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SLAVERY’S HOLY PROFITS: RELIGION AND CAPITALISM IN THE ANTEBELLUM LOWER MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of History
The University of Mississippi

by

JOHN LINDBECK

May 2018

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the antebellum lower Mississippi Valley, a place in which white Americans identified the commercial progress of the slave-based cotton kingdom with the manifestation of God's will. It reconciles the two different "Souths" described by recent historians of slavery and capitalism and scholars of antebellum southern evangelicalism. The dissertation begins with the early years of white settlement in the lower Mississippi Valley, when the connection between commercial prosperity and God's providence was not clear. By the 1830s and 1840s, however, these twin ideals merged as one. In those decades, churches and ministers provided stable centers of faith and confidence in the years of high prices for land, cotton, and slaves. Despite their faith in God, however, white southerners' doubts about the market and roving peddlers often morphed into doubts about the intentions of itinerant preachers. Still, evangelical denominations played a crucial role in providing reliable credit networks when few methods of examining the character of distant planters and merchants existed. With confidence in their economic system restored in the 1840s, evangelical slaveholders began to connect plantation efficiency with God's will. They believed that maximizing productivity, whether through violence or prizes for enslaved people, increased prosperity and aided in the spread of the Gospel. In this way, white southerners in the lower Mississippi Valley believed race-based slavery was a holy institution, not just for its supposedly Biblical endorsement, but for its economic advantages over free labor. Spreading God's kingdom necessitated driving

slaves harder. By the 1850s evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley were increasingly confident that their economic and social system would ultimately prove to be the perfect will of God. With belief in God's providence sanctifying their social system and their use of denominational institutions to facilitate financial transactions, this dissertation shows how the lower Mississippi Valley's evangelicals helped create the cotton kingdom and slavery's capitalism.

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INTRODUCTION

"JEHOVAH SHALL BE THY CONFIDENCE": THE COTTON KINGDOM AND GOD'S PROVIDENCE

In the last pages of Herman Melville's 1857 novel *The Confidence-Man*, an anonymous "cosmopolitan," aboard the steamboat *Fidèle* heading south from St. Louis to New Orleans, walks into a gentlemen's cabin late at night and strikes up a conversation with an old man reading the Bible. Sitting at a small table lit by a lamp, their discussion turns to whether distrust of fellow men meant a distrust in the Creator. As the two speak of confidence in general and its implications for faith in God, a barefoot boy dressed in rags straggles into the cabin hawking passenger locks and money belts for security against thieves aboard the boat. When the old man decides to purchase the products, the boy throws in a book for free. The book is a counterfeit detector, a guide that divulges the minute characteristics of every kind of bank note from banks around the country. Since nineteenth-century Americans did not have a universal currency, state-chartered private banks printed their own paper notes redeemable in gold and silver from the bank's vaults. The old man decides to test his three dollar bill on the Vicksburgh Trust and Insurance Banking Company, but the counterfeit detector says, "among fifty other things," that a good bill must "have a kind of silky feel, being made by the lint of a red silk handkerchief stirred up in the paper-maker's vat." As the old man obsesses over his bill, the cosmopolitan dismisses

the counterfeit detector, arguing, "Believe me, the bill is good," and that the detector is a sham meant to gin up people's natural distrust of each other.[1]

Soon the cosmopolitan shifts his attention to "the book before him." Without Melville immediately clarifying that this book was the Bible, not the counterfeit detector, the cosmopolitan wishes that "more confidence was put in" the Bible by "the travelling public." The old man, "with an expression very unlike that with which he had bent over the detector," replies that "in all our wanderings through this vale, how pleasant…to feel that we need start at no wild alarms, provide for no wild perils; trusting in that Power which is alike able and willing to protect us when we cannot ourselves." In agreement with the old man, the cosmopolitan leans forward and quotes approvingly "that passage of Scripture which says, 'Jehovah shall be thy confidence.'" Although they had previously debated the validity of the counterfeit detector's description of genuine bank notes, both men assume that the other book before them, the Bible, is a genuine guide to be trusted for truth in this world and the next.[2]

In deliberately mixing up the counterfeit detector and the Bible, Melville points out the underlying similarities between antebellum evangelicalism and capitalism. Both depended on faith, either in unknown people or unknown sources of information. Both involved risk but promised some kind of reward. Even if paper bank notes and counterfeit detectors might be shams, the old man and the cosmopolitan agreed that the Bible must be true—if not, then what could be trusted?

Despite its poor reception by literary critics when it was published, *The Confidence-Man* has been discussed at length by scholars in recent years, including American historians. Stephen Mihm and Walter Johnson have both used *The Confidence-Man* as a useful introduction to

[1] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man* (1857, repr.; London: Penguin, 1990), 294.
[2] Ibid., 295-296.

understanding the culture of antebellum capitalism. Mihm, in *A Nation of Counterfeiters*, emphasizes the problem of confidence in American paper money in the age of independent wildcat banks. Johnson sees Melville's novel as a metaphor of slave-racial-capitalism, with various individuals vouching for each other's reputation and confidence, and an economic system that ultimately rests on slave labor. Although Mihm and Johnson point out important themes of the book, neither mentions one that is at least as pervasive as what they discuss: religion.[3]

From beginning to end, *The Confidence-Man* features Methodist preachers, evangelical missionaries raising money for missions and benevolent societies, Bible-reading passengers, and frequent philosophical discussions about God, Providence, and confidence in God's will. Ignoring these themes throughout the book, as Mihm and Johnson do, blinds them to the importance Melville placed in them as well as religion's broader significance in American history. The historiographical implications of this omission are significant: to each of these historians, as for many historians of nineteenth-century capitalism in recent years, religion and the rise of evangelical denominations have no importance in the larger narrative of America's transformation from a yeoman republic to a capitalist empire.

Although historians have discussed the confluence of evangelicalism and a market-oriented society in the nineteenth century at great length in the American North, they have virtually ignored those connections in the South, and to their detriment. By splitting religion and economics, they have missed Melville's observation that faith in God and faith in a slave-based capitalist system fed off each other.

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[3] Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4-5; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 127-128.

This dissertation focuses on the antebellum lower Mississippi Valley, a place in which white Americans identified the commercial progress of the slave-based cotton kingdom with the manifestation of God's will. Although that connection was not clear in the early years of white settlement in the region, it solidified in the 1830s and 1840s. In those years, churches and ministers provided stable centers of faith and confidence in the years of high prices for land, cotton, and slaves. Despite their faith in God, however, doubts about the market and roving peddlers often morphed into doubts about the intentions of itinerant preachers. Still, evangelical denominations played a crucial role in providing reliable credit networks when few methods of examining the character of distant planters and merchants existed. With confidence in their economic system restored in the 1840s, evangelical slaveholders began to connect plantation efficiency with God's will. They believed that maximizing productivity, whether through violence or prizes for enslaved people, increased prosperity and aided in the spread of the Gospel. In this way, race-based slavery was a holy institution, not just for its supposedly Biblical endorsement, but for its economic advantages over free labor. Spreading God's kingdom necessitated driving slaves harder. By the 1850s evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley were increasingly confident that their economic and social system would ultimately prove to be the perfect will of God.

I have divided this dissertation into six chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter is historiographic. Since my argument hinges on a historiographical gap in the literatures of southern evangelicalism and the cotton kingdom, I discuss in detail major themes of the new histories of slavery and capitalism alongside those of antebellum southern evangelical history. By doing so, I argue that each of these two groups of scholars have imagined the antebellum South in ways that dismiss the other's major points, and only by reconciling these two "Souths"

can we move forward with a more coherent vision of how faith and the cotton kingdom intersected. I begin my own narrative in chapter two, which discusses the role of Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries in Indian removal, and the subsequent expansion of evangelicals, especially Methodists and Baptists, throughout the lower Mississippi Valley. In chapter three, I examine the concepts of credit and belief in the 1830s, and how those concepts linked religion and economics. A culture of loose credit meant people oscillated between confidence and anxiety, both in the market and in ministers. In chapter four, I discuss the economic fall-out after the Panic of 1837, and how evangelicals, particularly Methodists, developed credit networks based on their pre-existing denominational connections. In chapter five, I discuss the relationship between evangelicalism and commercially-oriented, race-based slavery. With their confidence in markets restored, evangelical planters attempted to turn their plantations into efficient factories with the intention that productive plantations would facilitate the expansion of God's kingdom. In chapter six, I show how evangelicals led the way in diversifying the lower Mississippi Valley's economic interests, believing that the expansion of manufacturing and infrastructure would help to spread their own particular proslavery Gospel. Finally, the epilogue ends with a brief discussion of the Methodist support for re-opening the African slave trade and the implications for a global, proslavery evangelicalism.

Showing how evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley combined commercial prosperity with their vision of God's will does not merely mean that they participated in the profits of the cotton kingdom. Evangelicals were not a peculiar after-thought to the cotton kingdom; rather, they were the idealistic drivers of its engine. They believed in their cause as a religious mission. That mission began with evangelization and Indian removal, but it expanded into pushing slaves and building railroads for the glory of God's kingdom. While isolated

individuals might have attempted to pursue their own fortunes in the Southwest by acquiring land and slaves, evangelicals did the same within a faith-based web of other planters and merchants. With belief in God's providence sanctifying their social system and their use of denominational institutions to facilitate financial transactions, the lower Mississippi Valley's evangelicals helped create the cotton kingdom and slavery's capitalism.

CHAPTER ONE

EVANGELICALS IN CAPITALISM'S COTTON KINGDOM

This dissertation argues that white southern evangelicals gradually equated a commercially-oriented, slave-based society with God's kingdom, but the significance of that story depends upon a current historiographical problem. The recent spate of literature on slavery and capitalism has created a divide in how the new historians of slavery and historians of evangelicalism understand antebellum southern society. For historians of slavery and capitalism such as Walter Johnson, Edward Baptist, and Joshua Rothman, the South was a bustling region with creative financial instruments, factory-like plantations, speculative bubbles, and close ties to the growth of global capitalism. Although not every aspect of this interpretation of the South is new, these historians have added some genuinely novel interpretations of a modern South while also reframing an old historical debate about slavery and capitalism. From the perspective of these authors, the South was not backwards-looking and doomed to die; rather, it offered an alternative commercial vision based on race-based slavery, and it exhibited some characteristics that remain a feature of American capitalist society today.

Historians of southern evangelicalism, from roughly the 1970s to the present, have acknowledged some continuity between antebellum evangelicalism and the emergence of modern religion, but their overall portrayal of the antebellum South has generally been pre-modern and static compared to the North. The "Old South," as they have understood this time

and space, has been characterized by the concepts of paternalism and honor, with a great deal of interpretive debt to Eugene Genovese and Bertram Wyatt-Brown. The interactions, conflicts, and negotiations historians of southern religion have described between evangelicals and the dominant culture presumed that white southerners lived in an older, more static world based on social and racial hierarchy and the patriarchal household. There are exceptions to this general characterization, but they mostly prove the rule that historians of southern evangelicalism have detached the antebellum South from historical moments generally described as northern, particularly the market revolution and forward-looking visions of commercial prosperity and social progress.

To reconcile these conflicting interpretations of the antebellum South, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between the rise of southern evangelicals and the concomitant rise of the cotton kingdom. Doing so makes apparent the way in which southern evangelicals began to see commercial prosperity as a sign of providential favor as well as a tool for spreading God's kingdom.

An analysis of the historiographical problem I have briefly outlined follows in this chapter. I begin with a discussion of the new histories of slavery and capitalism in the South. One notable characteristic among the new historians of slavery is that they intentionally eschew clear definitions of capitalism, instead relying on impressionistic descriptions to paint a picture that readers understand as being obviously "capitalist."[1] Despite this lack of definition, they nonetheless create contextual clues that point to their own working definition of what nineteenth-century capitalism was and why slavery was integral to its development. I have divided those

[1] See John J. Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," *Critical Historical Studies* 2 (Fall 2015): 281-304 and Scott Reynolds Nelson, "Who Put Their Capitalism in My Slavery?" *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5 (June 2015): 289-310 for an analysis of recent histories of slavery and their implicit definitions of capitalism.

clues into the seven following themes that I examine in greater detail: westward expansion, the slave market, plantation efficiency, financial innovations, speculation, global trade networks, and southern slaveholders' growing sense of optimism about their own social system in the years leading up to the Civil War. Next I discuss the historiography on the rise of evangelicalism in the antebellum South. This section focuses on two pervasive themes of this literature: the relationship between white southern evangelicals and slavery, particularly with the development of a distinct black evangelicalism and the emergence of a proslavery ideology, and concepts of honor and the patriarchal household in southern evangelicalism. By discussing the themes and assumptions of historians of religion and new historians of slavery and capitalism, it is apparent that each group could benefit by an approach that bridges the gap between the economic world of the cotton kingdom and the spiritual world of God's providence and rising evangelical denominations. Finally, I give a brief overview of the scholarship on American evangelicalism and capitalism, which has generally focused on the American North, to provide comparisons for how antebellum southern evangelicals resembled but also differed from northerners in their understandings of commercial progress and God's providence.

Slavery and Capitalism

If there is one historian who set the terms of debate for the nature of American slavery and antebellum southern history prior to the recent works on slavery and capitalism, it is Eugene Genovese.[2] For the purposes of this historiography, I want to focus on two points that are emblematic of Genovese's lifetime of work and that stand in stark contrast to recent

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[2] J. William Harris, "Eugene Genovese's Old South: A Review Essay," *Journal of Southern History* 80 No. 2 (May 2014): 342. While Harris acknowledges the recent attacks on Genovese's views on American slavery, he argues for "the continuing influence of Genovese's paternalist interpretation" of slavery on much of the historiography.

interpretations of American slavery and the history of the antebellum South. First, Genovese argued that the relationship between master and slave formed the foundation for all of antebellum southern history and culture, and that relationship can best be understood through the reciprocal relations of paternalism. In his enigmatic way of characterizing American slavery, Genovese began *Roll, Jordan, Roll* describing the institution as "cruel, unjust, exploitative, [and] oppressive," yet a system that "bound two people together in bitter antagonism" based on a complex "organic relationship."[3] Slaveholders conceived of slavery as a paternalistic institution based on mutual rights and responsibilities, one in which the "words 'duty' and 'burden' recurred time and again" in reference to slaveholders' obligations to enslaved people.[4] Yet slaveholders were not the only ones who created and reproduced the paternalist ideology; Genovese contended that despite its use to legitimize a system of "class rule," enslaved people also accepted paternalism "but with radically different interpretations."[5] Despite Genovese's litany of ways in which slaves resisted their state of bondage, such as breaking tools, running away, and preaching a Christian message of redemption, enslaved people rarely challenged the fundamental relationship of master and slave because of their overriding focus on "protecting…individuals against aggression and abuse" within the system itself.[6] In Genovese's understanding of the institution of slavery, violence was just one way of policing the boundaries of a system that primarily rested on an agreement of "reciprocal obligations."[7]

The second key characteristic of Genovese's understanding of American slavery was his belief that the antebellum South was a pre-capitalist society opposed to economic modernization

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[3] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, repr.; New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 3.
[4] Ibid., 75.
[5] Ibid., 3, 5.
[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] Ibid., 134. For a succinct summary of *Roll, Jordan, Roll*'s arguments, see Harris, "Eugene Genovese's Old South," 338-340.

and efficiency. Using the language of his Marxist paradigm, Genovese variously described southern slaveholders as "irrational," "premodern," "precapitalist," and "antibourgeois." Their paternalist society of reciprocal obligations made them "the closest thing to feudal lords imaginable in a nineteenth-century bourgeois republic."[8] When other historians showed that slaveholders reaped enormous profits from plantation slavery, Genovese countered that they were "quasi-aristocratic landowners who had to adjust their economy and ways of thinking to a capitalist world market." The antebellum South "developed many ostensibly capitalist features, such as banking, commerce, and credit," he acknowledged, but their social system was based on the continual accumulation of land and slaves for an aristocratic display of wealth that bought social prestige and honor. Additionally, land and wealth became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few slaveholders, leading the antebellum South to lack a large home market to support industrial growth. Without industrial development, Genovese argued, the "normal feature[s] of capitalism" did not emerge.[9]

Perhaps because he seeks to equate nineteenth-century slaveholders with semi-feudal lords, Genovese's work of history is peculiarly ahistorical. Much of the first hundred pages of *Roll, Jordan, Roll* is a theoretical explanation of hegemony and paternalism, while the bulk of the book makes little mention of dates or locations, leading readers to imagine a generally homogenous "Old South" untouched by the vicissitudes of history. Genovese did not discuss the history of the American South in a chronological manner nor did he explain how slaveholders gained such unparalleled authority over their society—including both enslaved and free people. The lack of any kind of narrative in Genovese's schema leads to the first of many ways in which

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[8] Quotes are in order from Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (1961, repr.; New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 16, 3, 19, 28, 31. See Harris, "Eugene Genovese's Old South," 331.
[9] Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, 19-23.

other historians—especially in recent years—have attacked him for leaving out how Americans created the "Old South" and what the white westward expansion through the Deep South looked like.

James Oakes is one of the first historians to criticize Genovese's positions in his 1982 book *The Ruling Race*. The general outline of Oakes's argument forms the precedent for more recent historians to create a new way of understanding the antebellum South. Oakes's attention to small slaveholders, who made up an overwhelming majority of slaveholders overall, reveals a story of adventure and white male democracy in their constant expansions westward. "The slaveholders' pilgrimage," as he calls it, was a ritualistic experience for young white men to move west, gain cheap land, buy slaves, live hardy lives on the frontier, and perhaps advance into the respectable ranks of the planter class.[10] Southern society was a socially fluid and diverse mix of English, German, and Scotch-Irish immigrants who were chiefly governed by their "grasping materialism."[11] Oakes portrays southern slaveholders in much the same light as northern capitalists. They divided labor into different components using overseers and drivers as part of their "bureaucratic chain of command" to maximize efficiency. "The ideal plantation was a model of efficiency," he writes, and the literature that promoted the plantation ideal of "factories in the fields" showed southern slaveholders' concerns for maximizing profits.[12] Yet in *The Ruling Race* Oakes does not clearly distinguish between different times and regions, only marking out a beginning and an end with the Revolution and the Civil War. Still, Oakes's general arguments laid the groundwork for later historians to build a systematic way of seeing a new relationship between slavery and capitalism in opposition to Genovese's.

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[10] James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 69-95
[11] Ibid., 57.
[12] Ibid., 153-154.

One of the first themes that characterize the new histories of American slavery is an emphasis on the historical creation of the "Old South" through white westward expansion and violence against Native Americans. Using the political and military records of the architects of that westward expansion, Adam Rothman has portrayed the Deep South as a region that "emerged from contingent forces, concrete policies pursued by governments, and countless small choices made by thousands of individuals."[13] While for Genovese the South could seem like a society that had existed since time immemorial, Rothman argues that there was nothing inevitable about the expansion of slavery to the lower Mississippi Valley. Thomas Jefferson's policy of expanding slavery eventually to diffuse the enslaved population and therefore destroy the institution backfired. Instead, Americans, both northern and southern, flocked to territories still claimed by Native peoples to buy land and make a fortune.[14]

The coercive and violent displacement of Native Americans was a contentious battle that also shifts scholarly attention away from a seemingly timeless cotton-producing South. Rothman points out that U.S. Indian agents like Benjamin Hawkins pursued a policy of "civilization" that divided Natives into "civilizers" and "traditionalists."[15] In Hawkins's wake arrived land agents, territorial officials, Christian missionaries, and a host of white slaveholders with their enslaved labor force ready to transform the Deep South into a sprawling cotton frontier. The Deep South, for Rothman, was a contingent region created in time through a diverse group of Americans, but it was also an international crossroads between the Caribbean, New England, and Liverpool. The slave rebellion of St. Domingue and later political developments in Europe during the Napoleonic Wars displaced thousands of French émigrés from Cuba in 1809 who arrived in

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[13] Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), xi.
[14] Ibid., 1-35.
[15] Ibid., 37-54.

