinking, considering the determination of Confederate states to maintain their independence, was nowhere better illustrated than by the position taken by Peace Democrats, a label attached to those Copperheads unrealistic enough to believe the Union could be restored if only North and South could be persuaded to come together at the conference table. In retrospect, such a position may seem foolish and it was easily exploited by Republicans; but it did not indicate a willingness on the part of most Democrats to abandon the idea of Union. The controversial "peace

<sup>27</sup> John J. Davis to Anna Kennedy, June 1, 1862; quoted in Curry, *A House Divided*, p. 109.

plank" in the Democratic platform of 1864 did not, as charged by the Radicals, call for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Rather, it demanded that "immediate efforts be made" in this direction, in an attempt to restore peace "on the basis of the Federal Union of States" at "the earliest practicable moment."<sup>28</sup> How such negotiations (already attempted by Horace Greeley, with Lincoln's consent) could resolve anything was never explained.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, even if Republican leadership possessed the necessary vision to destroy slavery and preserve the Union, reconstruction was destined to become an uncompleted social revolution. And while it is true that Democrats, not Republicans, attempted to make political capital by exploiting Negrophobia during the war, unenlightened racial attitudes—as Robert F. Durden, Leon Litwack, and James M. McPherson, among others, clearly show—were not monopolized by the Democratic party. Most Republicans did not fully comprehend either the forces they unleashed or opposed.<sup>30</sup>

Thus far, this paper has challenged the accuracy of the Copperhead stereotype in three ways: by questioning the validity of evidence used by traditionalists to substantiate charges of treason or treasonable intent; by arguing that conspiratorial rhetoric had meaning only in terms of partisan politics; and by attempting to place Copperhead ideology within the framework of the history of conservative nationalism (or federalism) where it properly belongs.<sup>31</sup>

Another angle of vision supporting the revisionist point of view is provided by careful examination of generalizations made by historians who locate major areas of disaffection in the less than fertile southern counties of Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio, counties inhabited primarily by people of southern origin, or their descendants.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Zornow, *Lincoln*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>29</sup> Harlan H. Horner, *Lincoln and Greeley* (Urbana, 1953).

<sup>30</sup> Durden, *James Shepherd Pike: Republicanism and the American Negro, 1850-1882* (Durham, 1957); Litwack, *North of Slavery: the Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961); and McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, 1964).

<sup>31</sup> The impact of antebellum individualism, especially its anti-institutional aspects, is treated brilliantly in Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: a Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959); John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: a Biography of William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston, 1963); Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly*, XVII (1965), 650-681; and George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965), pp. 7-50. It must be pointed out, however, that Fredrickson's acceptance of the Copperhead stereotype (ch. 9, "The Doctrine of Loyalty," pp. 130-150) mars a sometimes provocative performance.

<sup>32</sup> Gray, *Hidden Civil War*; Arena, "Southern Sympathizers"; Cross, "Divided Loyalties"; and Elbert J. Benton, *The Movement for Peace Without Victory*

In Iowa, however, as Robert Rutland observes, there "was no 'Copperhead' country as such. Conservative sympathies centered here in Iowa City in the north, in Keosauqua in the southeast, and followed 'the geographic pattern elsewhere.' Moreover, 'widespread' voting trends under a free Democratic election in the elections of 1861, 1862, or 1864, were 'the rule in the dark-wooded old west region.' In addition, the number of newspapers, churches, schools, and colleges in free Democratic areas suggests that the literary rate was comparable to that of other Midwestern communities. . . . 'Any attempt to fit the Iowa Copperhead into a discredited pattern is false,' Rutland concludes, as "statistics only seem that the hard core of the Copperhead movement was located exactly where one would expect it, in the non-voting Democratic in previous years."<sup>36</sup> Eugene H. Roseboom reaches similar conclusions for Ohio, pointing out that "the Free Democrats of Ohio were the old-line, hard-shell Democrats, strongest in the areas whether in north or south, that were rock-ribbed Democrats. . . . Their ancestry and economic ties with the South had little to do with their stand."<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Stampp goes one step further by arguing that Hoosiers living in the southern part of the state, because of their dependence upon the river trade, had more to fear substantially from a successful rebellion than people in any other section.<sup>38</sup>

The implications of investigations like these far exceed the danger of demolishing an earlier stereotype. They indicate the need, indeed the necessity, for additional grass-roots research into the nature of Democratic party structure in northern and border states.