Louisiana with tens of thousands of slaves, some of whom became involved in the German Coast slave rebellion, the largest uprising of bondspeople in American history.[16] By 1820, Rothman argues, "a heterogeneous population" had created an American South with connections to "a capitalist world-system" based on the economic exploitation of slave labor.[17]

Rothman's work historicizing the Deep South has influenced the scholarship of historians of slavery in the American South, particularly Edward Baptist and Walter Johnson. Although I will discuss their work in greater detail later, it is important to note where they have expanded on Rothman's work to discuss the forced migration of enslaved people to the lower Mississippi Valley. In the first chapter of Baptist's controversial book *The Half Has Never Been Told*, he foregrounds the horrifying experience of the one million slaves bought and sold in the domestic slave trade from 1790 to 1860. For Baptist, the creation of the slave South was executed through the long marches of slave coffles. "Stumbling with fatigue, staggering with whiskey," Baptist writes, slaves walked hundreds of miles to a foreign land—if they survived the journey—were sold to an unknown enslaver in Mississippi or Louisiana, and set to work on a "slave labor camp," as Baptist describes plantations.[18]

Walter Johnson, like Baptist, focuses on the role of the domestic slave trade in creating the Deep South, but all three historians give a clear chronological history of the imperial expansion of the United States through Louisiana and the ways wealthy speculators hijacked Thomas Jefferson's idealistic vision of a yeoman republic to create instead a capitalist's dream. In *River of Dark Dreams*, Johnson describes how surveyors and federal land agents reimagined a

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[16] Ibid., 37-70, 83-95, 106-117. For a more recent, detailed history of the German Coast slave rebellion, see Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).
[17] Ibid., 223-224.
[18] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 1-2. For an early use of the phrase "slave labor camps," see Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, xxii.

theoretical cotton kingdom through the intersecting lines of rectangular grids in 640-acre sections, all put up for sale at the land office and snatched up by speculators eager to turn a profit. For Baptist and Johnson, like Rothman, the expansion of American hegemony over the antebellum Southwest was a story of violence, coercion, and modern state-building, origins that disrupt previous vague notions of an "Old South."[19]

In the works by Rothman, Johnson, and Baptist, the domestic slave trade—the second theme that has reshaped the historiography of the American South—was a central component to white westward expansion in the antebellum South. J. William Harris, in his summary of the intellectual life of Eugene Genovese, remarked rightly that "studies of the slave trade have perhaps done more than any other area of research to undermine the paternalist interpretation."[20] In the most ambitious of these studies, Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul,* Johnson argues that the slave market was not a peripheral place in the life of enslaved people or slaveholders; rather, the slave market laid bare that the foundation of American slavery was "the chattel principle." While most of a slave's life might take place on a plantation far removed from a slave market, the chattel principle reminded southerners that "any slave's identity might be disrupted as easily as a price could be set and a piece of paper passed from one hand to another."[21] Planters imagined a world of reciprocal obligations and paternalism much like the one described by Genovese, but beneath their rhetoric, Johnson argues, they reduced each slave to "a person with a price," a

[19] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 35, 40-42.
[20] Harris, "Eugene Genovese's Old South," 345.
[21] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19. Johnson, of course, was not the first historian to study the slave trade, but he has made a larger impact on the historiography of slavery by connecting the slave trade to American slavery and the creation of the American South more broadly. For an earlier work on the slave trade, see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

commodity that could be bought and sold at the whim of the master.[22] Slave traders dealt most explicitly with this principle by profiting from buying, transporting, and selling enslaved people.

Planters, however, had a more complicated relationship with the chattel principle. The "bottom-line of [planters'] slave market speculations" was clear, Johnson argues; "they were buying slaves to clear and till their fields, to plant and harvest their crops, [and] to build their houses and their holdings." But beyond the laborious tasks of crop production and plantation management, slaveholders bought paternalism in the slave market.[23] The work of domestic servants created the "leisure and gentility of white women."[24] Masters more generally "became visible as farmers, planters, patriarchs, ladies, and so on, by taking credit for the work they bought slaves to do for them." "The Old South," Johnson provocatively concludes, "was made by slaves" and white southerners' dreams about what those people from the slave market could bring.[25]

Within the dehumanizing process of turning people into products, however, Johnson argues that slaves shrewdly manipulated and often disrupted planters' ideal plantation dream. With their knowledge of how slave traders directed bondspeople to comport themselves and what planters were looking for in a purchase, slaves could influence the sale by playing up certain characteristics—feigning docility, for example—or appealing to planters' paternalist ideal. Stories of different planters circulated through the slave market, and the reputation of each master could influence how a slave interacted with him, whether they played the roles they knew planters were looking for or they displayed the characteristics of an unruly investment. Many planters thought slaves were more trustworthy than the traders with whom they dealt, and slaves

[22] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 2.
[23] Ibid., 88.
[24] Ibid., 93.
[25] Ibid., 102.

could take advantage of that trust by shaping the sale to their own intentions. Despite the constant battle after sale between master and slave over the terms of the slave's bondage, the slave market loomed over the institution as a whole as each day masters attempted to terrorize and beat their slaves into performing the roles that the masters had bought at the market.[26]

Soul by Soul is the most comprehensive work on the economics and culture of the slave market, but Baptist in *The Half Has Never Been Told* adds his own twist with a view of the slave market as theft. Baptist's history of slavery is one of competing stories, and the history of the slave market from the enslaved perspective is one of "stealing" people from their homes and families. Slaveholders, he writes, forcefully separated hundreds of thousands of children from their mothers and wives from husbands in what slaves saw as a crime against their humanity. While this difference may not necessarily seem ground-breaking at first sight, Baptist extends this "talk about stealing" to American slavery in general. "In this story there is no good master, no legitimate heir to the ownership of slave property," for all are "enslavers."[27] He writes, "Stealing can never be an orderly system undergirded by property rights, cushioned by family-like relationships." If historians would peel off slaveholders' outer layer of paternalistic concern and regard for the rule of law, Baptist argues, they would find that the only way to own a person is through the violent theft of their bodies and will. Violence and theft are not the markers of an oppressive but complex institution with reciprocal relationships, rights and responsibilities, as described by Genovese. In "slavery-as-theft," "there is only chaos and violence." The nature of slavery was "constant disruption, creation, and destruction once more."[28] On plantations where slave traders bought people, at slave markets where they were probed and sold, and back home

[26] Ibid., 172-177, 213.
[27] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 189. Baptist provocatively refers to slaveholders as "enslavers" throughout the book to argue that all slaveholders were actively stealing and enslaving human beings.
[28] Ibid.

where their family members mourned their loss, Baptist and Johnson argue, we see the true character of slavery as the coercive stealing of human beings and their violent transportation and commodification to be resold and reborn in the slave market.

The third theme on which recent historians of slavery have diverged from previous scholars is the efficiency, brutality, and violence of plantation slavery.[29] The brutality of slavery was not incidental to the institution, they argue; rather, it was due to the South's connection to the broader capitalist system. Baptist in particular has made the most provocative argument of any of these recent histories with his claim that torture was the cornerstone of increased cotton production and therefore the industrial revolution and the birth of the modern world. Historians agree that the number of pounds of cotton picked per worker per day increased by nearly four hundred percent from 1800 to 1860. He compares that rate of productivity increase with the increase in production of about four hundred percent in the same period for workers using spinning machines in cotton mills and between six hundred and one thousand percent for workers in weaving mills.[30]

But the technology for mechanized cotton production did not emerge until the late 1930s. The "machine" Baptist identifies on plantations to spark this dramatic rise in efficiency was torture. The "whipping-machine" beat a sadistic truth out of the enslaved every day, Baptist argues, by "continually extract[ing]…the maximum poundage that a man, woman, or child could

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[29] Previous scholars have argued that plantation slavery was profitable and efficient, but the new historians of slavery emphasize violence and torture more than earlier scholars. For earlier works on the efficiency of plantation slavery, see especially Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1974); Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-Nineteenth Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); William Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); and Oakes, *Ruling Race*, 154. Oakes argues that slaveholders were capitalists, but he emphasizes the "bureaucratic chain of command" rather than violence.
[30] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 128.

pick."[31] Overseers kept meticulous account books containing the number of pounds a given slave could pick each day. If "hands" fell short of their expected quotas, then their "account was negative," and overseers would "settle" accounts by whipping workers to make up the deficit.[32] This brutal pushing system somehow kept up with the technological innovations of the industrial revolution, "multiplied US cotton production to 130 times its 1800 level by 1860," and made "slave labor camps…more efficient producers of revenue than free farms in the North."[33]

Baptist's explanation for this enormous growth in productivity, however, has elicited criticism.[34] First, Baptist's assertion that slavery was efficient and profitable may seem like an unoriginal resurrection of Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's controversial *Time on the Cross*. Fogel and Engerman argued in the 1970s that slavery was an efficient economic system that set a precedent for factory production later in the nineteenth century. More recently, Richard Follett has reached conclusions similar to Fogel and Engerman's, arguing that the mechanization of sugar production combined with positive incentives such as Christmas bonuses and overwork wages optimized the output of enslaved laborers. Follett particularly draws connections between the perquisites given to enslaved people and the wages workers received after emancipation.[35] What sets Baptist apart from these historians, however, is his exclusive focus on violence. For Baptist, capitalism is characterized by the theft of surplus labor through violence. The profitability of slavery was due to slaveholders' disregard for the humanity of enslaved people, treating them instead like livestock to be pushed to maximize productivity under the threat of the

[31] Ibid., 140-141.
[32] Ibid., 132.
[33] Ibid., 142.
[34] For one example of economic historians' criticism, see John E. Murray et al., "Roundtable of Reviews of *The Half Has Never Been Told*," *Journal of Economic History* 75 Issue 3 (September 2015): 919-931.
[35] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 4-6; Follett, *Sugar Masters*, 151-237.

whip. Where Fogel, Engerman, and Follett see increased productivity through something like a wage incentive, Baptist sees it purely through the exploitation that resulted from torture.

A second criticism of Baptist regards his dismissal of improved cotton seed varieties as a reason for increased cotton production in the antebellum South. Scholars have pointed out that new strains of cotton produced larger cotton bolls, "cluster" bolls, and taller plants, making them easier to pick in larger quantities.[36] Baptist cites the work of two economists who provide his quantitative data, but he brushes off their conclusions that emphasize cotton seed varieties by claiming that "picking totals rose continuously," both before the advent of the new strain of Petit Gulf cotton and after its emergence.[37] In response, one of those economists, Alan Olmstead, has called Baptist's work "flawed beyond repair," arguing that "the development of improved varieties [of cotton] was not a one-time occurrence despite Baptist's unsupported contention to the contrary." Without the important development of new cotton varieties, Olmstead argues, scholars are left believing one of two alternatives: either the frequent use of the whip forced slaves to gradually develop "some secret process" for cotton picking "that only slaves understood," or slaveholders in 1800 "were so much nicer, gentler, and more conscientious (or so much more ignorant) custodians of their chattel that they voluntarily extracted only one-fourth as much output in a day."[38] In addition to this problem, critics have argued that the cotton account books that planters used to track daily cotton picking totals varied vastly from day to day. Depending on the time of season, the field, or even whether a slave picked cotton all day or

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[36] Murray et al., "Roundtable of Reviews of *The Half Has Never Been Told*," 920; Ian Beamish, "Saving the South: Agricultural Reform in the Southern United States, 1819-1861" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2013), 14.
[37] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 127.
[38] Murray et al., "Roundtable of Reviews of *The Half Has Never Been Told*," 920-921.

only part of the day, the number of pounds of cotton picked per slave jumped up and down each day, making the strict quota system that Baptist describes unlikely.[39]

Yet none of these critiques diminish the broader argument that planters pushed their enslaved workforce to maximize cotton production at minimal cost. Even one of Baptist's critics, Ian Beamish, acknowledges some of the major points that contribute to this understanding of the capitalist antebellum cotton planter. The existence of strict picking quotas that carried over from day to day seems unlikely, but that does not mean that overseers did not whip slaves at the gin-house for falling short of what they expected them to pick in a particular day. Perhaps even more terrifying than a strict quota, Beamish writes, slaves were subjected "to the capriciousness of masters and overseers" who could decide whether a given quantity of cotton was sufficient. Echoing Baptist's more general argument, each variant of maximizing cotton production "relied upon the threat and reality of physical and psychological violence, represented most directly and brutally by the whip."[40] Another critic of Baptist's, while disagreeing on the importance of torture for the increase in cotton productivity, argues that southern planters were capitalists due to their "widespread and systematic market dependence."[41] Even if historians reject the thesis that the "whipping machine" single-handedly propelled the growth of American capitalism, they still seem to agree that southern slaveholders maximized cotton productivity through violence against slaves and depended on the market to continue their domination.

Much like *The Half Has Never Been Told*, Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams* emphasizes the role of violence in the rapid growth of cotton production, but Johnson avoids Baptist's errors by exploring other ways in which planters attempted to streamline production. The cotton

[39] Beamish, "Saving the South," 27-34.
[40] Ibid., 34-35.
[41] Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," 282.

kingdom's ruling ratios were bales per acre and bales per hand, or simply the maximization of output with the lowest level of input. Slaveholders tortured their labor force into working more efficiently in what Johnson describes as an alchemical translation of "lashes into labor into bales into dollars into pounds sterling." Doing so increased the aggregate productivity of slaves on Mississippi cotton plantations six-fold from 1820 to 1860, he claims, echoing Baptist's controversial argument.[42]

Yet Johnson also points out the ways in which planters attempted to augment production that were not necessarily dependent on violence. Everything became quantifiable in the mind of the reforming planter as the landscape was transformed into an unending field of cotton rows, each like the one before, and human beings were "stripped of their social networks" into atomized "hands."[43] They experimented with different strains of cotton seed to match the picking abilities of the average slave while monitoring each slave through the "visual grid" of the landscape.[44] The "agro-capitalist landscape" itself was a tool used by slaveholders to discipline slaves with the "supersensory power" of sight. Using the visual panorama provided by overseers atop horses, slaveholders attempted to dominate their labor force that toiled in straight rows of cotton with the cover of forest far away.[45] "The carceral landscape," a space that imprisoned slaves by carefully monitoring their every movement, was "an ongoing project" of slaveholder domination and expropriation to generate more bales per hand.[46]

Although previous historians had at least discussed the three themes of westward expansion, the slave market, and plantation efficiency to some extent, the new historians of

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[42] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 244-246.
[43] Ibid., 152-159.
[44] Ibid., 166.
[45] Ibid., 221.
[46] Ibid., 243.

slavery and capitalism emphasize a fourth theme of finance that is nearly unprecedented in the historical literature and is part of a wider theme within the new history of capitalism.[47] John Clegg points out that this trend within the history of capitalism is not indicative of new theories of capitalism, but instead is "reflecting the era of financialization in which these authors live and write."[48] Historians reluctant to define capitalism have become enamored by the history of complex financial instruments in a way to define capitalism by context—for instance, we can all agree that mortgage-backed securities are in some way inherently capitalist. By showing how slaves and slave-produced cotton were commodified, packaged, and sold in abstract securities, scholars like Baptist and Johnson not only stand in opposition to Genovese and older historians of slavery, they also shift the debates about capitalism and slavery from efficiency to financialization and speculation.

The best example of this kind of work is Baptist's research on the Consolidated Association of the Planters of Louisiana (C.A.P.L.), a planters' bank chartered by the Louisiana state legislature in 1827. The workings of this financial institution show how planters used creative ways to obtain credit from financiers in Great Britain and the American Northeast. Louisiana planters could buy stock in the C.A.P.L. which enabled them to borrow up to half the face value of their C.A.P.L. stock in banknotes by using their mortgaged property—both land and slaves—as collateral. To obtain the capital necessary to back the bank, the C.A.P.L. had the

[47] On slavery and finance, see Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism,1815-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). Although a few older economic historians focused on finance and banking in the antebellum South, they neglected the provocative connections recent historians make between slaves as chattel, banks, and overseas investors. For instance, Harold D. Woodman was arguing with historians about whether cotton factors or planters were responsible for a lack of southern economic development. For older histories of southern finance and banking, see Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of South, 1800-1925* (1965, repr.; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990); George D. Green, *Finance and Economic Development in the Old South: Louisiana Banking, 1804-1861* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).
[48] Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," 283.

state of Louisiana issue $2.5 million in bonds to be sold by the London merchant firm Baring Brothers on the British securities market. The bonds would pay five percent annual interest after ten to fifteen years. To ensure the investment's safety, the bonds were also backed by the good faith of the state of Louisiana. British investors initially bought the bonds for five hundred dollars, but that price later increased to one thousand dollars, roughly the price of a field hand, Baptist notes. With an implicit reference to the 2008 mortgage-backed securities bubble, Baptist argues that "a bond was really the purchase of a completely commodified slave: not a particular individual, but a tiny percentage of the income flows derived from each one of thousands of slaves."[49] As this method of procuring capital for Louisiana planters proved successful and was also a seemingly lucrative investment, the C.A.P.L. continued issuing bonds in the 1830s totaling seven million dollars. New banks in Louisiana appeared throughout the decade copying the C.A.P.L.'s method of capital accumulation and expanding the total amount of capital in the state from nine million dollars in 1830 to forty-six million dollars just a few years later.[50] Within the credit networks that connected London, Liverpool, New York, and New Orleans, British financiers could buy a piece of an abstract pool of collateralized slaves and fuel the continued capitalization and expansion of the cotton kingdom.

Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams* and Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton*—which I examine in greater detail later—also discuss the credit networks that financed American slavery, but they do so less provocatively than Baptist. In the early nineteenth century, Beckert explains, the American Chamber of Commerce in Liverpool, England began a process of standardization of cotton varieties to allow for the swifter exchange of money and credit. Advance payments

[49] Edward E. Baptist, "Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, Collateralized and Securitized Human Beings, and the Panic of 1837," in *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 80-82.
[50] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 254.

from merchant capitalists in England for cotton of a particular variety "was the magic wand that allowed merchants to recast nature, clear lands…produce crops in definite qualities and quantities, and meet the voracious appetites of manufacturers and their modern cotton machinery."[51] The move towards standardization also allowed for the gradual emergence of futures markets in cotton. "The connection between a particular contract and a particular batch of cotton began to weaken," Beckert argues, as cotton factors could sell their contracts to speculators who gambled that cotton prices would increase by the time the product actually arrived at its destination.[52] Johnson adds that these abstract bales of cotton, separated from the actual production process, "were the symbols of commodity fetishism."[53] Insured cotton need not even be present at port to be salable. Just like nineteenth-century European investors could buy a share in a pool of abstract slaves, they could also buy the contract for an abstract cotton bale. The financial transactions, as these three historians explain them, dealt in slaves, land, and cotton—the material resources for the entire "empire of cotton"—but increasingly all three of these resources became immaterial products to be used as gambling chips in a high-stakes trans-Atlantic game.

The new history of capitalism incorporates finance more to reflect present economic conditions, and in so doing it also equates capitalism with wild, sometimes hysterical, speculation as a result of the 2008 financial crash. With the recent popularity of movies such as *The Big Short* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*, financial speculation has become part of American popular culture.[54] John Clegg points out that an earlier generation of historians criticized Fogel

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[51] Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 219.
[52] Ibid., 212.
[53] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 265.
[54] For example, Baptist directly draws parallels between the financial world of 1830s Louisiana to the financial crisis of 2008 using popular books on the crash including *The Big Short* and *How Markets Fail*. See Baptist, "Toxic Debt," 72-73, 304-305n6-8.

and Engerman for equating slavery with modernity and capitalism because they conjured up ideas of efficiency and productivity that produced a "salutary" effect. Today, Clegg points out, popular ideas of capitalism are characterized more by con artists, gamblers, and a hedonistic love of wealth.[55]

One of the best examples of this history of capitalism featuring gamblers, speculators, and hysteria—the fifth theme in this historiography—comes from Joshua Rothman's unique snapshot of Mississippi and West Tennessee in the economic boom years of the 1830s. In *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, Rothman describes the violent oscillation of white southerners on the western frontier between "energetic optimism," on the one hand, and "dangerous volatility and unnerving doubts," on the other.[56] At the center of the story is Virgil Stewart's account of his arrest of John Murrell—allegedly the leader of what became known as the Murrell gang. When Stewart captured Murrell for horse stealing, he claimed Murrell told him about the inner workings of "the mystic clan," a loose confederation of outlaws who conspired to steal and re-sell slaves, steal horses, and eventually overthrow southern civilization by instigating a region-wide slave revolt. While the story surrounding Murrell was dubious, it fed into an existing atmosphere of anxiety in Mississippi. Paranoia surrounding the Murrell gang spread through rumors and newspaper articles to Madison County, Mississippi where white residents violently cracked down on what they believed to be a slave conspiracy by torturing and hanging both slaves and white men. It spread also to Vicksburg where a mob of angry Mississippians purged the city of its gamblers and hanged five in the process. Antebellum Mississippi as Rothman

[55] Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," 289-290.
[56] Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 5.

describes it was hysterical about the hopes for big gains alongside the anxieties those hopes generated.[57]

What Rothman does better than the other historians of capitalism and slavery is examine the culture of the cotton kingdom. The antebellum Southwest that he depicts is similar to the environment represented by Johnson and Baptist, but the primary action in *Flush Times and Fever Dreams* is in the minds of white southerners. The enslaved people they bought on credit and the land they mortgaged could bring prosperity, but leveraged land and slaves stoked fears of slave uprisings, speculative bubbles, and an uncontrollable lust for money. The fears of Mississippian slaveholders were the mirror images of what they hoped to become—they feared slave stealers because they were just like planters and slave traders but "more in tune with the enslaved than their putative actual masters, and a better speculator than even the shrewdest planters." In the same way, Mississippi planters despised professional gamblers because they exploited "their basest impulses toward greed and embodied their deepest anxieties about the prospects for a correspondence of speculative capitalism and moral responsibility."[58] The planters and professionals of Vicksburg and Madison County defined themselves as respectable citizens by creating a clear boundary between what they saw as respectable speculation and control over the enslaved on one hand and unvarnished gambling and slave stealing on the other. The pent-up outrage directed at gamblers, slaves, and suspicious white men was based on the fears of what might transpire if their own values of capitalism and individualism were able to run rough-shod over an ethic of respectability.

Although less focused on culture than *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, Johnson and Baptist do not entirely neglect a cultural history of capitalism and slavery. Johnson's portrait of

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[57] Ibid., 51-87, 159-163.
[58] Ibid., 268-269.

the shifty characters aboard Mississippi River steamboats, drawn from Herman Melville's novel *The Confidence-Man*, point to the question of trust in a modern capitalist society based on racial slavery. In *The Confidence-Man*, unknown and unnamed characters appear asking for donations or loans based on the referrals of other anonymous characters, all aboard a Mississippi steamboat that Johnson describes as a microcosm of the antebellum lower Mississippi Valley. At the foreground of Johnson's version of the South is "the era's emblematic tricksters—the con men, gamblers, and escaping slaves," people who embodied a capitalist economy "unmoored from geography" and "always twinned with anxiety."[59]

More closely related to Rothman's hysterical "fever dreams," Baptist describes the slaveholding capitalist South in a way that transcends traditional economic definitions of rationality. Sexual passion, he argues, drove slaveholders to imagine the Southwestern frontier as "a white man's sexual playground."[60] By the 1830s, slave traders marketed young enslaved women as "fancy girls" or "maids" to be sold at a higher price based on the predatory sexual desires of white men.[61] The example of forced prostitution of the enslaved illustrates a larger point for Baptist—that slaveholders "on slavery's entrepreneurial frontier, primed by their sexual arousal built into the human-commodity market…were more likely than ever to chase short-term gains with little thought for the future."[62] The capitalism of Baptist, like Rothman and Johnson, was not about rationality and efficiency but rather passion and the hungry desire for short-term gratification, even at the expense of long-term security.

The speculation and financial instruments discussed by the new historians of capitalism and slavery leads to the sixth theme of tying American slavery to the growth of global

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[59] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 126-150. Quotation located on page 150.
[60] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 238.
[61] Ibid., 240.
[62] Ibid., 243.

capitalism. No historian surpasses Sven Beckert in doing so in his book *Empire of Cotton*. Unlike the other historians discussed in this chapter, Beckert is not primarily interested in the American South. Instead, his story is based on the webs of the cotton economy stretching from the economic center of Liverpool to various peripheries in India, Latin America, Egypt, as well as the United States. The history of the cotton industry—emblematic, Beckert argues, of all of global capitalism—shows "how Europeans united the power of capital and the power of the state to forge, often violently, a global production complex," ultimately using the "capital, skills, networks and institutions of cotton" to create the modern world.[63]

To discuss the cotton industry over such a long period of time Beckert follows other recent historians in leaving the term "capitalism" undefined. Yet he does distinguish between two basic types of capitalism: war capitalism and industrial capitalism. Industrial capitalism is more familiar to scholars as a system of wage workers, contracts, markets, property rights, the rule of law, and powerful institutions backed by the state. War capitalism, by contrast, was an earlier mode of organizing production and labor characterized by "slavery, the expropriation of indigenous peoples, imperial expansion," a weak central government, and enterprising "private individuals."[64] In broad terms, the violent removal of native inhabitants and the forced labor regimes made up mostly of enslaved African Americans created the early "wages of war capitalism" to be accumulated and re-invested by European capitalists and states to create industrial capitalism. By the end of the nineteenth century, the power of European states and capitalists had become great enough to colonize distant parts of the globe, kill off native

[63] Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, xv.
[64] Ibid., xv-xvi.

industries, and add more wage laborers to a growing global pool who would serve the economic interests of the global financial centers.[65]

Although the geographic and chronological scope of *Empire of Cotton* is much greater than anything written by the other recent historians of capitalism and slavery, their works dovetail on the connections between global capitalism and American slavery. Beckert reiterates throughout the book that the success of capitalists depended on their ability to control a large labor force. The system of chattel slavery in the American South, he argues, was the perfect labor system in a suitable geographic location to provide the growing supply of cotton that English textile factories craved. As opposed to the labor regimes in early-nineteenth-century India and the Ottoman Empire where "rural cultivators had to first secure subsistence crops for their own use" before harvesting cotton for the market, American plantation slavery "exemplified the new rhythm of industrial labor." Slave owners were the first successful masters to exhibit "a core characteristic of capitalism," the "almost total control of the work process" on plantations.[66] Yet Beckert does not go so far as to argue that American slavery was absolutely necessary for the emergence of capitalism. As Dan Rood has pointed out in his review of Beckert's and Baptist's books, Baptist and Johnson virtually equate American slavery with the birth of the modern world while Beckert, in his more long-term global history, sees American slavery as "one significant iteration of capitalism's ever-shifting global division of labor—indispensable for a time, perhaps, but not for all time."[67]

As already indicated, Johnson and Baptist situate American slavery within a global capitalist context, though with a hazier understanding of what global capitalism was. Johnson, in

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[65] Ibid., 56-82, 274-311.
[66] Beckert, 108-109, 115.
[67] Dan Rood, "Beckert Is Liverpool, Baptist Is New Orleans: Geography Returns to the History of Capitalism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 36 (Spring 2016): 162.

particular, tracks the entire journey of a cotton bale from plantation to factory, following the networks of trade and capital across the Atlantic. He locates the capitalist center for American planters in New York, the port through which most southern cotton travelled en route to Liverpool, because it contained the most highly capitalized banks that could "offer longer credit on better terms to those interested in buying cotton." To Johnson, the complicated journeys of cotton and capital define capitalism in a particular time and space without having to define capitalism itself.[68]

Yet as the historian of capitalism Scott Reynolds Nelson points out, Johnson—among other historians—implicitly defines capitalism according to world-systems theory through his description of global exchange and capital accumulation. As Johnson explains, cotton was produced on slave-labor plantations and shipped to the American economic center of New York, where banks advanced credit on large volumes of goods for cotton's transatlantic passage to merchants and industrialists in Europe. Although Johnson claims to reject world-systems theory,[69] Nelson points out that his implicit definition of capitalism is exactly that—"a whole integrated system of slave and free production" with highly-capitalized cores, usually with a strong government and political freedoms, and weak peripheries dependent on brutality and slavery. Beckert, to his credit, makes clear his theoretical debt to world-systems theory and its author Immanuel Wallerstein, but Nelson notes that "many current historians of capitalism and slavery," Johnson and Baptist included, "echo world-systems theory, though they don't appear to understand that it is a theory about how regions become 'underdeveloped,' that is, prone to fierce financial calamities and stifled in their drive to industrialize."[70]

[68] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 254, 257-258.
[69] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 253-254.
[70] Nelson, "Who Put Their Capitalism in My Slavery?" 295. For world-systems theory, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World Economy, 1730s-1840s*

Despite their similarities, all three historians who discuss American slavery in the context of global capitalism—Beckert, Johnson, and Baptist—have slight variations on what that vision of capitalism implies. I have already noted the emphasis that Johnson and Baptist place on the economically "irrational" actions of southern planters who were nonetheless capitalists. The passions that fuel much of Johnson and Baptist's more provocative critiques of capitalism—both in the past and present—are conspicuously absent from *Empire of Cotton*. Perhaps Beckert's story is too large to be concerned with the driving motives of southern planters, but more likely this omission is because his understanding of capitalism is based on "a global network of land, labor, transport, manufacture, and sale." Beckert assumes that capitalism was about the rational and endless pursuit of capital.[71] While capitalists may have been "the age's true revolutionaries," according to Beckert, he stops short of describing capitalists as nearly hysterical agents of destruction, creation, and sadistic torture that Baptist and Johnson describe.[72]

(1989, repr.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). In his review of *Time on the Cross* and *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Wallerstein specifically argues, "Slave owners were then indeed capitalists, as Fogel and Engerman argue, not, however, because all rational men are, but because they were operating in a capitalist world-economy. And a slave owner who did not allow market considerations to loom large in his firm's operation would sooner or later go bankrupt and be replaced by one who did." See Immanuel Wallerstein, "American Slavery and the Capitalist World Economy," *American Journal of Sociology* 81 No. 5 (March 1976): 1211. John Clegg similarly refers to the necessity of slaveholders to operate within the market to remain solvent. He defines capitalism as based on "market-dependent producers," a concept borrowed from Robert Brenner's theory of capitalism in which "productive agents [are] dependent on the market for survival." See Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," 284; Robert Brenner, "Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong," in *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Chris Wickham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49-111. Clegg also joins Nelson in criticizing new historians of slavery for not addressing the theoretical literature on capitalism. According to Clegg, historians are "reverting to an antitheoretical empiricism. The danger is that in trying to do without theory they will unwittingly reproduce whichever theory has achieved the status of 'common sense.'" See Clegg, "Capitalism and Slavery," 287-288.

[71] See Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, xx. Beckert's endnote here cites Immanuel Wallerstein and other historians for this definition of capitalism. Wallerstein's "key element" of the capitalist system "is that it is built on the drive for the *endless* accumulation of capital." He continues that this "is not merely a cultural value but a structural requirement" with "mechanisms" that "reward" those who operate according to the system's logic and punishments for those who operate according to a separate logic. See Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III*, xiv.

[72] Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 309. While the notion of capitalism as revolutionary creative destruction is an old one, it has recently been revitalized by historians of slavery and capitalism. See Baptist on capitalism and the slave trade, Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 189, and Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith in their introduction to *Capitalism Takes Command* in which they conclude, "The American bourgeoisie thus acted like revolutionary classes throughout modern history, both in its struggle to gain a measure of control over the chaos born of its own success, and the willingness to destroy parts of itself in doing so." See Zakim and Kornblith, "An American Revolutionary Tradition," in *Capitalism Takes Command*, 4. For classic interpretations of the creative destruction of

The financial innovations, speculative activity, and global connections of southern slaveholders lead to the final theme of the new histories of slavery and capitalism discussed here—white southerners' optimism about the state of slavery and their civilization in the years leading up to the Civil War. Baptist argues that the political conflicts of the 1850s were a result of white southerners' goal "to see slavery expansion written into the laws of the nation and the covenants of its political parties." White southerners "did not see their own system as something antique, destined to fall before the onrushing future," but as a modern and innovative sector of the world economy.[73] More so than Baptist, Johnson highlights slaveholders' sense of their own inevitable progress in the closing chapters of *River of Dark Dreams*. White southerners thought of themselves as the leaders of western civilization, carrying the steamboat north and south and expanding slavery and plantation agriculture west. With these advances, they began to re-imagine a white man's slaveholding republic—the "dark dreams" from Johnson's title—in which white domination of supposedly inferior races stretched from the American South through strategic locations in Central America and the Caribbean. They had always thought of their empire in terms of east and west, but by the 1850s they imagined the axis of their slaveholders' empire in terms of north and south with Cuba, Nicaragua, and Panama as the next key territorial acquisitions. The extraordinary failure of American filibusters under Narciso López to take Cuba by force in 1851 did not seem to faze white southerners' dreams of dominating those races they deemed inferior through the providential "divine economy" set by God.[74] "Progress, commerce,

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capitalism, see Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), 59-163; D. Ryazanoff, ed., *The Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 30-33.
[73] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 346.
[74] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 392.

slavery, and empire" were concepts that were linked in white southerners' minds as the ultimate ends of history—as Johnson puts it, "global whitemanism."[75]

That Johnson's boldest claims involve the mind of the South, so to speak, create a dilemma for his own work as well as the historiography as a whole. Johnson thinks of himself as a materialist who uses "a materialist and historical analysis" to find out "what happened" in material terms, not "what *should* have happened."[76] For Johnson, this means that the driver of historical narrative was the domination of the physical world, not ideas or culture. Yet he delves deep into the macabre visions of what southern slaveholders hoped would occur to contrast it with what in fact did occur. Southern slaveholders, with their dark dreams, were oblivious to the "material limits" of their own "destiny" in Cuba, Johnson points out, as they "transformed a set of abstract propositions…into the terrible materiality of an expedition aiming to actualize that history by force of arms."[77] The expedition began with a mere "pitch," "a series of images" designed to create "faith" and "confidence" in the hopes of a successful Cuban invasion.[78] The invasion itself seemed to take place in a hazy fantasy world as tormented filibusters threw away their muskets to lighten their load, laid down to rest as the army marched on, and otherwise showed how unprepared they were, and impossible was their task. If the white man's slaveholding visions of empire in Latin America were so impossible, then what is left in *River of Dark Dreams* is a highly unlikely counter-history, yet also a window into the ideas "of those who did not know the course that events would take." As Johnson concludes the book, he emphasizes

[75] Ibid., 310, 418. For more on the global vision and optimism of southern slaveholders, see Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[76] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 254. See also Johnson, *River of Dark* Dreams, 9 for his assertion that "beneath the abstractions" of historical concepts "lies a history of bare-life processes and material exchanges." He provocatively specifies that his is a history "of sun, water, and soil; animal energy, human labor, and mother wit; grain, flesh, and cotton; pain, hunger, and fatigue; blood, milk, semen, and shit."
[77] Ibid., 331.
[78] Ibid., 337.

again white southerners' "vision…of pushing time forward by controlling people over space," and their "vision of political economy" in which "'freedom' was a quantity to be forcibly extracted from the suffering bodies of slaves" and those who were most vulnerable.[79]

What is real and what matters in *River of Dark Dreams* is unclear, whether it was the material world or the dreams that seemed so detached from that world. Yet the perspective he offers shows that white slaveholders did not conceive of themselves as traditional or a throwback to a previous way of life that would eventually be outmoded; instead, they were sure that God had destined them to be the leaders of western civilization through the institution of slavery.

Although new historians of slavery emphasize different aspects of the intersection of American slavery and capitalism, taken together they paint a very different collective portrait than previous historians of the antebellum South. The South they describe was violent, modern, efficient, globally connected, and optimistic about its position as a leader of western civilization. Additionally, these scholars agree that any history of the antebellum South must include the commodification of human beings in the slave trade and the white westward expropriation of Native American territory.

Johnson's dilemma in *River of Dark Dreams*—focusing on the dreams and ideas of men while believing that those dreams were irrelevant next to the profits and power they brought—brings into relief the gap in these historians' work. In their zeal to show that American slaveholders were leaders of America's capitalist frontier, these historians have neglected to explore the more abstract reasons white southerners migrated westward, bought slaves, and planted cotton. Particularly by ignoring the spectacular rise of evangelicalism in this same period, they have missed one of the most important developments in southern history. Historians

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[79] Ibid., 420.

of evangelicalism have shown repeatedly that the evangelical worldview affected and was affected by social, economic, and political events. Johnson comes closest to hinting at the place of God and providence in the development of the cotton kingdom, but this connection remains sorely underdeveloped in the literature on slavery and capitalism. By departing from these new histories of slavery and capitalism and turning to the historiography of southern evangelicalism, we see a different kind of South—one animated by the Spirit but often looking backwards to an old-fashioned household economy based on the reciprocal relations between masters and slaves.

Antebellum Southern Evangelicalism

When shifting to histories of southern evangelicalism, the antebellum South appears more traditional, orthodox, and detached from the tumultuous transformations of the market revolution that recent historians of slavery and capitalism have emphasized. Historians of evangelicalism have certainly not regarded the antebellum South as a timeless pre-modern space, but the themes that dominate the historiography of southern evangelicalism reflect the assumption that southerners were conservatives attempting to maintain an older order. That order has been characterized by two relationships that form the primary themes in works on antebellum southern evangelicalism: the relationship between evangelicalism and slavery, on one hand, and between evangelicalism and the patriarchal household and the concept of honor, on the other hand.

For the first theme, historians have discussed how enslaved African Americans created a distinct evangelicalism, often emphasizing the "agency" of slaves, while also explaining the emergence of a coherent proslavery Christianity in the 1830s and 1840s. Eugene Genovese, who I have already discussed as one of the most influential historians of slavery, paved the way for scholars to see slavery as a reciprocal relationship between masters and slaves that constituted

the ruling-class ideology of paternalism. Regarding the second theme, historians have generally depicted early evangelicalism as a counter-cultural movement in conflict with the patriarchal honor culture of the antebellum South, but that honor culture and evangelicalism eventually merged. In both themes, southern evangelicals of the 1830s through the 1850s consciously looked back to an older, patriarchal past in reaction to the free-labor North. Such a perspective seems to place southern evangelicals in another South than the hustle-and-bustle of Walter Johnson's New Orleans or Joshua Rothman's Madison County, Mississippi. Although there are exceptions to this characterization, it is necessary to analyze these themes to understand how this description became so pervasive and how to reconcile these seemingly two different "Souths."

Within the first theme—the relationship between southern evangelicals and slavery—it is necessary to distinguish between two sub-themes: the creation of a distinct African-American evangelicalism and the emergence of proslavery Christianity. Many of the major contours of the first of these two sub-themes were outlined by Genovese in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. Evangelicalism became a major vehicle for enslaved people's day-to-day resistance, according to Genovese, but that resistance often led them to divert attention away from the oppressive system of slavery itself and think instead of the hereafter. He argued that the prophetic language of evangelicalism facilitated the creation of a black "protonational consciousness," but Christianity could "only come to a supine call for accommodation to secular power and a retreat into the world of the spirit."[80] Still, evangelicalism was the primary foundation for black agency, according to Genovese, and "the world the slaves made," as he put it. Despite the shortcomings of religion for the purposes of resistance, Genovese assumed that enslaved people had a degree of autonomy and relief from daily physical oppression that contradicts how Baptist and Johnson have

[80] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 277. On a black "protonational consciousness," see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 280-284.

described enslaved people's conditions. Instead of the constant presence of torture with the "whipping machine" on "slave labor camps," as Baptist describes them, Genovese portrays slaves as more capable of resisting bondage in small ways, even if their resistance ultimately fed into the ruling-class paternalistic ideology.

Following Genovese's analysis of black resistance through evangelicalism, Albert Raboteau made similar observations about the thriving place of religion in African American culture. Raboteau's goal in the first part of *Slave Religion*, published in 1978, was to show that African folk beliefs survived in black Christianity through practices like the ring shout, spirituals, baptism by immersion, and burial practices, but he also explores how enslaved African Americans created these religious practices in the "invisible institution" of the brush harbor.[81] Although many enslaved women and men attended institutional churches, most of which were biracial, they also held informal gatherings led by enslaved preachers in which they instilled a sense of "personal value" in the face of the dehumanizing aspects of their enslavement. Slaves could find hope in the brush harbor, yet following in the path of Genovese, their Christian hope could also be other-worldly, pushing them to remain subservient in the here-and-now.[82] Whether evangelicalism influenced slaves to become more docile or resilient, "it also fostered a more subtle relationship," Raboteau argued, "that of religious reciprocity."[83] At the heart of antebellum black evangelicalism was the idea that the master-slave relationship entwined both together in an oppressive but reciprocal relationship based on constant negotiation. Instead of a one-sided story of religious and cultural annihilation, as historians of capitalism and slavery

[81] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (1978, repr.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 212-288.
[82] Ibid., 318.
[83] Ibid., 148.

would describe, *Slave Religion*—with the influence of Genovese—portrays a syncretic process that created a unique biracial Christianity in the antebellum South.

Twenty years after Raboteau, Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood have followed up Raboteau's work with a shift towards black institutional churches while still emphasizing the centrality of racial reciprocity in the making of southern evangelicalism. In *Come Shouting to Zion*, Frey and Wood explicitly acknowledge that their framework "takes from Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and Mechal Sobel's *The World They Made Together* the lesson that black and white Southerners inhabited the same world and shared many of the same experiences."[84] For herself, Sobel had argued in *The World They Made Together* and *Trabelin' On* that enslaved people had carried many African traditions into their own distinct African-American Christianity, and ultimately they had been influential enough to transform white Americans as well.[85] With the influence of Genovese and Sobel clearly stated, Frey and Wood begin with a "starting premise" that religious change was a "reciprocal process" based on the "active agency" of enslaved African Americans.[86] Early revival culture allowed African Americans to create a unique Christianity, not only practiced in the brush harbors, but also in the surprisingly large number of independent black churches in the antebellum South. Following along the historiographical trends that characterized the 1980s and 1990s, Frey and Wood emphasize the central role of black women in carving out an autonomous space in evangelical churches.[87] Increasingly black as well as white women spoke out in biracial churches as exhorters to their congregations in what

[84] Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), xii.
[85] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
[86] Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, xii.
[87] Ibid., 126-127.

was part of the "continual negotiation" between evangelicals of different races and genders over how the Gospel would be expressed in the slave South.[88]

More recently, Charles Irons has continued the same emphasis on negotiation between slaveholders and the enslaved that characterize this historiography. In *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, he argues that paternalism was not necessarily a ruling-class ideology, as Genovese described it. Instead, since "whites and blacks interacted constantly within evangelical communities," he writes, black evangelicals "largely determined the timing and nature of decisions that white evangelicals made about race and slavery." With heavier emphasis on the reciprocal relations of paternalism as articulated by Frey and Wood, Raboteau, and Genovese, Irons provocatively claims that "an appreciation of black agency within evangelical communities is therefore critical to understanding the evolution of the proslavery argument."[89] Even in white southerners' fashioning of a proslavery Christianity, Irons argues that enslaved people had enough autonomy within their congregations to influence white evangelicals' opinions. Far from Baptist or Johnson's depiction of slaves terrorized by a "carceral landscape," enslaved people in Irons's view were active creators in an ongoing negotiation between white and black southerners.

In addition to amplifying the autonomy of enslaved people in the American South, Irons focuses on the second sub-theme mentioned previously, the emergence of proslavery Christianity. Irons is not necessarily new in mentioning when and how proslavery Christianity emerged in the American South, although his emphasis on black participation in proslavery Christianity is novel. Other historians had previously argued that evangelicals began as critical outsiders to the South's peculiar institution, but gradually evangelicals and slaveholders merged

[88] Ibid., 183.
[89] Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2.

to create a fierce Biblical defense of slavery. Irons softens this transition, arguing instead that evangelicals in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century were more apathetic about slavery, and even saw it as a good opportunity to spread the Gospel to enslaved African Americans. Still, well into the nineteenth century, he argues, white evangelicals attempted to sanctify slavery by softening it with paternalistic rhetoric and care for the souls of the enslaved.[90]

Irons's arguments about the emergence of proslavery Christianity are mostly in line with how other historians have approached the topic. Most importantly for other historians of southern evangelicalism is their agreement that the proslavery argument was a reflection of southern conservatism and orthodoxy compared to their northern counterparts. Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese were early proponents of this message. Southern evangelicals were upholding Christian orthodoxy, as understood in nineteenth-century Protestant terms, according to the Genoveses. By arguing for Biblical literalism and patriarchal social order, southern evangelicals were backwards-looking traditionalists in opposition to what they perceived as northern anarchic liberalism and infidelity.[91] Mark Noll has continued that argument, pointing out that according to the "reformed literal hermeneutic" of nineteenth-century American Protestantism, southern evangelicals could easily argue that the Bible did not condemn slavery per se, and instead it seemed to sanction human bondage openly in numerous passages. Anti-slavery evangelicals were left grasping after the "spirit" of the Bible, arguing that despite textual evidence in favor of slavery, slavery as it existed in America conflicted with the moral law to love one's neighbor.[92] Following Noll's argument a step further, Molly Oshtaz identifies

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[90] Ibid., 13.