If the political objectives and major ideological tenets of the opposition are clear, the forces that produced Copperheadism have not been precisely analyzed. No historian, including the present writer, has yet attempted an intensive quantitative analysis for any state, or an attempt to correlate ethnic, religious, social, and economic factors with Copperheadism. The idea that soil fertility or southern origin were major factors in determining Copperhead affinities are only two examples of generalizations that do not seem to withstand the challenge of critical revisionism. If, as Rutland observes, low soil fertility seems to be a major characteristic of eight Iowa Copperhead counties

(Cleveland, 1909). The revisionist historian Frank Klement accepts this view in part. He attributes the rise of Copperheadism, among many other factors, to the southern origins of large numbers of midwesterners. Klement, *Copperheads*, pp. 14-15, and "Middle Western Copperheadism and the Genesis of the Granger Movement," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVIII (1952), 679-694.

<sup>36</sup> Rutland, "Copperheads of Iowa," 25.

<sup>37</sup> Roseboom, "Southern Ohio and the Union in 1863," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXIX (1952), 41-42.

<sup>38</sup> Stampp, *Indiana Politics*, p. 132.

but not of twelve others, one may legitimately question whether soil fertility was at all important in shaping political loyalties.<sup>39</sup> Further research might or might not uphold the validity of such a generalization for some areas, but if it did, one could analyze with greater certainty why this was so for some counties and not for others.<sup>40</sup>

The use of quantitative data is not a panacea, however; historians have yet to discover any precise way of measuring the influence of an idea on the course of human events. In contrast to Gray, Klement, Barnhart, and Stampp, who place heavy emphasis on economic forces—especially midwestern opposition to tariff, banking and railroad legislation in accounting for the appeal of Copperheadism, Eugene Roseboom argues that one may "logically reverse the picture" of an Ohio Copperhead as an agrarian liberal, a forerunner of "later nineteenth century agrarian reform movements" (a view supported by Klement),<sup>41</sup> and

describe him and his Ohio following as archconservative individualists, looking backward to a happier agrarian, state rights past, using the time-worn appeals of the Democrats of Jackson's day against banks, tariffs, and capitalists, and offering no solution for the nation's problems but 'the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was, and the Negroes where they are.'<sup>42</sup>

Partial support for this point of view has appeared in Ronald P. Formisano's paper, "Copperheads, Grangers, and the Idea of Agrarian Radicalism," which challenges Klement's conclusion that "midwestern Copperheadism linked Jacksonian Democracy and Grangerism."<sup>43</sup> A "substantial part of Klement's case," Formisano writes, "rests on his interpretation of the activities of the Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862," where, according to Klement, "a Democratic majority ran the convention." The state's Copperheads, primarily "farmers from southern Illinois," dominated that majority, and used "the Convention for an attack on railroads." Klement's attempt to link Copperheadism to Grangerism thus depends largely on the argument that "Copperhead farmers" dominated the Illinois convention of 1862, and the assump-

<sup>39</sup> Rutland, "Copperheads of Iowa," 25.

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<sup>41</sup> Klement, "Genesis of the Granger Movement."

<sup>42</sup> Roseboom, "Southern Ohio," 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> A copy of this manuscript is in the possession of the present writer, and is quoted by permission of Mr. Formisano, a doctoral candidate at Wayne State University.

tion that "Granger farmers of the 1870's were responsible for railroad control."<sup>41</sup>

Both contentions, according to Formisano, are erroneous. An attempt to apply the "agrarian radical" thesis to either movement overlooks, first of all, the findings of scholars like Chester M. Destler, Frederick Merk, Mildred Throne, George H. Miller, Lee Benson and Harold D. Woodman, whose works show that mercantile and commercial, not farm groups, provided the major impetus behind Granger agitation in the 1870's.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, Formisano's analysis of the significance of the railroad issue in the Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862 clashes sharply with Klement's.