[91] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, "The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders' World View," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (Summer 1987): 211-233.

[92] Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 376-385; Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 31-50. For a similar account of the evangelical debate over slavery, see Mitchell Snay,

northern Protestants' shift towards anti-slavery Christianity as the first move towards embracing a liberal Protestantism that imagined God gradually unfolding his revelation of justice and truth to the modern world. Theories of God's gradual revelation dovetailed with other contemporary arguments about evolution and Biblical criticism, placing northern Protestants at the forefront of a liberalizing Protestant America.[93]

Underneath the foundation of these arguments by Irons, the Genoveses, Noll, and Oshatz is the assumption that southern evangelicals were upholding traditional reformed ways of reading the Bible while northerners were the theological as well as social innovators. Southern evangelicalism, as they characterize it, was not progressive or forward-thinking; instead, it referred back to a more established Biblical hermeneutic that seems in retrospect bound to crumble before the forces of modernity. Instead of seeing white southerners become increasingly optimistic about the future of slavery by the 1840s and 1850s, as Johnson and Baptist do, these historians portray white southern evangelicals as being defensive reactionaries against the strengthening onslaught of abolitionism.

The second theme, on the relationship between evangelicalism and the patriarchal household and honor, also places the antebellum South in a seemingly separate time compared to the North. Historians of southern evangelicalism who have focused on this theme owe a great debt to Bertram Wyatt-Brown in his classic cultural history *Southern Honor*. For Wyatt-Brown, the South's distinctive culture drew on centuries-old concepts of honor based on a communal ethic. Like "all traditional societies," he claimed, the slaveholding South "provided little space for the individual," instead providing order to society through an "ancient ethic" based on

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Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

[93] Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

various rituals and customs that reinforced social hierarchy and white masculine independence.[94] By closely examining the daily routines and communal rituals of the rural South, Wyatt-Brown consciously separated the antebellum South from the more individualistic and market-driven North, a contrast that has affected subsequent scholars.

Drawing most clearly from Wyatt-Brown in the historiography of southern evangelicalism is Christine Heyrman in *Southern Cross*. Heyrman tells what has become a common narrative for the history of antebellum southern evangelicalism: early southern evangelicals opposed the patriarchal hierarchy and pervasiveness of slavery in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, but by the 1830s, they had become enmeshed in southern patriarchal culture. The patriarchal culture of the antebellum South, according to Heyrman, was very similar to the ways in which Wyatt-Brown described the South. She describes the South's slaveholders as a "gentry" class and "gentlefolk," as if the feudal manors of their imagination realistically characterized their society.[95] Her "familiar settings of sociability in rural counties" she names are reminiscent of Wyatt-Brown's vivid rural scenes, including "horse races and taverns, barbecues and balls."[96] Even evangelical ministers, in her words, became by the 1830s "men of honor, initiates into the mysteries of competition, combat, and mastery" by embracing the traditionally masculine social practices of hunting and light convivial drinking.[97] The South that Heyrman describes was a distinct region with a social structure inimical to capitalism, modernity, individualism, and financial innovations. Stable communities of men, both gentlefolk and plain-folk, policed the boundaries of acceptable social behavior through archaic concepts of

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[94] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (1982, repr.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), xxxii, 463.
[95] Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 24, 27.
[96] Ibid., 18.
[97] Ibid., 207.

male honor, while evangelicals gradually came to “speak in a southern accent” by adapting to those ancient norms.[98]

Although Wyatt-Brown’s concept of honor may seem somewhat outdated, some of the most recent historical work on southern evangelicalism has depended on understanding the antebellum South as a nearly pre-modern society detached from the market revolution in the American North. Charity Carney, in *Ministers and Masters*, follows Heyrman in tracing the relationship between the clergy and southern honor culture, particularly between Methodist ministers and the demands of white southern manhood. Carney argues that ministers embodied a cultural compromise in the antebellum South as “a powerful patriarch and a humble servant of God, a temporal master and a spiritual egalitarian.”[99] Even more recently, Robert Elder has analyzed the relationship between evangelicalism and honor culture as a convergence that occurred over time. While zealous evangelical converts did indeed challenge many of the traditional communal structures of authority, he argues, they created new institutions and ideas of individual identity that were infused with the rhetoric of honor. Elder acknowledges that evangelicals’ sense of individual identity was modern, but the creation of a modern evangelical

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[98] Ibid., 27. Heyrman also makes frequent reference to Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), which portrays the South as a series of hierarchical relationships based on race, gender, and the patriarchal household. Yeoman households mostly farmed for foodstuffs, with only surplus labor and land devoted to cotton or other cash crops. For other works on southern honor culture and masculinity cited by Heyrman, see Elliot J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review* 90 (February 1985): 18-43; Stephen M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Kenneth S. Greenberg, “The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South,” *American Historical Review* 95 (February 1990): 57-74.

[99] Charity R. Carney, *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 2.

self occurred alongside southern evangelicals' maintenance of "a vibrant strain of premodern communalism."[100]

By obsessing over premodern concepts of honor and the patriarchal household, historians of southern evangelicalism have not so much painted an inaccurate picture of the South as an incomplete one. Surely some southern evangelicals attempted to maintain an older order based on slavery and Biblical orthodoxy that they feared could pass away, but just as often, white southerners—and especially evangelicals—saw the near-future in millennial and progressive terms, in which their pro-slavery vision for society would be vindicated. To neglect the progressive outlook of proslavery evangelicalism is to misunderstand antebellum southern evangelicalism.

Similarly, histories of evangelicalism that emphasize the "agency" of enslaved people performed a timely service to scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, as Walter Johnson has argued, but the focus on agency and "negotiation" can neglect the ways in which the evangelical world for African Americans was defined by violence and repression of the "brush harbors."[101] Ignoring the ways in which evangelicalism facilitated the exploitation of enslaved African Americans on the altar of commercial prosperity leaves out much of southern religious history.

One major reason for the gap between these histories and how recent historians have depicted the South may be differences in regional focus within the South. Walter Johnson, Adam Rothman, and Joshua Rothman explicitly focused on the lower Mississippi Valley while Baptist generally emphasized the Southwest more than the older, more settled portions of the South on

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[100] Robert Elder, *The Sacred Mirror: Evangelicalism, Honor, and Identity in the Deep South, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 2.
[101] Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (Autumn 2003): 113-124.

the Atlantic seaboard. The Southwest and lower Mississippi Valley were the places that experienced the biggest economic booms and busts and greatest profits from cotton production. Historians of southern evangelicalism, on the other hand, have generally focused on the eastern seaboard. Irons does so explicitly, while others seem to have gravitated towards the larger archival source-base of the old Virginia and Carolina planters and their interactions with evangelicalism. Randy Sparks's history of evangelicalism in Mississippi is a welcome change from that regional focus, but even Sparks only mentions the "flush times" briefly as a temporary obstacle for evangelicals to overcome in order to Christianize the state in the 1830s. The rest of his narrative follows the familiar trend for southern evangelicalism—the racial negotiations between white and black evangelicals and the emergence of proslavery evangelicalism. A renewed focus on evangelicalism in the lower Mississippi Valley with a keen eye on the recent trends outlined by new historians of slavery and capitalism helps to distinguish between southern evangelicalism on the eastern seaboard and the commercial centers of the Southwest and lower Mississippi Valley.[102]

Despite the prevailing tendency of historians of evangelicalism to equate the South with traditionalism, one of the leading exceptions among scholars has been Beth Barton Schweiger. In her history of the evangelical clergy in nineteenth-century Virginia, Schweiger claims that the scholarly focus on proslavery Christianity and Confederate nationalism has obscured southern ministers' most common concerns of evangelization and the creation of a modern denominational infrastructure. Instead of obsessing over southern revivalist preaching, she points out that southern ministers usually "evangelized the nineteenth-century South through organization, printing presses, strategic planning, and settled institutions." Southern ministers did

[102] Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 76-86.

not always agree on these principles, as evidenced by the sectarian strife that pitted rural ministers against more powerful, urban ministers, but the church that emerged most powerfully and dominated Virginian culture had "a faith in progress" and believed in a God who "was an innovator." Despite their theological conservatism, Schweiger concludes, the southern evangelical clergy led the way in creating a professional clerical class and modern bureaucracies capable of pushing for progressive reforms by the end of the nineteenth century.[103]

Schweiger has been a prominent dissenter to the view that the South was traditional and backwards-looking, but her work resembles James Oakes's lone antagonism with Eugene Genovese. Her insights are helpful ways to understand how evangelicals created a modern South, but they do not address recent characterizations of the master-slave relationship, plantation efficiency, violence, and capitalism. In order to understand antebellum southern evangelicals in light of recent histories of slavery, it is imperative that historians combine the ways in which the religious and secular melded together, especially in the more commercially-driven regions of the antebellum lower Mississippi Valley. By doing so, we can weave back together the common threads among antebellum southerners between religious faith and secular economic faith, denominational efficiency and plantation efficiency, and proslavery Christianity and the violent coercion of the enslaved.

<u>Religion and Capitalism in American History</u>

Although historians of southern evangelicalism have often ignored connections between Christianity and the growing power of capitalism in the nineteenth century, historians of the American North have frequently featured these connections in some of the most celebrated

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[103] Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2-5.

works on religion and economics. Beginning in the early twentieth century, Max Weber began this mode of inquiry by connecting the growth of the Protestant calling with a modern, disenchanted capitalism. The attempts by Reformed Protestants to sacralize every aspect of life for the glory of God, Weber argued, ironically transformed their world into the bureaucratic and secular "cosmos of the modern economic order."[104] Historians of American religion, even if not in direct conversation with Weber's famous thesis, have addressed its central issues in a variety of ways. Many have emphasized the role that evangelicals played in extending the values of the marketplace throughout the country while also establishing the social reform impulse in modern American society. Although historians have disagreed about whether the reform impulse was primarily about social control over an unwieldy proletariat or middle-class self-discipline, they have agreed that evangelical Protestants helped foster and sanctify modern American capitalism. Furthermore, they have established that Americans' beliefs about God affected their political and social outlooks, particularly regarding the market revolution. This connection between the market and the sacred that has been developed so thoroughly in the American North offers fresh methods of inquiry for the analysis of evangelicalism, slavery, and capitalism in the nineteenth-century South.

Charles Sellers's *The Market Revolution*, ostensibly a political history of the Jacksonian era, actually advances one of the most vivid—if theologically confused—histories of the interaction between religion and capitalism in antebellum America. Most germane in *The Market Revolution* is Sellers's unorthodox and frequent use of the terms "arminian" and "antinomian" to describe a broad "clash of cosmologies" in the Jacksonian era. In Sellers's telling of early American history, the American countryside prior to the market revolution was filled with

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[104] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism with Other Writings on the Rise of the West*, 4th ed., trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 157.

"magical spirituality." Coastal entrepreneurs and innovating evangelicals formed a new ideology that emphasized individuals' innate free will. This alliance of businessmen and evangelicals "sanctioned competitive individualism and the market's rewards of wealth and status." In opposition to Sellers's arminians were the antinomians—farmers and workers in the "parochial and fatalist countryside." For antinomians, "the rural majority," Sellers posits, the idealized republic already existed; there was no need for government-promoted economic growth or public expenses. These projects, designed to profit the elite and well-connected, antinomians insisted, were offenses against the sovereignty of God and would threaten the patriarchal independence of backcountry yeoman farmers.[105]

Despite the fact that the terms "arminian" and "antinomian" as Sellers uses them bear little resemblance to their accepted theological meanings—something Daniel Walker Howe has pointed out—they help to draw connections between religion, politics, and capitalism for antebellum Americans.[106] Preachers like Lyman Beecher, Nathaniel Taylor, and Charles Grandison Finney were the influential arminians, as Sellers understands them, who attempted to perfect society through mass conversions and large, bureaucratic reform societies. They along with evangelical businessmen such as the Tappan brothers believed commercial progress and God's providence worked in tandem. They supported reform efforts like Sabbatarianism and temperance to sanctify capitalism, not oppose it. These reforms would also subdue the emerging laboring class who, by and large, were less enthusiastic about joining arminian efforts to reform society.[107] Gradually this "equation of Christian virtue with…capitalist asceticism" transformed

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[105] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 30-32.
[106] For Howe's critique of Sellers's use of these terms, see Daniel Walker Howe, "Charles Sellers, the Market Revolution, and the Shaping of Identity in Whig-Jacksonian America," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54-74.
[107] Sellers, *Market Revolution*, 202-236.

into a general culture of the secular, efficient "business man."[108] Antinomians in the workshop and the countryside, meanwhile, opposed these efforts at sanctifying the country through good works and commercial progress, and instead supported the rise of Andrew Jackson as the coming of their own "democratic Millennium."[109] As Sellers wraps theological terms into cosmological meanings, and then places those categories into the mayhem of antebellum American politics, he inevitably overgeneralizes about the connections between religious belief and political support. While problems of terminology and consistency are rampant in *The Market Revolution*, Sellers advances one of the most influential Weberian arguments for connecting zealous northern evangelicals with Christian asceticism, social reform, and the eventual emergence of a secular business culture.

Similar to Sellers, Paul Johnson and Robert Abzug have argued that evangelical religion in the antebellum North spurred on attempts to perfect society through social reform and to control the ill effects of an expanding commercial republic. Johnson's *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, published in 1978, well before *The Market Revolution*, nonetheless advances a similar argument, though on a much smaller scale in the town of Rochester, New York. With the opening of the Erie Canal, master craftsmen in Rochester transformed their work places into small factories that increasingly separated employers from wage laborers, as opposed to the previous relationship of masters and journeymen. As laborers and master craftsmen moved to separate private spaces, the emerging business and professional class embraced Finney's revival message and conscious turn away from sin. The social reform efforts they created were designed to accomplish two goals: first, sanctify society, and second, control an unruly proletariat by

[108] Ibid., 230. Sellers writes about the creation of the "business man," "originally a man conspicuously busy," who "became the archetype of a culture of busyness." See Sellers, *Market Revolution*, 237.
[109] Ibid., 301.

coercively eliminating alcohol, the circus, and the theater "because they wasted men's time" and distracted them from their use as efficient laborers. For Paul Johnson, reform was designed to control a changing capitalist society, particularly the working class.[110]

Abzug does not necessarily embrace Johnson's thesis of social control and instead emphasizes the ways in which middle-class reformers attempted to sacralize society through self-discipline and asceticism. In particular, northern reformers like Arthur and Lewis Tappan supported temperance societies and manual labor institutes in an effort to "sacraliz[e] all of their own business practices and the world in which they traded."[111] They hoped their reform efforts would make the commercial society from which they reaped hefty profits a holy society based on a sacred capitalist system. For antebellum evangelicals, Abzug argues, there was no division between God's heavenly order and the earthly social order. Although Abzug emphasizes a separate aspect of antebellum evangelical reform from Johnson, taken together, Johnson and Abzug place innovative northern evangelicals like Finney and the Tappans in the context of a sanctified capitalism that they hoped could advance God's kingdom on earth.

In more recent years, historians of American religion and capitalism have developed these arguments more fully to explore how the clergy reacted to and used capitalism. In his introduction to *God and Mammon*, Mark Noll asks why "there have been so few comprehensive efforts to explain connections between God and mammon in the United States' early history."[112] This collection of essays discusses the existing scholarship, particularly Sellers's thesis from *The Market Revolution*, while contributors such as David Paul Nord and Kathryn T. Long show how

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[110] Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 115.
[111] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 107.
[112] Mark A. Noll, "Introduction," in *God and Mammon*, 3.

nineteenth-century American Protestants created the modern corporate structure to help spread their religious message. Nord, in particular, points out the gradual shift of evangelical book publishers from donating Bibles and religious tracts free of charge to marketing and selling tracts to reach a wide audience. He claims evangelicals were often critical of the excesses of capitalism. But by the 1840s, Nord explains, the evangelical book publishing operatives had "made themselves practical businessmen, savvy marketeers, large-scale manufacturers, and grasping capitalists in order to save the country from the market revolution."[113]

Stewart Davenport similarly explores in *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon* how northern Christians navigated the emerging market capitalism of antebellum America. Their primary concerns with capitalism were to distinguish between principled and unprincipled economic activity and to locate God "in this new and powerful machine" of capitalism. The reactions ranged from religious endorsement of capitalism as providential, outright opposition to the system, and a middle-ground Davenport calls "pastoral moralism," a view that he summarized as theologically emphasizing individual love of neighbor and drawing clear boundaries for acceptable economic behavior within the gray area of commercial interactions.[114]

What these historians share is the common idea that the North was the center of American capitalism, while the South was either incidental or even hostile to capitalism. Davenport is clear about his assumption that southerners, "religious or not, critiqued the development of market capitalism" as outsiders to that system.[115] The contributors to *God and Mammon*, with the exception of Kenneth Startup, write about American religion and capitalism

[113] David Paul Nord, "Benevolent Capital: Financing Evangelical Book Publishing in Early Nineteenth-Century America," in *God and Mammon*, 165.
[114] Stewart Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon: Northern Christians and Market Capitalism, 1815-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 6, 10, 12.
[115] Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon*, 7.

with a singular focus on the North, without an acknowledgment that their story may be a regional one. Startup, however, gives a more complicated picture in his chapter on the southern clergy's views on capitalism. He begins by acknowledging that "a transformation" in the market began "touching every aspect of southern life" in the nineteenth century, and that "the South was fully engaged in a global economic community and…reaped great benefits…as a result of its full absorption into Western capitalism."[116] Yet the bulk of the chapter is devoted to how the southern clergy envisioned the capitalist free-labor North as the antithesis of a biblical society, especially in their rants against the conspiratorial aims of capitalist abolitionists. Startup, acknowledging the contradictions of the southern clergy, guesses that "it may well be that a *capitalist* Southern clergy wished to deflect its own sense of shame, not over slavery, but over its own absorption in the capitalist ethos."[117] But beyond vague recognitions that the South was connected to global capitalism, Startup does not engage with this line of inquiry any further.

While Davenport, Nord, and Startup have approached the relationship between American religion and capitalism with an emphasis on the religious side, Jonathan Levy and Stephen Mihm have examined American capitalism and found connections with faith and religion at the foundations of the capitalist system. Levy, in particular, explores the cultural transformation that coincided with the development of financial instruments created to alleviate and control risk. In eighteenth-century America, Levy argues, divine providence caused "acts of God," but gradually in the nineteenth century Americans began to place greater faith in the free will of individuals. In his definition of this new ideology that is strikingly similar to Sellers's description of the

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[116] Kenneth Startup, "'A Mere Calculation of Profits and Loss': The Southern Clergy and the Economic Culture of the Antebellum North," in *God and Mammon*, 218.
[117] Ibid., 228.

"arminian" vision, Levy says that in the "new gospel, free and equal men must take, run, own, assume, bear, carry, and manage personal risks."[118]

Stephen Mihm, while less explicit in his links between capitalism and religion than Levy, still emphasizes the faith that was necessary to maintain antebellum America's chaotic, decentralized monetary system. In the colonial era, British North Americans equated money with magic and alchemy, but even in the relatively disenchanted nineteenth century, Mihm repeatedly emphasizes the "mystical faith in the credit of the country" embodied in antebellum paper money.[119] Mihm argues that nineteenth-century capitalism forced Americans to place their faith in anonymous people and institutions while also attempting to root out the deceivers. For both Levy and Mihm, free will and faith were fundamental components to antebellum American capitalism, yet they argue that these cultural trends tied to the market revolution were mostly absent from the South due to the region's dependence on the institution of slavery.[120]

Although this overview of the literature on American religion and capitalism is not exhaustive, it provides the themes that guide this dissertation. In particular, these historians identify varying kinds of interplay between religious faith and economic and social outlook. Faith in God affected belief in markets and vice versa. If the South was integral to the development of American capitalism, albeit with slave labor in place of wage labor, then historians ought to ask the same kinds of questions that Sellers, Johnson, and Abzug have asked.

[118] Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4-5.
[119] Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24-29, 19.
[120] Levy argues that slavery was actually a hedge against risk in a capitalist economy, while Mihm asserts that the slaveholding South punished criminals like counterfeiters and rogues much more seriously because of fears of slave rebellion, so a chaotic counterfeit economy did not flourish in the South as it did in the North. See Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*, 62-63 and Mihm, *Nation of Counterfeiters*, 199.

Instead of resorting to the old arguments over how evangelical masters and slaves negotiated their relationship, and how evangelicals challenged a static patriarchal culture, the time is ripe to search for the ways in which southerners, both white and black, saw God in their capitalist society. To begin that story, I start where recent historians of slavery and capitalism have begun: with the westward expansion of missionaries, speculators, and settlers, and their complicated interactions with the native inhabitants of the lower Mississippi Valley.

CHAPTER TWO

CIVILIZING THE WILDERNESS: EVANGELICALS AND INDIAN REMOVAL

From the beginning of the nineteenth century through the Indian removal treaties of the 1830s, white evangelicals used various strategies to convert and "civilize" the lower Mississippi Valley's native inhabitants. The earliest white American settlers to the region were often lone evangelical missionaries attempting to expand Christianity across the frontier, but institutions like Presbyterian synods and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions played a much larger role in enacting plans for white Christian westward expansion. These institutions' versions of evangelization adhered to a Jeffersonian path to yeoman independence, attempting to "civilize" the Choctaws and Chickasaws of the region through education and agriculture. By the 1820s, however, their vision seemed increasingly outdated to both native leaders and white settlers. Wealthy Choctaw and Chickasaw elites did not want white missionaries teaching their sons and daughters how to be republican, yeoman farmers but instead how to become successful southern planters and slaveholders.

The failure of the Presbyterian missionaries and their schools was followed by Methodist circuit riders in the 1820s who displayed a second strategy of Christian expansion—that of evangelical conversion alone with little attempt at education. The shift to the second method and its more immediate acceptance by large factions of Choctaws coincided with increased white southern settlement in the Southwest and the pervasive belief that the removal of Native Americans in the South was necessary for Indians' survival. To these settlers as well as

missionaries on the frontier, native converts to Christianity seemed like the perfect intermediaries to ease the removal process.

Both conversion and Indian removal worked hand-in-hand for the missionaries' goal of expanding God's kingdom. In the case of the Choctaws, this removal was in fact negotiated through a Methodist minister, Alexander Talley, who acted as a go-between with Choctaw chiefs and federal agents. By the early 1830s, when Choctaw and Chickasaw removal west of the Mississippi River was mostly complete, white settlers were able to go about the business of buying land and slaves, planting cotton, and building churches.

Frontier Evangelicals and Missionaries

Retrospective accounts of early American evangelicals and missionaries to the lower Mississippi Valley emphasized their austere isolation and asceticism in the midst of an unknown wilderness. According to these accounts, a brave group of families from South Carolina embarked on a treacherous journey in 1791 down the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers to establish a lonely settlement in Spanish territory at the mouth of Cole's Creek twenty miles north of Natchez. Despite the religious restrictions in Spanish territory against public Protestant displays, many of those early settlers established a Baptist church at "Sister Stampley's home" led by Richard Curtis Jr. as pastor. Later missionaries in the early nineteenth century like the Presbyterians James Hall, James Bowman, and William Montgomery in 1800, rode horseback and heavily armed through Chickasaw and Choctaw country to Natchez. The Presbyterian minister Joseph Bullen was the first to establish an evangelical presence among the Chickasaws in 1799, but his inability to speak Chickasaw or obtain a translator confined his brief work to the Chickasaws' enslaved African Americans and the occasional English-speaking trader travelling

between Natchez and Tennessee. Methodists probably had the greatest number of lone missionaries attempting to convert the region, from Tobias Gibson who first travelled in 1799 to Mississippi down the Cumberland and Mississippi Rivers via canoe to Newit Vick and the wild-eyed revivalist Lorenzo Dow. For those who memorialized these ministers and missionaries in later accounts, they were courageous frontiersmen, generally disconnected from the mercantile world of planting and profit.[1]

But these men were not alone in their journeys, nor were they disconnected from the merchants and planters of their day. The evangelicals who participated in the early years of western settlement in the lower Mississippi Valley were not the evangelicals made famous by historians who opposed slavery and class hierarchy in the South. Rather, in Mississippi and Louisiana, some of the first evangelical missionaries and ministers became the leading slaveholding planters and businessmen. The first Baptists travelled in extensive family groups and later established sizeable plantations along what became some of the most profitable land in the country. The early Methodists, in particular, actively sought ways to profit from their settlements and evangelization efforts. Although Tobias Gibson seemed like the rough, Bible-carrying, frontiersman that later Methodists liked to imagine, he also had wealthy family members already residing in the lower Mississippi Valley before his arrival. When Gibson reached the Natchez country, his "intelligent, wealthy, and influential family connection" Samuel Gibson, namesake of the town of Port Gibson, had already established himself along with other

[1] Richard Aubrey McLemore, *A History of Mississippi Baptists, 1780-1970* (Jackson: Mississippi Baptists Convention Board, 1971), 7-18; E.T. Thompson, *Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States* (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1934), 71, 140-141; John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, Tennessee: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 1:24-28, 81-82, 128-129. For similar themes of frontier revivalism outside of the lower Mississippi Valley, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972); Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

branches of the Gibson family in the vicinity of the original territorial capital of Washington. Samuel Gibson, Stephen Gibson, and Tobias's cousin Reverend Randall Gibson, were among the early patrons of the first Methodist church in the territory, along with the Griffing and Swayze families.[2]

Gibson's fellow Methodist, Rev. Newit Vick, settled in Mississippi Territory as a preacher, but his underlying motivation to migrate was his aspiration to become a successful businessman and slaveholder. Another early Methodist frontiersman, William Winans, described Vick in his early years of Mississippi settlement as "pretty highly spiced with aristocratic feeling."[3] Newit and his wife Elizabeth sold and bought hundreds of acres of land in rapid succession beginning in 1799 in Virginia and North Carolina. Upon hearing reports in 1805 from his brothers of abundant fertile land in the West, the Vick family travelled by keel boat to Cole's Creek where the first Baptist families had arrived, and after a year searching for the most valuable nearby land, he bought about 385 acres in what became his Spring Hill plantation northeast of Washington, while simultaneously accumulating enslaved African Americans to labor on his newly-bought land. A year later Vick spent $4,000 on one thousand arpents—or about 846 acres—of land to the west of his existing plantation. By this time, Vick had already been a licensed Methodist minister for sixteen years, and he quickly assembled a substantial local following of other white settlers to hear his weekly preaching.[4]

In 1814, he and his nephew Foster Cook made a gamble that the northern sparsely-populated land in Warren County would someday become more valuable. According to the

[2] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 1:28-29.
[3] William Winans, "The Autobiography of William Winans," ed. Ray Holder, MA Thesis, University of Mississippi, 1936, 130.
[4] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 1:28-29; James Morris Perrin, *Reverend Newit Vick: Founder of Vicksburg, Mississippi, His Ancestry, Relatives, and Descendants* (Hammond, LA: J.M. Perrin, 1990), 11.

Methodist minister and later historian John Griffing Jones—of both the early Baptist Jones family and the early Methodist Griffing family—Vick was confident that "at no distant day the Indian title to the fertile lands" to the north and east of Warren County "would be extinguished by an honorable purchase, and become densely settled with a white population whose staple productions would seek a market through the Mississippi River."[5] So Vick bought three sections of 640 acres each in "Open Woods" stretching from the Mississippi River to the east. His large enslaved work force of sixty-eight slaves cleared and cultivated the land while he preached weekly at a small log church near his plantation. In 1819 he began surveying and selling town lots along the river in what would become the prosperous river port of Vicksburg in 1825. Unfortunately for Vick, he died of yellow fever later in 1819, but his many descendants became the heirs to Vick's property at precisely the right time as his predictions of Indian removal and commercial success came true.[6] Vick, Gibson, and the founders of the earliest towns and settlements genuinely believed they were doing the hard work of expanding God's kingdom by evangelizing and creating new churches, but along the way, they laid the foundations of Mississippi's commercially-oriented, slaveholding planter class.

Prospective planters like Vick could profit from the small Natchez country in southwestern Mississippi, but they knew that the primary obstacle to their own commercial success was the continuation of Native American sovereignty in the region. While they agreed that Indian sovereignty was an obstacle, they disagreed on whether Indians needed to be removed from the territory or whether they could be transformed into their own Euro-American image and brought into the United States as republican citizens. The official government policy was the latter—Secretary of War Henry Knox's plan to "civilize" Native Americans through

[5] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 1:348.
[6] Perrin, *Reverend Newit Vick,* 12.

education, agriculture, and Christianity. But the alliance of the Red Stick Creeks and the pan-Indian resistance movement of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa during the War of 1812 re-opened debate about the trustworthiness of Native Americans and the potential for their "civilization." During this time, the federal government led by General Andrew Jackson began negotiating increasingly hefty land cessions from southwestern Indians, first with the Creeks in the wake of the Red Stick defeat in 1814, and then major land cessions from the Chickasaws in 1816. In the fall of 1820, Jackson hammered out the Treaty of Doak's Stand with the Choctaws, obtaining five million acres of Choctaw land in central and western Mississippi in exchange for thirteen million acres west of the Mississippi River in addition to $6,000 in annuity payments from the Department of War to the Choctaws. In the wake of a potential armed pan-Indian threat and the prospects for cheap land for cultivation, white Americans' opinions shifted in the 1810s towards Indian removal as the most expedient measure for obtaining more land for cultivation.[7]

Presbyterian and ABCFM Missions: The Civilization Plan

Just as public opinion was turning on the subject of Indian removal, the proponents of Knox's old Civilization Plan gained new life. In 1819, Congress passed the Civilization Fund Bill which appropriated the necessary funds for benevolent societies to set up schools among natives. Ten thousand dollars per year were to be offered to schools for Indians operated by white Americans.

Just one year before, the Presbyterian-affiliated American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had sent three missionaries led by Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury from a

[7] Christina Snyder, *Great Crossings: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in the Age of Jackson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 10; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 168; Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2:193.

Cherokee mission in Georgia to set up a mission school among the Choctaws. Working with the Choctaw agent, Colonel John McKee, Kingsbury settled on a location along the Yalobusha River and named this new station Elliot, in honor of the seventeenth-century New England missionary to the Algonquians. Choctaw leaders initially welcomed Kingsbury's mission school, and the ABCFM and the Presbyterian denomination as a whole began taking advantage of the new civilization bill funds offered by the federal government in addition to the appropriations that tribal leaders offered for schools. One year after the bill's passage, the ABCFM organized an additional school on Oktibbeha Creek in what became the Mayhew school, operated by Kingsbury, allowing the new Andover-educated Rev. Cyrus Byington to take over Elliot. The same year, the South Carolina Presbytery sent a young minister Thomas Stuart to begin a mission school among the Chickasaws in northern Mississippi called Monroe. With the Chickasaws as well, the demand for mission schools from tribal leaders was great enough to warrant the erection of three additional schools in different areas of Chickasaw territory, staffed by teachers, blacksmiths, and ministers. By 1828, forty missionaries were working among the Choctaws at the various schools, with Choctaws investing thousands of dollars of their own annuity payments into the schools, while the Chickasaws did the same.[8]

The ABCFM and Presbyterian mission schools among the Choctaws and Chickasaws represented the Jeffersonian dream of civilizing the wilderness and, as white Americans understood it, civilizing the Native Americans as well. Beyond religious and basic grammatical education, the schools taught agricultural methods; boys learned how to sow and cultivate crops

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[8] Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 10; Thompson, *Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States*, 144, 15-16, 71-75; Clara Sue Kidwell, "Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi before 1830," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O'Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 203-207; James R. Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People: The Chickasaw Indians to Removal* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 218-220.

and how to tend livestock, while girls learned domestic skills. The schools also taught artisanal crafts to boys. At Charity Hall, a Cumberland Presbyterian Association school among the Chickasaws, between fifteen and thirty students participated in the basic operations of the school by learning at a blacksmith shop, a saddler's shop, and a tanyard. Literacy was also a prime goal at the mission schools. Missionaries struggled to learn the native languages, but often they were able to obtain a translator to begin the work of teaching how to read and write English. Already by the end of 1821, the Elliot mission boasted that of the seventy-four students enrolled over the previous year, fifty of whom arrived unable to speak English, "several can now speak our language fluently" and twenty-eight "could read with facility in the New Testament."[9] Literacy could open the door for further education in geography or arithmetic, and Presbyterian ministers saw literacy as a natural prerequisite to creating new Christians by teaching them how to read the Bible.

Although missionaries did not see conversion to Christianity and church membership as secondary in this scheme, the ordering of their priorities—education and agriculture alongside Christianity—essentially made the hopeful addition of new native Christians just one part of a broader cultural conversion. As the Elliot missionaries explained in 1823, the "two prominent objects" of the school "are the improvement of their pupils by means of useful knowledge, and the formation of habits of industry." Both of these goals, they claimed, were "subsidiary to the introduction of Christianity, and its ultimate prevalence," but the emphasis on knowledge and industry still remained the most important and time-consuming for teachers and students.[10] For

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[9] *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; Compiled from Documents Laid before the Board at the Twelfth Annual Meeting, Which Was Held at Springfield, Mass. Sept. 19, & 20, 1821* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1821), 62.
[10] *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions…at the Fourteenth Annual Meeting* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1823), 79.

the proponents of this plan, the civilization of Indians in the lower Mississippi Valley—their assimilation into white American culture—would allow for the peaceful expansion of the United States to the Mississippi River. Instead of displacing thousands of Native Americans, these missionaries and their supporters in the ABCFM and the federal government believed that they could simply transform young native boys into independent yeoman republicans and native girls into republican wives and mothers. While this was not a vision that necessarily excluded commerce or slavery from the lower Mississippi Valley—despite some New England ministers' misgivings about the Indians' use of enslaved labor—neither did it emphasize commerce or envision a cotton kingdom in the Indians' future. Instead missionaries dreamed of advancing the republic by making white yeoman citizens out of formerly "uncivilized" Indians.[11]

In the early years of the Presbyterian and ABCFM missions, Choctaw and Chickasaw leaders were eager for the introduction of schools. Formerly, Choctaw and Chickasaw boys entered manhood through valor in war. As the political circumstances of Choctaws and Chickasaws changed, so did their conceptions of manhood. By the 1820s, young native men saw education and prominence as a planter or merchant as the new path to responsible manhood. Already some of the wealthiest Choctaws and Chickasaws were acquiring African-American slaves, adopting the Euro-American concept of hereditary race-based slavery, and producing surplus cotton, corn, beef, and pork to sell for profit, especially along the Natchez Trace. These new commercial leaders acquired their education in English literacy not by missionaries but by businessmen. For instance, the young Chickasaw James Colbert was sent by his father in 1783 to

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[11] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 218; Amanda L. Paige, Fuller L. Bumpers, and Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., *Chickasaw Removal* (Ada, OK: Chickasaw Press, 2010), 8; Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 47, 57-58, 62; Thompson, *Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States*, 144; Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 11, 28-30.

learn and work in Pensacola with the mercantile firm of Panton, Leslie, and Company. Additionally, these leaders were often the sons of native mothers and Euro-American fathers. Since Choctaw and Chickasaw society was matrilineal, the children of these marriages followed the family line of their mothers. The prominence of their mothers' families combined with the wealth and social connections of their fathers opened up opportunities for education and business.[12]

For this new generation of native leaders emerging in the 1810s and 1820s, the prospects of gaining authority within their respective nations and remaining in their homelands east of the Mississippi River depended on education in English letters and on commercial prominence. Missionaries were pleased to see that Chickasaw and Choctaw leaders embraced their schools so quickly, but they were often disappointed in the lack of interest in Christianity. Cyrus Kingsbury wrote that "the expectation of [the Choctaws] has been that all our efforts would be directed toward the commencement of a school," not the creation of churches.[13] Although the students were taught the rudiments of Christianity in school, after nearly ten years of education at the Elliot mission, only four students joined the Presbyterian Church, and "only a handful ever attended the services."[14]

Despite their auspicious beginnings, mission schools became sites of conflict between native leaders and missionaries. One disagreement was over the place of labor. In the process of teaching Indian students "useful knowledge" and "habits of industry," missionaries had male students perform the bulk of the agricultural labor on mission plantations. In 1821, the Elliot mission led by Cyrus Byington reported to the Department of War that the station had sixty acres

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[12] Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 26; Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 17-27, 30-31; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 216.
[13] Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 28.
[14] Thompson, *Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States*, 144.

of improvements cleared that year, and that nearly all of those acres were cultivated by the students. "The children are docile, obedient, and ready to perform any kind of labor," Byington reported. "Every morning, by sun-rise…you might see a company of boys going to the cornfield with their hoes, and another to the woods with their axes."[15] Kingsbury's report to Secretary of War John C. Calhoun in early 1822 echoed Byington's, stating that "besides planting and hoeing, and laboring in various other employments, [the male students] cleared several acres of land." He continued, "It is believed that ten to fifteen acres, may in this way annually be added to the plantation." Without this kind of "civilized and christian education," Kingsbury believed, "the wretchedness of this people" would become apparent through "the avarice of unprincipled white people, and from the influence of their own ungoverned appetites and passions."[16]

But this kind of labor, especially for boys and men, was regarded by Choctaws and Chickasaws as feminine and degrading. Traditionally agriculture was a female labor among these tribes, while men customarily engaged in hunting and war. But with the more recent addition of a permanent enslaved labor force made up of African Americans, those gender roles were gradually shifting. Native leaders who were becoming successful slaveholding planters shuddered at the idea of having their sons work in the fields at mission schools as if they were slaves. Choctaw and Chickasaw leaders did not want to train their sons and daughters to be farmers but to be commercially-savvy planters. Kingsbury reported in the early 1820s that Choctaw leader Robert Cole had complained along with other Choctaws that the students spent far too much time laboring in fields or in domestic work and not enough learning in the schools. According to Kingsbury, Cole's impression was "that the children were allowed only two hours

[15] *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions…at the Fourteenth Annual Meeting*, 65, 63.
[16] Jedidiah Morse, ed., *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1822), 189, 196.

in a day for study, and that the balance of the day they were driven in the field in the same manner that negroes were on the plantations in the Southern states."[17] Rev. Thomas Stuart, leader of the Monroe mission in Chickasaw country, encountered a similar problem. Years after the demise of the mission, Stuart recalled that he and other missionaries believed that agriculture and the domestic arts were necessary as part of the civilization process, and the War Department required such training for missions to receive federal funds. But Chickasaws objected to this education program, "saying that if they wanted their children to work, they could teach them themselves."[18]

At the crux of the misunderstanding between missionaries and Indians about labor is a profound irony: Choctaw and Chickasaw leaders were more progressive and forward-thinking than their supposed educators. To them, the future did not lie with industrious, independent yeoman farmers but with slaveholding, business-minded cotton planters. The skills and ideals of these missionaries seemed old-fashioned in a world in which cotton production was becoming increasingly profitable, and a native man's standing in the tribe was based on his wealth measured in slaves. The missionaries' attempts to civilize Indians by teaching artisanal skills may have seemed harmless enough, but forcing them to work in the fields was too far for a future slaveholder. In addition to forced labor, missionaries whipped students for misbehaving, a physical discipline that would have been common at any school. But Choctaw and Chickasaw leaders saw the labor and punishment as too close to how they treated their own slaves. In a reversal of popular perceptions of the Indian-missionary relationship, native elites began

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[17] James Taylor Carson, "Greenwood Leflore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History*, 189; Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 38.
[18] E.T. Winston, *"Father" Stuart and the Monroe Mission* (Meridian, Miss.: Tell Farmer, 1927), 19.

rejecting the mission schools because they were too old-fashioned and not reflective of the modern, commercially-driven world that the lower Mississippi Valley was becoming.

In addition to the primary disagreement over labor, native leaders and missionaries grew increasingly at odds with each other over the use of tribal money for the schools as well as the behavior of teachers. Combined with their disputes over labor, these disagreements created significant tribal opposition to the ABCFM schools by the late 1820s. Choctaw and Chickasaw leaders saw these schools as a significant investment, paid for by their own wealth. Although Congress and the ABCFM contributed some of the money to fund the schools, the vast majority came from annuity payments from previous land cession treaties. When the Choctaws ceded half of their tribal territory in 1820 at the Treaty of Doak's Stand, the payment for the Choctaw land came in the form of additional land west of the Mississippi River as well as $6,000 per year in annuity payments. In 1825 Choctaw leaders renegotiated the 1820 treaty by selling off the western land for $96,000, which secured payments for Choctaw veterans of the War of 1812, and granted them a lump sum of $216,000 in addition to the regular $6,000 per year in funds that would be used for mission schools. The Chickasaws also invested a great deal of capital in these schools, spending $2,500 per year on each of their schools in addition to paying $5,000 per school for construction costs, all of which came from annuity payments for land cessions. When tribal leaders visited school grounds, they saw new buildings, large fields of grazing livestock, cultivated fields of cotton and corn, and stores full of clothing and crops that the children had produced. The profits from all of this business went to fund the schools, but tribal leaders saw their total capital investment of $70,000 being stolen from them, their children working for free, and the profits going to pay the salaries of ministers and teachers. Such a situation caused a

growing sentiment among Indians that the missions were swindling tribes of their money and land.[19]

The resentment against missions reached a peak in the summer of 1828 when Choctaws found out that a young student, Susannah Lyles, had become pregnant after a teacher, Stephen Macomber, repeatedly raped her. Lyles explained what happened and then said that another teacher, Adin Gibbs, had sexually assaulted her. When Kingsbury met with Lyles and angry Choctaw leaders, she said that Macomber, whose wife was also a missionary and teacher at the Mayhew station, "said he wanted I should forgive him…and he prayed God to forgive him."[20] Kingsbury immediately dismissed Macomber, but the scandal ruined the reputation of the ABCFM schools, and many Choctaw leaders began to support the idea of sending their children to a more elite boarding school in Kentucky called Choctaw Academy instead of the ABCFM schools.