Delegate Daniel Reilly was the only Democrat from southern Illinois, the abode of Klement's "Copperhead and Granger farmers," to offer resolutions dealing with general railroad regulation, including rate control, the issue Formisano describes as the "great shibboleth" of the later Granger agitators. Three other Democrats offered resolutions similar to Reilly's, but two of the three represented counties in northern Illinois; the third came from the west-central part of the state. Two other delegates, both Republicans, also called for some form of regulation but were not concerned with rate control. Even more important, none of these resolutions was given serious consideration by the convention, and were easily shunted aside by the Democratic leadership, which included four prominent Copperheads from the southern part of the state. The only viable issue involving railroads at the convention, Formisano concludes, concerned the failure of the Illinois Central to meet the terms of its original charter by paying 7 per cent of its annual profits to the state. Politics, an attempt to embarrass the administration of Republican Governor Yates, "not nascent Grangerism, lay behind the Illinois Central issue."<sup>43</sup>

Questioning the validity of the "agrarian radical" thesis as applied to Copperheadism is one thing, however; arguing that Copperheads should be viewed as archconservative individualists having strong intellectual commitments to a vision of the past is quite another. Yet the history of the Copperhead movement in West Virginia permits more careful differentiation here than elsewhere between economic

<sup>41</sup> Formisano, "Idea of Agrarian Radicalism," 4-5.

<sup>42</sup> Destler, "Western Radicalism, 1865-1901: Concepts and Origins," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXI (1944), 335-368; Merk, "Eastern Antecedents of the Grangers," *Agricultural History*, XXIII (1949), 1-8; Throne, "The Grange in Iowa, 1868-1875," *Iowa Journal of History*, XLVII (1949), 289-324; Miller, "The Granger Laws" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1951); Benson, *Merchants, Farmers, and Railroads* (Cambridge, 1955); and Woodman, "Chicago Businessmen and the 'Granger Laws,'" *Agricultural History*, XXXVI (1962), 16-24.

<sup>43</sup> Formisano, "Idea of Agrarian Radicalism," 5-35.

social, and ideological determinants.<sup>44</sup> Generalizations cannot be made for the entire movement on the basis of findings in one state; but showing beyond reasonable doubt that ideological and social forces were major causative agents in producing Copperheadism in one state raises the question as to whether or not economic determinism and political partisanship *per se* can carry the weight assigned to them in the Middle West.

In West Virginia, three factors—political expediency, economic self-interest, and a desire to remain in the Union—were the major forces behind demands for the separation of this state from the Old Dominion. Sectional conflict had been one of the hallmarks of Virginia politics for more than fifty years. Future Copperheads like United States Senator John S. Carlile, who organized the resistance movement against secession in northwestern Virginia; ex-Congressman Sherrard Clemens; and John J. Davis, father of John W. Davis, led the "new state" movement in its early stages. Without Carlile's leadership and the active support of other Copperheads like Clemens, Davis, and state legislators John C. Vance and Andrew Wilson, it is doubtful that the adjourned session of the Second Wheeling Convention (August 6-20, 1861) could have passed a dismemberment ordinance, the first in a long series of acts leading to the creation of the state of West Virginia.

But in 1862, these men, and others like them, turned against separate statehood rather than accept what they termed "Congressional dictation" when the Willey Amendment, a gradual emancipation proviso, was attached to the West Virginia Bill by the Republican majority in Congress. Moreover, conservatives in West Virginia, as elsewhere, became frightened when the war for Union was transformed into a crusade to destroy slavery and subjugate the South. They conjured up visions of presidential or military dictatorship, unlimited Negro migration to the North, and disunion—all caused by the fanaticism of northern radicals. The slavery question, with its attendant ramifications, thus clouded all other issues, and Carlile and his associates in West Virginia set themselves down as critics and opponents of change. Yet, if any one idea had dominated the thinking of northwestern Virginia Unionists in 1861, including Carlile and most other conservatives, it was their recognition that after fifty years of sectional controversy the opportunity had presented itself to gain