In Great Crossings, Kentucky, on the property of Senator Richard Johnson, who was generously paid six thousand dollars in Choctaw annuity funds, male students continued their education at Choctaw Academy to reflect more closely what native leaders had envisioned when they desired an education for their children. Boys at the school spent less time working and more time learning, eventually stunning curious audiences with their show of eloquent speeches in English and their knowledge of Italian bookkeeping—an unusual subject for the time but one that Choctaws thought prepared them well for a future as prominent businessmen, merchants, and planters. Although the dream of "civilizing" the Choctaws and Chickasaws of the lower Mississippi Valley continued into the 1830s at Choctaw Academy—a school that soon opened to

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[19] Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 36, 30; Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 219; Winston, *"Father" Stuart and the Monroe Mission*, 71.
[20] Snyder, *Great Crosssings*, 72; Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 119-120.

more tribes than just the Choctaws—the momentum that the ABCFM schools had acquired was lost, and white Americans had lost faith that Indians could so drastically transform into independent, white citizens.[21]

The Growth of Cotton and Evangelicalism in the Lower Mississippi Valley

As the success of the mission schools looked more doubtful, an influx of white settlers in the 1810s and 1820s added to the pressure of the mission schools and contributed to the end of native sovereignty in the lower Mississippi Valley. The 1810 census counted about 40,000 people—excluding Native Americans—in all of the Mississippi Territory, and over half of that total resided in the five counties that bordered the Mississippi River. After the War of 1812, Americans flooded to southern Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. By 1820 the combined population of Mississippi and Alabama increased to 203,349, with the vast majority of the increase coming in newly-opened areas of Alabama and southeastern Mississippi.

With cotton prices hovering close to thirty cents per pound in the late 1810s, these new settlers had cotton cultivation in mind when they migrated. The cotton produced in Mississippi and Louisiana increased tenfold in a decade from a negligible two million pounds in 1810 to a combined total of twenty million pounds of cotton in 1820, split evenly between the two states. In just the three years between 1819 and 1822, total cotton exports from New Orleans increased 225% from 48,000 bales to 156,000 bales. Although the vast majority of this cotton was produced in the area around Natchez, farmers, planters, and merchants were primed to grab new

[21] *Index to Executive Documents, Printed by Order of the Senate of the United States, Second Session, Thirty-Third Congress, 1854-55* (Washington: Beverley Tucker, Senate Printer, 1855), 18-27; Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 1-17, 86. For an example of a prominent minister who advocated "colonizing" Indians for their conversion, see Isaac McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian Missions* (Washington: William M. Morrison, 1840), 217-218.

lands from the Choctaws and Chickasaws in central and northern Mississippi to maintain the cotton boom that had already begun.[22]

Absent from the extent records of total cotton bales produced and sold are the number that came from Choctaw and Chickasaw planters. Although the majority of the native populations did not own slaves, enslaved people made up a significant portion of both the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations. Out of a total of about 24,000 people counted in the 1831 census in the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations within the borders of Mississippi, there were about 1,700 enslaved African Americans. The percentage of slaves in the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations was small compared to the nearby white populations, but native elites' interest in teaching their children the values of slaveholding, business practices such as Italian bookkeeping, and literacy demonstrates that they were just as interested in profiting from the market revolution as were their eager white neighbors.[23]

As the total population of the region increased and cotton production took off, so did the number of evangelicals along with evangelical churches and ministers. Small Baptist congregations sprung up in every new settlement, dotting the southern Mississippi landscape with forty-one active churches by 1819. Methodists were a bit slower at establishing full-scale churches, but in 1820 they had seven ministers on circuits in southern Mississippi, five of whom preached in Adams, Wilkinson, and Amite counties in the southwestern corner of the state. But those seven did not count the number of local Methodist ministers—local ministers being those who had "located" to a particular area and did not receive a salary but often preached at a church

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[22] *Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons Within the United States of America, and the Territories Thereof, Agreeably to Actual Enumeration Made According to Law, in the Year 1810* (Washington, 1811), 1:1; *Census for 1820* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1821), 18, 119-122; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 2:1027, 898, 684; *Writings of Levi Woodbury, LL.D., Political, Judicial, and Literary* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1852), 3:260.
[23] Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 127; Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 39.

while making a living some other way. The lower number of Methodist ministers compared to Baptist churches is deceptive, however, when the total number of Methodist members in 1820 of 2,631 is compared with an estimated Baptist membership statewide of over 1,500.[24]

These membership numbers may seem small compared to the overall population, but total evangelical church membership in the early nineteenth century was slim compared to the overall cultural impact on people who attended services at a variety of churches or listened with great earnestness to entertaining travelling circuit riders. Evangelical ministers often noted that the people who attended services regularly but were not members outnumbered regular members by three or four times.[25] Although evangelical churches were still relative upstarts on the American religious scene, white Americans throughout the country saw Protestant churches as the main institutions of frontier civilization that marched hand-in-hand with an orderly republican society. Americans saw the values of civilization, commerce, and Christianity as three interdependent parts of the overall transformation of the West from what they deemed to be uncivilized wilderness into a purified republican haven.[26]

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[24] McLemore, *A History of Mississippi Baptists*, 68-71, 74; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1773-1828* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 1:348, 346.

[25] On church membership, many historians have noted that many more people attended services than the number of members suggested since church membership in antebellum American required conversion and strict discipline. Gregory A. Wills notes that Baptist churches often had more "hearers" who attended service than members, while one early Baptist minister claimed that the number of people who attended meetings but were not members or were excommunicated was three times the number of members. C.C. Goen argues, "Nearly every minister preached regularly to congregations three to four times the size of church membership." See Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14-15; C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 55; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 159-160. As one example at Monroe Mission in the Chickasaw Nation, Rev. Thomas Stuart recalled that there were only about one hundred church members, but about two hundred came regularly for church services. See Winston, *"Father" Stuart and the Monroe Mission*, 72-73.

[26] For Protestant churches as the primary institutions of American frontier, see Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*. For the ties between Christianity, republicanism, and civilization in America, the best work is Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Jonathan Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

But before white settlers could clear lands and cultivate cotton in the lower Mississippi Valley with an enslaved labor force, they depended on missionaries to be the vanguard force into the region. Presbyterian missionaries in particular had established their ground in the state as leaders of this expanding civilization, using federal funds for the cultivation of the wilderness from woodlands to productive fields. In this conceptual scheme, white Americans included Native Americans in the "wilderness."[27] Presbyterian missionaries attempted to convert Native Americans while also civilizing a wilderness into commercially-productive farmland. In short, they hoped to create what they imagined to be responsible white citizens out of southwestern Indians.

The Methodists and Indian Removal Treaties

But by the mid-1820s, many white Americans, especially in the South, had lost faith in that kind of mission. Instead, the methods of evangelization used by Baptists and Methodists began to seem more compatible with white southwestern society. Rather than attempt the laborious and time-consuming experiment of "civilizing" and educating Native Americans, they simply proclaimed the Gospel and attempted to create converts through emotional, sometimes ecstatic preaching. Implicit in this arrangement was the idea that Native Americans were not to be created into American citizens. Their souls were to be saved, but eventually they would have to make way for the progress and expansion of American civilization with its particular southern symbols of cotton fields and churches. On the eve of the 1830s with a friendly presidential

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[27] For histories of Euro-American concepts of wilderness and Native Americans, see especially James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973); William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

administration in office, the success that Methodists in particular had with converting Mississippi's native population would ultimately facilitate the removal of the southwestern tribes and make way for a much grander expansion of cotton production across the Deep South.[28]

The Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Church had botched an attempt at evangelizing the Choctaws once before in 1823, but at the 1827 annual conference, the state's Methodist leadership sent out an experienced old minister to be the lone preacher at the revived Choctaw mission. Rev. Alexander Talley, the man chosen for the position, was a widower with no children and "had no domestic ties nor secular business to prevent his entire devotion to his new field of labor." Talley, who had spent much of his ministerial career in the Southwest, was a physician and "a highly cultivated man," according to Rev. John G. Jones, so Jones recalled that it was "a sublime spectacle" to watch the aging doctor, "with what personal and camp equipments one horse could carry, plunge into the almost unbroken forests of the Choctaw Nation." Talley's resemblance to the lone missionaries who had originally ventured into the area was striking to observers, many of whom still were circuit riders but had become more accustomed to safer and smaller circuits. In contrast to the ABCFM missionaries who emphasized "the enlightenment and cultivation of their intellectual faculties," Talley "believed that the gospel…was adapted to save the most illiterate and fallen of our race," and thus he thought it was a waste of time to establish schools for a small group of Choctaw children. Avoiding the eastern and northern areas of the Choctaw Nation where the ABCFM had established missions, Talley explored the headwaters of the Big Black and Pearl Rivers,

[28] Sam Haselby describes the transition from missions to Indian removal as a seminal moment of bringing together two strands of American religious nationalism. Andrew Jackson employed nationalistic rhetoric to exclude Indians, Haselby argues, and make way for frontier yeoman farmers. See Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 282-315,

preaching initially to just “the whites, half-bloods, and others who could understand some English.”[29]

But despite Talley’s obvious language barrier, he achieved unprecedented evangelistic success among the Choctaws, reportedly converting over three thousand people in less than two years. Although “not as elegant and eloquent as some others in the pulpit,” according to a later Methodist historian, Talley gained a reputation as a charismatic spiritual leader among the Choctaws, preaching through translators to large audiences.[30] After a few months of his trip northeast into Choctaw country, Talley acquainted himself with a rising Choctaw leader in the western district, Greenwood Leflore. Leflore welcomed Talley into his home and soon became an influential translator and promoter of Talley’s. Jones wrote in later years that Talley would preach in discreet paragraphs on a cardinal doctrine of Methodism, and after finishing each paragraph, “Colonel Leflore would take that for his text and literally preach a short expository sermon on it.”[31] After one successful camp meeting in August, 1828, many of Leflore’s family members came to his home, where Talley stayed most of the time, wanting to hear more and to converse with those in the Leflore family who had converted. When prayer commenced yet again, Talley wrote that he “address’d the congregation through Col. Laflore, and then invited the mothers forward, and to our great joy the three Captains humbled themselves in the dust before the Lord together with several other persons.” “From the first prayer,” Talley reported, Leflore’s mother “was so overwhelmed with the Divine power as to be incapable of leaving her seat,” and “we continued in prayer and singing about an hour.”[32]

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[29] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 2:165-168.
[30] Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville, TN: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 250.
[31] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 2:175.
[32] Alexander Talley to William Winans, August 27, 1828, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps-Wilson Library, Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter Cain Archives).

On another occasion, a "full-blood woman…fell under the power of the Spirit" and remained motionless, "apparently dead," as many fellow listeners feared. After an hour of prayer around her, she revived, "happy, a young convert." Jones, in his retrospective history of Methodism in Mississippi, recalled the excitement in Choctaw country when he visited a camp meeting that first year. The Choctaws had formed a vast circle, and Jones and his fellow Methodist ministers "pressed in toward the center, where we found Dr. Talley running round, rubbing his hands together, exhorting one then another, interspersed with loud shouts of holy triumph, 'O Brother Jones,' said he as he clasped us, 'God has given us the victory!'"[33]

If Talley and Jones's reports about what happened in the Choctaw Nation are to be believed, then the contrast between the Methodist and Presbyterian results at evangelization are astounding. Some of those differences can be explained through their distinct understandings of conversion, with Methodists more open to immediate emotional conversion experiences while Presbyterians were generally skeptical of emotionalism and demanded a long-term testimony and witness.[34] The year before, for instance, the ABCFM missionary Cyrus Byington had begun a revival with the Choctaws at Mayhew, and he visited Thomas Stuart's Monroe mission school for the Chickasaws later that year. Stuart wrote that "it was evident the Spirit of God moved upon the hearts of the people," but "so far from adopting any measures calculated to produce excitement, we were careful to keep it down," preferring "instructions in the first principles of religion" before actual conversion.[35]

But a contrast of styles still does not account for the radical success of Talley and other Methodist preachers among the Choctaws in the late 1820s. Rather, the public excitement and

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[33] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 2:177-178.
[34] Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi,* 123.
[35] Winston, *"Father" Stuart and the Monroe Mission*, 73.

apparent spiritual power of Methodists attracted Choctaws wary of their position vis-à-vis the United States. In a parallel with the Second Great Awakening more broadly, the world for the Choctaws was changing dramatically in the 1820s, and they were quickly losing their tribal autonomy and territory. They recognized that removal west of the Mississippi River was becoming increasingly likely.[36] Additionally, the prospects for commercial gain through agriculture and the adoption of race-based slavery had radically altered gender relations and pushed Choctaws into the tumultuous waves of the global cotton economy's boom-bust cycle. Although enslaved people still made up a small percentage of the total Choctaw population, they were concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy Choctaws who primarily used slave labor on plantations.[37] Producing cotton, beef, and pork for market could bring hefty profits, but tribal leaders felt they had lost their independence and no longer fulfilled their traditional male roles as hunters and warriors. In an era that seemed to epitomize the lack of Choctaw autonomy, Talley and other ministers preached a message of redemption and power.

As other scholars of religion and Native Americans have argued, conversion to Christianity was not a clear-cut removal of native religious concepts, but often a process of translating Christian concepts, both literally and figuratively, into Native American worldviews. Not only were missionaries using translators who had limited if any knowledge of Christianity, they were also using words like "grace" that carried a different meaning for Protestant Anglo-Americans than it did for Native Americans, for whom such a concept often meant something more akin to spiritual power. Although Talley and Jones may have seen Choctaw leaders bowing in the dust as a sign of humility before God, Choctaws may have regarded it as an act of spiritual

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[36] Talley gave the sense that he and Choctaw leaders knew removal was inevitable in his letter to William Winans, October 28, 1829, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[37] See Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, chapter 1.

empowerment that was indistinguishable from physical empowerment.[38] When Methodists arrived in the Choctaw Nation with a message of deliverance and redemption, Choctaws saw them as preachers of a new method of spiritual power, one that was convincing enough for thousands of Choctaws who saw removal and destruction looming in the near-future.

Another reason for Talley's success, however, was political. Long before Talley actually baptized Leflore and much of his family as Christians, Leflore had actively begun to promote evangelicalism, and he saw in Talley an important political ally. Talley had contacts with the state's mail carrier and Jackson loyalist, David Haley, and Leflore probably believed that the ability to send communications to Haley through Talley would help him achieve the greatest gain from a future removal treaty. Also by allying himself with Talley, a popular preacher among the Choctaws, Leflore may have hoped to maintain his popularity in a growing Christian Choctaw faction—what Talley called "the friends of civilization."[39] In return, Talley received a home base from which to evangelize, as well as an influential mouthpiece in Leflore who actually translated Talley's prayers and sermons. For Leflore, Talley was his spiritual authority who legitimated Leflore's rising political power within the tribe.

As news of Talley's success among the Choctaws reached the conference's other leaders, the Mississippi Methodist Conference sent more missionaries to aid in the Choctaw mission. Robert Smith and Moses Perry accompanied Talley between 1829 and 1830. Although there was an abortive attempt at establishing schools, the emphasis for Methodists was the salvation of souls alone. As Bishop Joshua Soule had exclaimed after the first reports of Choctaw converts,

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[38] This has mostly been studied with Catholicism, but the same concepts apply to Protestant missionaries among Native Americans. See especially Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), chapter 5; Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[39] Talley to Winans, March 20, July 5, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.

"The Choctaw are ours. No, I mistake; they are Christ's!"[40] Although Soule corrected himself, the obsession with counting the number of members and new converts as the ultimate measure of their success led Methodists to abandon costly attempts to educate with more substantial institutions such as mission schools. What emerged was a hands-off position regarding Choctaw education, commerce, and overall "civilization." While members of the ABCFM were busy creating a written Choctaw language, the Methodists seemed to stay out of such worldly concerns and concentrated on souls.[41] Yet Talley was integrally involved in Choctaw politics, as that involvement played a role in his success. Implicit in the Methodist position on their mission to the Choctaws was the assumption that Indians would no longer inhabit the present territories anyways, or at least they would no longer have sovereignty east of the Mississippi River. Newit Vick had gambled that would be the case when he bought so much property in Warren County at a logical river port for what was then the Choctaw Nation. For Methodists like Talley, there was no reason to waste time and resources on a civilization policy when the people to be civilized would be removed in a matter of years.

While Mississippi's Methodists sent additional missionaries into the Choctaw Nation, they also expanded their geographical reach throughout the lower Mississippi Valley. One of the state's leading Methodists for the entire antebellum era, Rev. William Winans, arrived in 1810 when Methodists could count about five hundred members in Mississippi and Louisiana, over one hundred of whom were enslaved. But by the time Talley set out for the Choctaw Nation in 1827, the state's Methodist leadership could count fifty travelling ministers in the conference and over thirteen thousand members. The conference sent some of those fifty ministers up the Red River in Louisiana, with Orsamus Nash in southern Louisiana on the Attakapas circuit. They also

[40] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 2:34.
[41] Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi,* 86-88.

led districts to the east up the Tombigbee River and up the Black Warrior River through the heart of Alabama. But the bulk of the ministers were in either the Washington District, in the region immediately around Natchez, or the Mississippi District, which covered the other portions of recent white settlement in the state up the Mississippi River and into the state's interior. The early denominational leader, Winans, was presiding elder of the Washington District, with two other ministers who would become prominent in the denomination in later years, Benjamin Drake and William Curtiss, assigned to Natchez and New Orleans, respectively. Among them was also John G. Jones, the chronicler of the state's Methodist history, who was assigned to the Warren County circuit in the area around Vicksburg that year. As white southerners worked their way up riverbeds and into the interior of the region, they trusted Methodist ministers to be a civilizing influence in what could be a rough frontier in rural Louisiana and Mississippi.[42]

In addition to the numbers of Methodist ministers and members, some of the most prominent Mississippians in the 1820s had joined the state's Auxiliary Missionary Society. Levin and Ellen Wailes were dues-paying members, along with the wealthy planter and minister John C. Burruss, and a few of the wealthy Claiborne family, descended from Mississippi's second territorial governor, William C.C. Claiborne. One other man who was a member of the Auxiliary Society was a Natchez physician named Samuel Cartwright. Cartwright became famous in later decades for his scientific observations on the topic of race and his unswerving commitment to the institution of slavery. These elites of the cotton kingdom—planters, merchants, and professionals—placed their faith in the Methodist Church and financially supported the institution's mission of evangelizing throughout the region.[43]

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[42] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1:196-198, 572, 555.
[43] List of Members of the Auxiliary Society in 1824, William Winans Papers, Box 11, Folder 75, Cain Archives.

These newly-settled white southerners along with their elected political leaders attempted to evade responsibility for Indian removal in the South, but white Americans generally believed that it was an inevitable part of civilization's march across the continent. In his State of the Union address in December 1829, Andrew Jackson warned that if the Choctaw, Cherokee, and Creek were not removed west of the Mississippi River, they would inevitably be led to a fate of "weakness and decay" by conniving white Americans. A month later, the Mississippi state legislature passed a law eliminating the sovereign authority of Indian nations within the state of Mississippi.[44] Instead of incorporating Native Americans into the United States as republican citizens, as an older Jeffersonian plan would, the Methodist missionary Alexander Talley adopted a newer plan based on clear biological racial distinctions. "Never can a red man," Talley wrote in late 1829, "become an equal participant in our national blessings, and consequently can never connect his destiny with ours. They must ever continue a distinct people or extinction must be the result."[45] The next year, Talley reiterated what seemed to be common knowledge among white southerners—that "it is indisputable that the red people cannot flourish in a state of amalgamation with the whites."[46] Consistent with new scientists like Charles Caldwell at the Transylvania School of Medicine in Kentucky, many white Americans began to imagine a natural hierarchy of races based on hereditary, biological traits.[47] Talley, like others, had adopted the idea that supposedly inferior and superior races could not live in harmony.

Additionally, proponents of these new racial theories had become convinced that Native Americans would never use the land in the most productive way to advance the cause of

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[44] Jackson quoted in Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi,* 129; Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 132.
[45] Talley to Winans, October 28, 1829, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[46] Talley to Winans, July 5, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[47] Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 132.

civilization. One wealthy Methodist and judge in Mississippi, James R. Nicholson, expressed the common sentiment of the time, that although the Choctaws "were advancing with unparalleled rapidity in the arts of civilization and christianity," it would be improper to allow "wandering savages to claim a large, extensive, and fertile country which has been evidently designed by Providence to be subdued and cultivated and become the residence of civilized man." "The cultivation of the soil," Nicholson added, "is an obligation imposed by our Creator upon the human race," and such an obligation necessitated removing "enatic tribes" in "the hunter state" from the territory. Justifying their removal on biological racial grounds, as Talley had, he claimed that "the peculiar habits and character of the red man" made him "*incapable* of sustaining any other relation with the white man than that of *dependence* and *pupilage*." With their combination of racial arguments based on biological difference and providential commission to cultivate the soil, evangelical Mississippians justified Indian removal as "the duty of the white man as having higher claims to civilization and Christianity."[48] Despite the fact that native elites in Mississippi had bought slaves and cultivated the soil, the stereotypical image of wandering Indians repeated by men like Nicholson and Talley predominated in white Americans' understandings of Native American society. Both Indians and white southerners were interested in buying enslaved African Americans and making profits through agricultural pursuits. With or without Indian removal, the cotton boom would occur. The only question was who would profit from that commercial boom.