<sup>44</sup> Curry, *A House Divided*. The analysis in this paper is based primarily on chapters 10-15. A briefer treatment is provided in Curry, "A Reappraisal of Statehood Politics in West Virginia," *Journal of Southern History*, XXVIII (1962), 403-421. See also, F. Gerald Ham (ed.), "The Mind of a Copperhead: Letters of John J. Davis on the Secession Crisis and Statehood Politics in West Virginia, 1860-1862," *West Virginia History*, XXIV (1963), 93-109.

In Iowa, however, as Robert Rutland observes, there "was no 'Copperhead' country" as such. Conservative strongholds reached from Sioux City in the north to Keokuk in the southeast, and followed "no geographic pattern whatever." Moreover, twelve of twenty counties which voted Democratic either in the elections of 1861, 1863, or 1864, were "located in the dark-colored silt loam region." In addition, the number of "newspapers, libraries, schools, and colleges in Iowa Democratic areas suggests that the literacy rate was comparable to that of other Midwestern communities. . . ." "Any attempt to fit the Iowa Copperhead into a die-stamped pattern is futile," Rutland concludes, as "statistics only show that the hard core of the Copperhead movement was located exactly where one would expect it, in the areas voting Democratic in pre-war Iowa."<sup>33</sup> Eugene H. Roseboom reaches similar conclusions for Ohio, pointing out that "the Peace Democrats of Ohio were the old-line, hard-shell Democrats, strongest in the areas, whether in north or south, that were rock-ribbed Democratic. Southern ancestry and economic ties with the South had little to do with their stand."<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Stampp goes one step further by arguing that Hoosiers living in the southern part of the state, because of their dependence upon the river trade, had more to fear economically from a successful rebellion than people in any other section.<sup>35</sup>

The implications of investigations like these far exceed the function of demolishing an earlier stereotype. They indicate the need, indeed, the necessity, for additional grass-roots research into the nature of Democratic party structure in northern and border states.

If the political objectives and major ideological tenets of the loyal opposition are clear, the forces that produced Copperheadism have not been precisely analyzed. No historian, including the present writer, has yet attempted an intensive quantitative analysis for any state, in an attempt to correlate ethnic, religious, social, and economic factors with Copperheadism. The idea that soil fertility or southern origins were major factors in determining Copperhead affinities are only two examples of generalizations that do not seem to withstand the challenge of critical revisionism. If, as Rutland observes, low soil fertility seems to be a major characteristic of eight Iowa Copperhead counties

(Cleveland, 1909). The revisionist historian Frank Klement accepts this view in part. He attributes the rise of Copperheadism, among many other factors, to the southern origins of large numbers of midwesterners. Klement, *Copperheads*, pp. 14-15, and "Middle Western Copperheadism and the Genesis of the Granger Movement," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVIII (1952), 679-694.

<sup>33</sup> Rutland, "Copperheads of Iowa," 25.

<sup>34</sup> Roseboom, "Southern Ohio and the Union in 1863," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXIX (1952), 41-42.

<sup>35</sup> Stampp, *Indiana Politics*, p. 132.

but not of twelve others, one may legitimately question whether soil fertility was at all important in shaping political loyalties.<sup>36</sup> Further research might or might not uphold the validity of such a generalization for some areas; but if it did, one could analyze with greater certainty why this was so for some counties and not for others.<sup>37</sup>

The use of quantitative data is not a panacea, however; historians have yet to discover any precise way of measuring the influence of an idea on the course of human events. In contrast to Gray, Klement, Barnhart, and Stampp, who place heavy emphasis on economic forces—especially midwestern opposition to tariff, banking and railroad legislation—in accounting for the appeal of Copperheadism, Eugene Roseboom argues that one may "logically reverse the picture" of an Ohio Copperhead as an agrarian liberal, a forerunner of "later nineteenth-century agrarian reform movements" (a view supported by Klement),<sup>38</sup> and

describe him and his Ohio following as archconservative individualists, looking backward to a happier agrarian, state rights past, using the time-worn appeals of the Democrats of Jackson's day against banks, tariffs, and capitalists, and offering no solution for the nation's problems but 'the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was, and the Negroes where they are.'<sup>39</sup>

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what they had always been denied by slaveholding agrarians: the right to legislate for themselves; the opportunity to develop their natural resources; and to expand and protect their infant industries in the Ohio, Kanawha, and Cheat River Valleys. The future of West Virginia, they reasoned, lay with the Northeast. For Carlile and his associates, the easiest path to follow, one dictated by economic self-interest and political expediency, was the one they did not take—the Willey Amendment.

In the process, Carlile, who previously had been the favorite of western Virginia Unionists, succeeded only in destroying his political career and consigning himself to oblivion. Yet he did so willingly, staunchly refusing to compromise in the face of heavy odds against him. Only in terms of exaggerated fears of social change—an intellectual commitment to a vision of a strict constructionist, Anglo-Saxon past—can Copperheadism in West Virginia be understood.

It may be argued that a socio-ideological interpretation applicable to Copperhead leadership in West Virginia is relevant only for an analysis of the motivating impulses of other Copperhead leaders, and not for the rank and file. The fact remains, however, that Carlile, Clemens, and others organized the movement, articulated its principles, and provided the driving force behind it. The fact remains also that the political and economic milieu that existed in West Virginia during the war provided arguments against, not favorable, to their cause. Moreover, conservative Unionism in border, middle Atlantic, and northeastern states, far stronger than most historians of midwestern Copperheadism have recognized, cannot be explained satisfactorily in terms of economic sectionalism; agrarian radicalism; southern birth; soil fertility; illiteracy; or party loyalty. The assumption that Copperheadism flourished primarily in the Middle West is not a sound one. The sound and fury that characterized partisan politics in this area is not a measure of predominance. In New Jersey, Democratic control, not the absence of Copperhead attitudes, accounts for the comparative calm of wartime politics in this state.<sup>45</sup> And recent studies show that conservative Unionism was a strong force in Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut, as well as in the border states of West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Kentucky.<sup>46</sup>

One may conclude, therefore, that if revisionist historians have

<sup>45</sup> Tandler, "Civil War New Jersey."

<sup>46</sup> Erwin S. Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism: Pennsylvania and Presidential Politics, 1860-1872* (Philadelphia, 1964); Robert J. Rayback, "New York State in the Civil War," *New York History*, XLII (1961), 56-70; Wainwright, "Loyal Opposition in Philadelphia"; Niven, *Connecticut for the Union*; Wagandt, *Emancipation in Maryland*; and Harold B. Hancock, *Delaware During the Civil War* (Wilmington, 1961).

demolished the traditional stereotype of the Copperhead as traitor, and if they have placed the political objectives and major ideological tenets of the movement in historical perspective, they have been less successful in analyzing the motivating impulses behind it. What then needs to be done? First, as mentioned earlier, basic research, using quantitative data, should permit historians to make more precise generalizations as to the nature of political party structure; secondly, comparative studies need to be made of conservative Unionism in midwestern, border, and northeastern states; and thirdly, an increased awareness that the sources of ideological commitment remain complex, obscure, and elusive should prevent the type of interpretive oversimplification that has characterized much of the previous writing on the subject. Calling attention, however, to the uncertain joys of interdisciplinary research, as contemporary historians are inclined to do when approaching the outer limits of their own training, research, or critical capacities, is not to belie its promise, or its importance. This comment applies not only to Copperheadism but to the entire range of American political experience involving exaggerated fears of foreign and domestic devils. Certainly, the "politics of hysteria" is one of the most challenging and potentially distinguished subjects to which American historians can address themselves; and if they can resolve some of the major sociopsychological problems connected with the politics of conspiracy, they will, at one and the same time, exorcise some of the "devils" involved in historical methodology itself.