As removal gained momentum among white Americans, increased sectarian conflict within the Choctaw nation in the late 1820s hurt the Choctaws' cause to remain. Some Choctaw leaders, particularly Mushulatubbee and Nitakechi in the eastern districts, had become

[48] J.R. Nicholson to William Winans, September 10, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.

increasingly opposed to Christian missionaries and their schools. In 1828, one of the captains who had converted to Methodism joined an exploring party in search of prospective land west of the Mississippi River. When he returned, Talley reported to Winans, he showed a gift from the Osages, a human scalp, with the warning that "the missionaries are sure to take their land away unless they are driven out of the nation." So the captain "call'd his people together," according to Talley, and they announced that they were "in violent opposition to [the missionaries]."[49] Increasingly Talley divided the Choctaw factions between the "Christian" Choctaws and the "Oposing [sic] parties" who were "hostile to Christianity."[50] The ABCFM missionary Kingsbury made a similar distinction between a "Christian" faction and a "Pagan" one.[51] In order for Christianity to survive among the Choctaws, missionaries became convinced, the right faction needed to remain in power. Mushulatubbee and his faction had already made it clear to U.S. Choctaw agent William Ward that they were willing to remove westward. But Talley knew that whichever faction approved removal would be recognized by the United States as the tribal leader. "To opose [sic] the views of the U.S.," that is, to oppose removal, would secure "the future home of the Choctaws to the control and government of men, hostile to Christianity, and fully influenced by the old prejudices and principles of the natives."[52] If the Christian faction signed a removal treaty first, however, Talley was convinced that "the elivated [sic] ground of civilization and Christianity" would survive in the West.[53]

As Talley lobbied with other Methodists for Choctaw removal, he worked for this end goal in tandem with the Jackson administration through the mail carrier and Jackson supporter

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[49] Talley to Winans, February 13, 1829, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[50] Talley to Winans, March 20, July 5, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[51] Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 117.
[52] Talley to Winans, March 20, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[53] Talley to Winans, July 5, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.

David Haley. In a letter to Jackson in October 1829, Haley described Talley as "a Gentleman of high standing in that country" who "resides with Col Leflore." Only through Talley and Leflore, Haley insisted, would Choctaw removal be possible. "The chiefs cannot prepair [sic] the indians for a Treaty," Haley explained, but "this must be done by the Government through some person that the indians are well acquainted whith [sic] who has influence with them," who can "call the indians in council" to "reason with them, and be plain and positive." Both Talley and Benjamin Harris, a Choctaw leader and brother-in-law of Leflore, insisted that the Choctaw people would not follow a chief who agreed to remove without apparent necessity.[54] Writing later that month, Talley echoed Haley's sentiments in a letter to fellow Mississippi Methodist and slaveholder Rev. William Winans. Talley explained that "if they go, they must feel that it is force, that drives them." Talley advised Winans that Jackson must "convince the common people that the President is constitutionally obligated to support Mississippi," and that he should "speak plain to them."[55] For the Jackson administration, Talley was the necessary intermediary to convince the common Choctaw people that removal was necessary, while he worked with Leflore and his allies to solidify Leflore and the Christian faction's authority within the nation.

Yet if Talley and many Methodists saw Indian removal as a necessary action, the reason for the continued opposition to removal by the ABCFM deserves explanation. Kingsbury was notably absent from removal talks, and he opposed a removal treaty from 1829 through its completion, calling it "wholly a most unjust and wicked proceeding" and "a monstrous exercise of arbitrary and unjust power towards a weak and defenceless people who have placed themselves under our protection."[56] There is no reason to doubt Kingsbury's sincerity in

[54] David W. Haley to Andrew Jackson, October 8, 1829, in Daniel Feller et al., ed., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 483-484.
[55] Talley to Winans, October 28, 1829, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[56] Kingsbury quoted in Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 133.

opposing Choctaw removal, but one important incentive that separated the ABCFM missions from the Methodist missionaries was their heavy investment in mission infrastructure. In the 1831 report from the Choctaw mission to the ABCFM, it was noted that "no provision was made in the [removal] treaty for refunding any part of the money expended by the Board in establishing and sustaining this mission, amounting, since its commencement, to above $60,000 besides the labors of above thirty missionaries and assistants, for twelve years." The report continued that the mission properties were presently worth "more than the interest of $75,000 annually for a hundred years."[57]

A later historian of Presbyterian missions among Native Americans emphasized that the Choctaw removal "was a severe blow to the American Board, which had invested thousands of dollars in the various stations throughout the old Choctaw Nation in Mississippi," and that "the federal government paid the Board less than five thousand dollars for the improvements in its various abandoned stations." Many of the missionaries who had worked with the Choctaws decided not to continue in the West, and instead remained in Mississippi "to become citizens of that commonwealth."[58] Although Kingsbury and Byington eventually moved to the new Choctaw Nation in the western territory, those missionaries who stayed participated in the economic boom that accompanied Indian removal in Mississippi.

During the summer of 1830, before an official treaty had been negotiated but after removal seemed inevitable to Choctaw leaders, tensions between the Leflore and the Mushulatubbee factions came to a head. In the spring of that year, Mushulatubbee had expressed fears to Choctaw agent William Ward that Leflore would assemble forces to remove him from

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[57] *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions…at the Twenty-Second Annual Meeting* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1831), 83.
[58] William B. Morrison, *The Red Man's Trail* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1932), 61.

power.[59] Over the next few months, Mushulatubbee's "Pagan party" allegedly burned churches, religious books, and demanded that missionaries leave the Choctaw Nation.[60] Talley reported that "companies of armed men" were seizing Christian Choctaws from their homes. "One side of their face was blackened and the other side painted," he wrote to Rev. Winans. The captured Choctaws were "then ordered to get up and dance away their religion, and if they hesitated guns were fired under them to hurry them."[61] Rumors also circulated that Mushulatubbee had appointed twelve men to assassinate Leflore. On July 14, Mushulatubbee set up an armed guard of about one thousand men at Choctaw leader David Folsom's house, where annuity payments were disbursed every year. Accompanied by eight hundred of his own armed soldiers, Leflore marched to Mushulatubbee to assert his complete authority over the Choctaw Nation. Each side stared at the other with "a general battle…momentarily expected." Two hours passed, with neither Leflore nor Mushulatubbee refusing to give up their authority, until Nitakechi, a chief of Mushulatubbee's faction, met Leflore and Folsom in the middle of the battle lines. The three men called off the fight but without a firm resolution to the initial conflict.[62]

Two months later, Secretary of War John Eaton and a friend of Jackson's, John Coffee, came to Choctaw country to negotiate a treaty. Talley and the Choctaw leaders arrived with the two hostile factions camped apart from each other, but Kingsbury and the ABCFM missionaries were told to stay away. Although there are different accounts for how it occurred, one of the more plausible is that hundreds of Choctaws along with the vast majority of their leaders professed to be opposed to removal. When it became clear to most Choctaws that a removal

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[59] Nora Jeanne Shackleford, "The Leflore Family and Choctaw Indian Removal," (M.A. thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1967), 41.

[60] "Disturbance Among the Choctaws: Two Accounts," *Niles' Weekly Register*, August 21, 1830, 457-458.

[61] Talley to Winans, July 5, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.

[62] "Disturbance Among the Choctaws," *Niles' Weekly Register*, August 21, 1830, 457-458; Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), 24-26.

treaty would not be signed, most of them went home, while a couple hundred stayed behind. Reportedly Eaton threatened the Choctaw leaders that if they refused to remove, they would be at war with the United States and would ultimately lose any claim to land west of the Mississippi River either. Buckling under the threats, 171 Choctaws signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek on September 27, 1830. The treaty granted the Choctaws fifteen million acres in Indian Territory while removing Choctaw control of eleven million acres in Mississippi. It also guaranteed four hundred thousand dollars to the Choctaws in annual payments over twenty years and secured money for teachers and schools in their new home.[63]

One important article of the treaty, proposed by Leflore, stipulated that any Choctaws who wished to remain in Mississippi could apply for land and subsequently receive 640 acres for themselves as well as additional land for their children.[64] When William Ward directed the Choctaws who wished to stay to assemble for that purpose, the bulk of the tribe, about ten thousand Choctaws, expressed interest in staying. Yet Ward did not expect that such a large number desired to stay, and he only completed the necessary paperwork for a few dozen of those ten thousand. One of the few who benefited with a 640-acre section along with other pecuniary "gifts," however, was Greenwood Leflore. Although he initially said he would move west with the Choctaw Nation, he later "decline[d] to proceed," according to a trader and friend of Eaton's, choosing instead to remain in Mississippi and expand his property holdings.[65] With his allotted sections, Leflore expanded his plantation from 250 acres worked by thirty-two slaves to eventually over 15,000 acres just in Mississippi, while increasing his ownership of enslaved

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[63] Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 139-143; Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 141.
[64] Ibid.
[65] George S. Gaines to John H. Eaton, November 6, 1830, in *Correspondence on the Subject of the Emigration of Indians, Between the 30th November, 1831, and 27th December, 1833, with Abstracts of Expenditures by Disbursing Agents, in the Removal and Subsistence of Indians* (Washington: Duff Green, 1835), 2:183-185; Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 142-143.

people to about four hundred. If Leflore's goal was to get the best deal out of a removal treaty through the mediation of Talley and Haley, he clearly succeeded.[66]

Coerced by their tribal leaders and forced out by agents of the federal government, over the next few years the vast majority of the nearly eighteen thousand Choctaws left their homes behind and migrated west. The first round of removals came in November, 1831 when four thousand left in an unusually frigid winter. Without sufficient rations, blankets, or tents, the disaster that became the first trip was recorded at the Mississippi River crossing at Memphis by Alexis de Toqueville, who happened to be travelling down the Mississippi River at the time. After the first trip, a second group left in November of the following year, but a cholera outbreak in Vicksburg spread through the Choctaws and killed many. When the trips were finally over, five to six thousand Choctaws remained in Mississippi to live under the jurisdiction of the state, while two thousand died along the way to Indian Territory.[67]

Although many of the same general conditions existed for the Chickasaws as the Choctaws during this period, the Choctaws were the first of the southeastern nations to remove to Indian Territory, and therefore other groups like the Chickasaws were able to learn from their experiences. In the same year as the Choctaw removal treaty at Dancing Rabbit Creek, the Chickasaws signed the much more carefully-worded Treaty of Franklin that stipulated that the removal treaty was only binding on the condition that Chickasaw leaders personally approve the western land they would obtain. Conducted to Indian Territory with another pro-removal minister, the Baptist Rev. Isaac McCoy, the Chickasaw exploring party led by the prominent

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[66] Carson, "Greenwood Leflore," 227, 231; Shackleford, "The Leflore Family and Choctaw Indian Removal," 24-29.

[67] Shackleford, "The Leflore Family and Choctaw Indian Removal," 65-67; Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 98-99; Sandra Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads: The Political Economy of Class and Culture in the Oklahoma Timber Region* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 19; Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 151-161.

Colbert family was unhappy with the western lands offered to them, and thus the treaty did not take effect. Two years later in 1832, Chickasaw leaders signed the Treaty of Pontotoc Creek, a removal treaty that was amended in 1834 to give the Chickasaws many more benefits than the Choctaws received and much more latitude with how to use their Mississippi land. As opposed to the corrupt deal the Choctaws received through the agent William Ward, Chickasaw tribal members were actually given a 640-acre section of land each, with more going to slaveholders and those with larger families. Households with over ten members and owning more than ten slaves, for instance, received six sections of 640 acres. Just as the price of Mississippi land was rising sky-high, many Chickasaws sold their land to speculators for a handsome profit, bought more slaves with that money, and headed west.[68]

As Native Americans in the Deep South were forced out of their homes by a series of treaties in the 1830s, the conditions of their treaties reflected how much each tribe had adapted to an increasingly capital-intensive cotton economy based on enslaved labor. Both Choctaws and Chickasaws vigorously defended their right to hold slaves, and elite Chickasaw slaveholders capitalized on the demand by white speculators and settlers for their land. Speculative land companies popped up in North Mississippi, borrowing money to buy Chickasaw cession land, then putting up their purchased land as collateral to borrow and buy more. One of those companies, Gordon and Bell, acquired six hundred sections of land from Chickasaw sales that they then sold to capitalist speculators. On their journey westward, Chickasaws also experienced much better conditions than the Choctaws. Instead of being forced out by agents, they departed on their own time, many of them on horseback to their new home in Indian Territory. As cotton prices climbed in the 1830s, Chickasaws were able to expand slavery westward while the white

[68] Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People*, 225-231; Paige, Bumpers, and Littlefield, *Chickasaw Removal*, 53-54.

planters of the emerging cotton kingdom established their dominion over the whole state of Mississippi.[69]

At the heart of this decisive period of American history was the instrumentality of evangelical missionaries. As David Haley made clear, the federal government depended on outsiders who Native Americans trusted to make removal seem inevitable and necessary. Although the government may have been able to eliminate native sovereignty east of the Mississippi without missionaries, the presence of missionaries and their crucial status within the ranks of the political leadership of the tribes facilitated the process of removal and made it more peaceful for white Americans. For ministers like Talley, the end result was that the Choctaws were quickly becoming civilized and Christianized due to "the spirit and power of religion that appeared among the people on their arrival here" in Indian Territory, as he reported.[70] Evangelical ministers could triumphantly laud the progress the Choctaws had made as they emigrated westward. After furnishing the displaced Choctaws with "the sacred Scriptures and some of our hymns in the language of the Natives," evangelicals felt confident that these Christian Choctaws "will probably become the rallying point of more extended missionary operations in that vast wilderness."[71]

Back in Mississippi, the symbol of Methodist triumph was Greenwood Leflore, a former Choctaw chief turned Methodist cotton planter and wealthy gentleman of high society. Christians across the country may have sympathized with the sad plight of the less fortunate Native Americans, but their suffering seemed to be part of God's providential plan to extend his kingdom westward and usher in the fulfillment of civilized commercial development throughout

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[69] Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 42; Paige, Bumpers, and Littlefield, *Chickasaw Removal*, 59-61.
[70] Talley quoted in Thomas Smith and John O. Choules, *The Origin and History of Missions* (Boston: S. Walker, and Lincoln and Edmands, 1834), 2:525.
[71] Smith and Choules, *The Origin and History of Missions*, 2:526.

Mississippi. From many clergy members' perspective, forced Indian removal carried with it unfortunate consequences, but the removal of the Choctaws and Chickasaws was only the opening act in the ongoing and divinely-ordained evangelical civilization of the American South.

The next step was a series of purchases, sales, and the extension of evangelical circuits and churches. Speculators bought the land, which was then sold to eager white settlers. The 1820 population of about 75,000 inhabitants, mostly in the area surrounding Natchez, nearly doubled to 136,000 by 1830 as white Americans expanded across the newly-bought central and northern portions of the state.[72]

And with them came a new rush of ministers. The Methodists, in particular, redrew the boundaries of their conferences and districts. The Alabama portions of the Mississippi Conference split to form their own conference, but within the state of Mississippi, the reach of circuit riders in the new "Chahta District," presided by Orsamus L. Nash, stretched to the newly-opened portions of former Choctaw and Chickasaw territory in northern Mississippi. Eight ministers now made up a district from Madison County up the Big Black River all the way to Yalobusha County in the northern hinterland. John Lane, presiding elder of the Vicksburg District, led six other ministers in a region that covered Vicksburg and stretched east around Jackson and northeast of Vicksburg. A young minister, Preston Cooper, who had converted to Methodism only a few years earlier had already become a presiding elder of the Louisiana District that stretched from Baton Rouge up the Red River Valley.[73] Baptists as well marched hand-in-hand with new white settlement, establishing associations in Yazoo County in 1833, in

[72] *Census for 1820*, 122; *Abstract of the Returns of the Fifth Census* (Washington: Duff Green, 1832), 36.
[73] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2:304.

former Choctaw territory in 1834, and in Yalobusha County to the north in 1836. By 1836, forty-eight Baptist ministers dotted the Mississippi countryside.[74]

The drive to buy land and slaves in the newly-opened portions of Mississippi was only matched by the continued expansion of evangelical ministers and churches. Evangelical denominations, especially the Methodist circuit riders and local Baptist churches, thrived in the bustling frontier environment of 1830s Mississippi. As settlers in the Mississippi interior became planters almost overnight, they placed their faith in God and the economic networks that bound them to slave traders, bankers, and cotton factors.

[74] McLemore, *History of Mississippi Baptists*, 90; Z.T. Leavell and T.J. Bailey, *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists, from Earliest Times* (Jackson: Mississippi Baptists Publishing Company, 1904), 80.

CHAPTER THREE

PREACHERS AND PEDDLERS: CREDIT AND BELIEF IN THE FLUSH TIMES

As white Americans in the lower Mississippi Valley bought land and enslaved people in the 1830s, they also longed for a sense of providential order, symbolized by the ministers who taught them to put their faith in God. Yet their zeal for buying and speculating could easily turn into a source of anxiety about whether their investments were safe. Similarly, their confidence in evangelical ministers and God's order was volatile, resulting in lurking suspicions of those religious leaders. Credit and belief were intertwining concepts for white southerners during their early settlement of the lower Mississippi Valley following Choctaw and Chickasaw removal. Contemporaries drew parallels between preachers, peddlers, gamblers, and speculators as rootless itinerants, and they attempted to root out the counterfeits in their midst. Two famous preachers, Theodore Clapp and John Newland Maffitt, seemed to thrive in this atmosphere of spiritual demand, but even they inevitably drew the sharp interrogations of anxious believers. The stories of Clapp and Maffitt stretch into the 1840s, but this period of volatility marked by confidence and anxiety culminated in the Panic of 1837, a transformative event in which white Americans realized they needed to invent more systematic ways of developing trust with their business partners to succeed in the competitive environment of slave-based global capitalism.

John Murrell and a Culture of Credit

Sometime in the early 1830s, a tall and garrulous young man, dressed in a plain black cloak and a broad black hat, rode across the Elk River in Middle Tennessee to keep an appointment he made. He was an itinerant minister, visiting "Brother Nobs," who he met a year earlier while preaching in the neighborhood. When Nobs and his family offered the clergyman supper, he was "lengthy in his supplications at table," and his sermons made "all around" think "he was just going to open the windows of heaven, and select its richest blessings for brother Nobs." He also discussed with Nobs his farm and slaves in south Alabama and his struggle to find a humane overseer. Nobs "drank it all down." When morning came, Nobs refused the minister's payment for the night's lodging, but the itinerant asked if he would at least make change for his twenty-dollar bill. Additionally, he decided he would buy a mule from Nobs for $250 and pay him at the next camp-meeting. Brother Nobs did not know as he watched this eloquent minister ride away on his circuit that he would never see him again. No doubt he must have been upset to find out that the twenty-dollar bill the preacher gave him was a counterfeit note. The itinerant proceeded in a long circuit throughout the South, made connections with men he called "speculators," with whom he "scattered some United States' paper," robbed a few men, and "preached some d---d fine sermons." He stole horses and slaves with his wide-reaching band of confederates, the "mystic clan." While plotting a mass slave insurrection in 1834, he was finally captured and arrested by Virgil Stewart, and became infamous throughout the country as John Murrell, the "Western Land Pirate."[1]

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[1] Augustus Q. Walton, *A History of the Detection, Conviction, Life and Designs of John A. Murel, the Great Western Land Pirate; Together with the System of Villainy, and Plan of Exciting a Negro Rebellion* (Cincinnati, 1835), 29-31. For descriptions of itinerant Methodists, see Charity R. Carney, *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 35; John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, Tennessee: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 2:191.

The religious element that reappears throughout Stewart's Murrell account sheds light on the significant connections between religion and the region's anxiety-filled flush times. Joshua Rothman has recently discussed the Murrell story as part of a larger analysis of slavery and capitalism in the antebellum Southwest, and although Rothman mentions Murrell's disguise as a Methodist minister in passing, he minimizes the importance of religion and preachers in the 1830s Southwest. By claiming there were no "permanent ministers" in Vicksburg in the early 1830s, he dismisses the long history of Methodist and Baptist ministers in the area and misunderstands how evangelical denominations functioned in antebellum society. Just among Methodists in Vicksburg at the time of the Murrell arrest, for instance, there was a presiding elder of Yazoo District in Vicksburg, Rev. John Lane, with Rev. Robert D. Smith preaching in Vicksburg, and Rev. Charles Kimball Marshall preaching in the Warren County circuit outside of town. This is beside the fact that Vicksburg was settled by the Methodist minister, Newit Vick, and the Methodist extended Vick and Cook families.[2]

But the establishment of institutional Methodism in 1830s Vicksburg is just one strand of the web that bound faith to the lower Mississippi Valley's commercial explosion. The Choctaw and Chickasaw land cessions of 1830 and 1834 created new opportunities for white Americans to speculate and move into "the Purchase," as they called the territory. The white population of the state doubled from 1830 to 1836, and many of the newly-settled areas in former Choctaw country in central Mississippi, especially around Jackson and up the Big Black and Yazoo River valleys, became dominated by capital-intensive plantations in which enslaved African Americans

[2] For a list of Methodist appointments, see *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1829-1839,* vol. 2 (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 184. For his mentions of ministers, see Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 55, 76, 256, and see page 181 for quotation on "permanent ministers" and early Vicksburg.

outnumbered whites by a substantial margin. Cotton frontiers like "the Purchase" became filled with fortune seekers who were eager to borrow on credit to acquire land and slaves, but the fortunes of these speculators became tied to unknown white neighbors, distant merchants, newly-bought and mortgaged enslaved people, and, of course, roving peddlers and preachers who attempted to "civilize" the countryside by selling products and belief. Quite suddenly the region had become a society built on credit.[3]

The preacher's sale of belief through evangelization may seem small compared to the other financial transactions of the period, but antebellum Americans tied credit to belief in a more holistic web than later twentieth- and twenty-first century Americans have done. If Noah Webster's 1828 American dictionary is to be taken as accurate of American English at the time, Webster's primary definition of credit was "belief; faith." As an example, Webster wrote, "We give *credit* to a man's declaration, when the mind rests on the truth of it, without doubt or suspicion, which is attended with wavering." For its etymology, "See Creed," Webster wrote. After other definitions of credit revolving around "reputation," "honor," "confidence," and "character," Webster finally reached the topic of business with his sixth definition: "In *commerce*, trust; transfer of goods in confidence of future payment."[4] For Americans of the period, the credit on which planters, shopkeepers, and merchants depended was intimately bound to faith, trustworthiness, honor, confidence, and character—values that they associated with religion and respectability.

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[3] For the use of the term, "the Purchase," see William Winans to Samuel D. Shackleford, December 27, 1832, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 8, J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps-Wilson Library, Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter Cain Archives). For population increase, see Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 4.

[4] *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "credit."

Implicitly, credit also depended on uncertainty. If there were no risk, then there would be no reason for belief and faith in the first place; rather, credit would be reduced to mere facts. The credit that made early nineteenth-century American commerce function depended on the bonds of belief between distant individuals and institutions with an underlying assumption that, like the Apostles' Creed, the truths of commerce could not be verified with certainty but only grasped at with bits of evidence and a leap of faith.

With the antebellum understanding of credit in mind, the lower Mississippi Valley in the 1830s was a society built on easy credit in more ways than one. It constructed the emerging cotton kingdom on credit that planters would pay off their debts, with a progressive faith that the price of cotton would not plummet; credit that paper money and stock in railroad banks would retain their value; credit in either the inherent docile behavior of slaves or the intimidating force needed to discipline their enslaved work force; and credit in a God who bound the entire system together. Ministers on the frontiers of the lower Mississippi Valley could inspire that faith that perpetuated the cotton kingdom's economic system, but those who were itinerant ministers stoked the underlying anxieties of such a precarious society. The faith that cotton frontier speculators and settlers put in all of these pieces of society was an obvious liability, and concerns about the trustworthiness of ministers were pervasive. In this tumultuous environment, some preachers made a fortune playing to the demands of the people, but even these religious celebrities were not immune to the suspicions of the lower Mississippi Valley's flush times.

Credit and the Economics of the Cotton Kingdom

These cultural concepts of credit in the lower Mississippi Valley, however, were also built on a perfect storm of material economic factors. First, among these factors, was the cheap

and abundant land offered for sale with the removal of Choctaw and Chickasaw claims to sovereignty. The Land Office in Washington D.C. sent surveyors out to "civilize" the wilderness, crisscrossing the varied landscape with imaginary lines forming 640-acre sections and quarter-sections of 160-acre plots. The newly-surveyed land was then settled by white farmers and planters who spread out from the older Natchez district to the central portions of the state around Jackson and up the Yazoo River valley. For example, in 1830, Hinds County in central Mississippi counted 8,645 inhabitants, among whom 3,212 were enslaved. Ten years earlier the county did not exist but was part of the Choctaw Nation. By 1836 the central and northern portions of Mississippi had filled up so much that the total state population doubled from its 1830 total.[5]

Initially the surveyed plots were sold at $1.25 per acre, but the demand for more fertile land to produce cotton pushed the price much higher, making it feasible for investors to make quick one hundred percent returns on land they had never even seen. The architects of federal land policy, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, initially intended the plots to be sold to farmers who would improve the land, but more often than not, companies with friends in the Land Office gobbled up as much of the valuable property as possible to be later sold at a much higher price. For instance, a group of prominent Mississippians created a company at the Chocchuma Land Office in northern Mississippi to survey land in the area prior to the sale. While critics derided the corruption between the head of the Chocchuma Land Office, William Gwin, and his friends with the land company, supporters in Jackson argued that the purpose of the company was "not to defraud the government or oppress the poor" but to facilitate "private

[5] *Abstract of the Returns of the Fifth Census*, (Washington: Duff Green, 1832), 36; Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 4.

transactions by private individuals."[6] Companies like the one at Chocchuma bought abstract plots of land from squatters called "floats," which could then be used to buy actual plots. A market in floats, however, circulated among distant investors, driving prices up even further.[7]

The second economic factor in the southwestern boom was the price of cotton. From 1830 to 1834, New Orleans cotton prices increased by more than eighty percent, from 8.4 cents per pound to 15.5 cents per pound, as foreign manufacturers craved more of the crop that was increasingly monopolized by American planters. With soaring cotton prices and newly-opened fertile land, a frenzy of speculators and more modest men on the make swooped to the land offices. The federal government sold more than one million acres of land in 1833 and nearly three million acres in 1835. Land booms had occurred in America before, but never on this scale, and never at such a fever pitch.[8]

To purchase this land, however, buyers needed capital, and the lack of hard specie—gold and silver—in the Southwest made this a difficult task. The pre-1830 banking infrastructure was not capable of lending sufficient funds for these purchases, so state legislatures stepped in to fill this need. The state of Louisiana led the way with some of the more innovative financial tools of the era, building from an older concept of land banks but allowing planters to put, not just land, but personal property, including enslaved people, up as collateral to buy bank stock and secure loans. The state of Louisiana then issued bonds, sold them to investors in New York and England, and used the revenue from the bond sales to capitalize the bank. The plan began small in 1827 with the Consolidated Association of the Planters of Louisiana, a bank with two million

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[6] "Col. J.F.H. Claiborne and M. Gilchrist, Esq.—Chocchuma Land Sales," *The Mississippian*, August 8, 1834.

[7] Dennis J. Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 104-105. Also see Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), chapter 1; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), chapter 2.

[8] Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1933), 2:1027; Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 4.

dollars of capital reserves. Quickly the demand for land and cotton set off a frenzy of bank-chartering, note-issuing, and lending as Louisiana chartered the Union Bank in 1832 with seven million dollars in capital and the Citizens' Bank the following year with twelve million dollars in capital. But Mississippi, late to the banking game, jumped all of these with the most highly-capitalized bank in the region, the Union Bank of Mississippi, chartered in 1838 for $15.5 million in stock with the state of Mississippi underwriting the loans. Within a period of eight years, the total value of loans issued in Mississippi jumped from about one million dollars to over fifteen million dollars.[9]

Planters' banks based on securities in slaves and property were one method of obtaining capital, but another was the creation of infrastructure projects and what were known as "railroad banks." Mississippians and Louisianans knew that they needed railroads to connect the interior of their states to river and sea ports, so in the 1830s they proposed a flurry of new chartered railroad bank corporations. Planters and merchants in the interior saw the Vicksburg and Jackson Railroad as one of the most important pieces of infrastructure to bypass the old monopoly of Natchez merchants by connecting the capital to a bustling new river port. Agents for the corporation collected subscriptions from investors, including two hundred thousand dollars just from Clinton, west of Jackson, with another one hundred thousand dollars expected from Jackson itself.[10] One planter wrote that "the *all-absorbing* talk of conversation" in Vicksburg "was the Rail Road." "For once," he continued, "Mississippians have ceased to talk of land,

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[9] Willis Levi Meadows, Jr., "The Union Bank of Mississippi" (M.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1949), 23-35; Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 4. Also see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 243-259.
[10] "Vicksburg Rail Road," *The Mississippian*, October 24, 1834.

negroes and cotton bales, and have turned their attention *in good earnest*, to the Rail Road enterprize."[11]

But corporations like the Vicksburg and Jackson Railroad were not just—or perhaps even primarily—designed to improve the region's infrastructure, for they also served as banks, issuing paper currency based on the subscriptions they had received from investors. Of course those subscriptions were generally paid with paper money as well. Railroad bank notes circulated as other bank notes in a region starving for capital, and they inevitably found their way to the Planters' Bank and later the Union Banks that then issued greater loans based on the value of railroad bank notes.[12] A planter, farmer, or professional with even a modest desire to gain easy wealth invested in these corporations, with railroads planned from St. Francisville, Louisiana to Woodville, Mississippi, from Grand Gulf to Port Gibson, and from New Orleans to Pascagoula. Each of these railroad corporations issued currency to be circulated under the assumption that these enterprises would be successful.[13]

The largest corporation with the highest hopes was the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad, a grand project designed not only to cut through the heart of Mississippi's cotton frontier, but also to link with a proposed railroad from Boston to Nashville via Lynchburg, Virginia.[14] Newspapers reported on the enormous demand for the company's stock that could only be bought for "extravagant rates." The President of the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad gleefully wrote, "Conceive, if you can, of those locomotives, all puffing and snorting, bearing in their train 2360 cars, laden with 10,000 passengers; 40,000 bales cotton." "Is this fiction, is it

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[11] A Baker's Creek Planter, "Vicksburg and Jackson Rail Road," *The Mississippian*, June 15, 1835.
[12] Clifford Thies, "Repudiation in Antebellum Mississippi," *Independent Review* 19 (Fall 2014): 193; Mitchell, *History of Mississippi*, 106.
[13] *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge, for the Year 1837* (Boston: Charles Bowen, 1836), 250; John MacGregor, *The Progress of America, from the Discovery by Columbus to the Year 1846* (London: Whitaker and Co., 1847), 2:743-744; "Rail Roads," *Woodville Republican*, October 3, 1835.
[14] "Grand Project" and "The New Orleans and Nashville Rail Road," *The Mississippian*, December 11, 1835.

romance?" he asked rhetorically. No, of course, it was "the all-powerful eye of faith, turning aside the impenetrable veil that's suspended at the vestibule of futurity," where dreamers would find that all this was "fully personified by actual fact."[15] With the combined powers of credit and technology, Mississippians confidently asserted that the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad would increase the value of surrounding property and double the region's population, further shoring up the competitiveness of Mississippi planters and removing their dependence on merchants in Natchez.[16]

Dreams of the lower Mississippi Valley as "the vestibule of futurity" were common in the 1830s, but under the surface lurked unprecedented anxiety. Cotton production in Mississippi had increased enormously from ten million pounds in 1820 to eighty-five million pounds in 1834.[17] Credit from speculators and foreign investors financed this boom in production, but they did so with the calculation that cotton prices would not fall back down to their late-1820s levels. Additionally, residents of the lower Mississippi Valley realized that the economic system from which they profited was fragile and depended on a series of links in an economic chain. They relied on paper currencies from start-up banks without an established reputation.

Even beyond the value of genuine bank notes, the fear of counterfeit notes was omnipresent. In August, 1834, residents of Holmes County, Mississippi arrested between thirty and forty men suspected of being part of a counterfeiting company from Black Creek, with two operations for manufacturing counterfeit notes in Shawnee Point, Arkansas Territory and upon the Osage River in Missouri.[18] Just five months later, residents of Woodville, Mississippi caught

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[15] Joshua Baldwin, "New Orleans and Nashville Rail Road," *The Mississippian*, October 2, 1835.
[16] "To the Citizens of Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee," *Woodville Republican,* May 9, 1835.
[17] *Writings of Levi Woodbury, LL.D., Political, Judicial, and Literary* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1852), 3:260.
[18] Cives [pseud.], "Black Creek Counterfeiters Routed," *The Mississippian*, August 8, 1834.

a counterfeiter named Jeremiah Terry, who was carrying twenty-one counterfeit notes of one hundred dollars each for the Bank of the United States. He claimed to be an agent for a larger counterfeit company headquartered "somewhere in Arkansas," and he passed counterfeit bills from Florida to Columbus, Mississippi.[19]

Fears of counterfeiters revealed common anxieties about the newly-erected financial system on the cotton frontier, but perhaps an even greater anxiety concerned the large population of enslaved African American men and women. In both wealthy established areas and the newly-settled counties in the interior, enslaved people often outnumbered free people, and memories of Nat Turner's recent rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia were fresh in white southerners' minds. Even before the infamous crackdown on a suspected slave insurrection plot in Madison County in 1835, planters in newly-settled areas were fearful of enslaved people they had recently bought, and slaves were often the first to come under suspicion if anything went wrong on the plantation. In 1834, for instance, two enslaved women and one enslaved man were accused of murder and held in the Benton Jail in Madison County after their master and mistress became suddenly sick. When the mistress died, and the master's fate was still unknown, enslaved witnesses purportedly claimed that the cooks had steeped the heads of a rattlesnake and a scorpion in their master and mistress's coffee, which caused the fatal illness. Incidences and rumors of incidences like these fostered a hyper-vigilant environment among white citizens against any suspicious characters.[20]

Although planters could do everything in their capacity to verify that their factors were honest, that their slaves were obedient, and that their investments were safe, the basis of credit as faith was necessary for society to function. If credit was belief, then the belief in God and his

[19] "A Counterfeiter Detected," *Woodville Republican*, January 31, 1835.
[20] "Murder By Poison," *The Mississippian*, September 5, 1834.

providence that evangelical ministers spread to the cotton kingdom's frontier formed the cornerstone of the region's credit boom. Business leaders might describe the technological and commercial developments of their era as driven by "the eye of faith" progressively peeling back the barriers that separated man and God. The humorist Joseph Baldwin recalled the ties between credit in markets and faith more broadly. "An experiment" had begun in the 1830s Southwest, he wrote, of "credit without capital," in which the infatuation with metals was deemed "an absurd superstition," and "the principle of success and basis of operation…was faith." "A sort of financial biology," he argued, converted rags into "the thing conjured for," money, something that made sense only when men were under the "mesmeric influence" of the time.[21] Retrospectively, Baldwin could claim that men were acting irrationally, but he used the language of faith and superstition to describe a period in which newspapers clamored about "the faith of the state" and its possible ruination with the failures of regional banks.[22]

Those who ministered to the religious needs of the Southwest also saw these connections, as the language of "redemption" was used loosely when collecting both money and converts. When a New Orleans minister wrote that "New Orleans will be redeemed" after producing scores of converts and raising thousands of dollars, he was revealing how religious belief was like a bank note. In order to redeem it, its veracity needed to be checked. Only then would it produce the converts and money on which ministers depended.[23] Converting people into the evangelical fold was often discussed like a business, with one minister's work praised as a success "as a result of his organizations and net gains."[24] The Methodist Rev. John G. Jones

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[21] Joseph G. Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches* (1853; repr., San Francisco: Bancroft-Whitney, 1901), 81-82.
[22] "The Grand Bank!—The Planters Bank!!" *The Natchez*, February 13, 1830.
[23] W. Nools to Charles Kimball Marshall, February 27, 1835, Charles Kimball Marshall Papers, Folder 2, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson (hereafter MDAH).
[24] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:64.

described one year as “a prosperous year, giving us a net increase of eight hundred and eleven white and two hundred and four colored members.”[25] As ministers discussed converts in economic terms of redemption and net gains, planters and speculators turned to faith in the state or a larger, primordial power advancing society and holding the whole game together.

Itinerant Preachers and Peddlers

If faith was at the center of lower Mississippi culture, and credit in each person’s character was of the utmost importance, then roving itinerants, especially those who preached faith in the Gospel and their social system of slave-labor, could be the greatest sources of both hope and anxiety. Peddlers of various kinds were well-known characters on frontier communities, supplying new products for curious residents across the countryside, but their reliability was often suspect. In addition to selling products, peddlers could also be steam doctors, book sellers, or gamblers. Such services were a boon to rural communities, providing them with medical help without a professionally-trained doctor or the latest popular books far from any bookstore. But the combination of their mobility and shifting identities placed them in a liminal space of society. One physician and wealthy slaveholder in Natchez complained in 1836 of the “heap of trouble in this country” caused by “freebooters,” and especially “landjobbers and slavedealers” who travelled back and forth between the lower Mississippi Valley and the newly-independent Texas.[26] The Methodist circuit-riders and Baptist preachers

[25] Ibid., 2:70.
[26] A.P. Merrill to Thomas Kinnicutt, June 18, 1836, Thomas Kinnicutt Papers, Box 2, Folder 3, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts (hereafter AAS). See also Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 121-124; Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 88, 226.

who scattered into the newly-settled portions of Mississippi often inspired faith in white settlers and planters, but the fear that they could be a counterfeit like Murrell often rose to the surface.

Elijah Skaggs was one of those travelling chameleons who both mirrored and frightened white southerners. Skaggs learned to be a professional gambling cheat—popularly known as a "sharper"—in the backwoods of Kentucky. He travelled to Nashville and toured throughout the Southwest to profit from the faro and monte games he set up. As card games of chance, faro and monte fit well into the cultural milieu of the lower Mississippi Valley that sought to make a quick fortune. But Skaggs was not an ordinary faro banker. He arrived in towns on horseback, "dressed in a frock-coat and pants of black broadcloth…a white shirt with standing collar, and around his neck was wound a white choker, while, resting on his cranium, was a black stove-pipe hat." The combination of his attire and "solemn young face" earned him the nickname the "preaching faro dealer." Dressed as an itinerant minister, Skaggs represented the trickster character type of peripatetic peddlers selling what the people wanted, and consciously mixing their belief in God with their belief in economic fortune. Just like the religious denominations of his time, Skaggs eventually created a large, nation-wide firm stretching from New York through New Orleans to California, in which "artists"—always "men of genteel appearance"—did the dirty work of conning suckers out of their money, while Skaggs raked in seventy-five percent of the profits.[27]

If Skaggs was a gambler and businessman disguised as a respectable Christian minister, Isaac Smith was just the opposite. Smith was a deacon of the Congregationalist Church from Litchfield, Maine who travelled for twenty years in the 1830s and 1840s up and down the

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[27] John Morris, *Wanderings of a Vagabond: An Autobiography* (New York: John Morris, 1873), 242-246; Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Viking, 2003), 119; Herbert Asbury, *Sucker's Progress: An Informal History of Gambling in America* (1938; repr., New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 149-154.

Mississippi River Valley selling Christian and secular books. He initially worked as an agent for the Vermont Bible Society, selling Bibles in the West, but at least by 1839 he began expanding his business to make contracts with other New England publishers to sell a variety of popular books on commission, including the "Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge," "Lives of the Presidents," and "Church History." "Brother Isaac," as fellow Christians called him, was given a particular territory in western Tennessee, northern Mississippi, and northern Alabama, in which he could hire other agents to expand sales throughout the region. In addition to selling books, however, Smith also routinely sold jewelry. He knew how to work a crowd into a frenzy, "hustle [customers] together…and make them bite sharp," doing so at times with fraudulent products like gilt watches advertised as gold watches. He seemed to have an honest conviction to spread the Gospel and other religious tracts, and he became well-regarded back home in Maine for his work in setting up a local academy and for his service as a deacon. But he also used that reputation as a Bible salesman on the frontier to create a flourishing business that allowed him to buy respectability back in Maine. In a frontier environment dependent on novel financial institutions and an enormous enslaved work force, itinerants of all sorts— gamblers, preachers, speculators, religious book sellers, and peddlers of any other kind—were often lumped together as anonymous and potentially dangerous men. The frontier depended on them but simultaneously feared them. In the same way, new residents of Mississippi and Louisiana were forced to put their faith in a potentially dangerous market that depended on unknown cotton factors and recently-bought slaves.[28]

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[28] The quotations on Smith working a crowd and advertising gilt watches as gold watches comes from W.B. Stearns to Isaac Smith, August 25, 1856, Isaac Smith Papers, AAS. See also Contract between Brattleboro Typographic Company and Isaac Smith, November 30, 1839, Os. Wilson to Isaac Smith, April 30, 1837, Crosby H. Wheelan to Isaac Smith, June 14, 1848, Abiel Avery to Isaac Smith, October 18, 1848, W.B. Stearns to Isaac Smith, March 18, 1857, Isaac Smith Papers, AAS; *History of Litchfield and an Account of its Centennial Celebration, 1895* (Augusta, Maine: Kennebec Journal, 1897), 314.

As itinerants of the Skaggs and Smith type advanced on the Mississippi Valley, so did regular licensed ministers in search of converts. Particularly in the new territories opened up for white settlement by Choctaw removal, Methodists were among the first to pour into interior cotton-producing areas like Madison County. Ministers described the unique ability of Methodist circuit riders to gain quick converts in this newly-settled land. "They had taken possession of the field," the minister John G. Jones wrote, which was "already white unto the harvest."[29] Although Jones's Biblical reference to fields "white unto the harvest" was not about cotton, the most apt image for opportunity in the Southwest was indeed a white field of cotton. Rev. William Winans, the Mississippi Methodist who had supported Talley's mission to the Choctaws, made the same analogy in an 1835 letter to another minister describing prospective converts as a "vast field, so white to the harvest."[30] The southwestern frontier was a land to gain fast wealth through cotton, and circuit riders could not help but see this particular metaphor as illustrative of their own intentions of raising up revivals and "profiting" with "net gains" by saving souls.

Prior to 1828, Jones described Madison County as having "only a scattered population," but among them was "a fair proportion of Methodist families and local preachers."[31] Fewer than five thousand inhabitants resided in the county in 1830, and almost half of them were enslaved African Americans, but among those nearly three thousand white Mississippians were John Shrock and Samuel Cole, both of whom were former itinerants who bought land in Madison County during the rush and began to preach locally. Jones himself was one of the early circuit riders of Hinds County and Madison County. Yet another, Orsamus L. Nash, quit the itinerancy to locate in Columbus, Mississippi and do God's work there.[32] Among Baptists, the Choctaw

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[29] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:370.
[30] William Winans to Orsamus L. Nash, August 29, 1835, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 8, Cain Archives.
[31] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:215.
[32] Jones, *History of Methodism* 2:216, 2:364.

Baptist Association in Choctaw County had already established thirty-four churches with one thousand members by 1834, after having no churches in the county in 1830.[33] Years later, one minister recalled the sudden burst of new religious activity at a camp meeting in former Chickasaw territory, writing that "sobs, tears, and shouts filled the air, and the whole encampment seemed to be overwhelmed with the divine presence."[34] As white settlers pushed into former Choctaw and Chickasaw territory, they were joined by the increasingly popular and powerful Methodist and Baptist denominations that searched the frontier for eager converts.

But the understanding of fields "already white unto the harvest" was not just metaphorical for these religious men, for they invested a great deal of their own economic interests in the cotton kingdom. In his famous narrative of the Southwest after living in Natchez for a few years, Joseph Holt Ingraham wrote that, like all white Mississippians, ministers participated in "the universal mania" for cotton planting. Without restraint by the stricter customs regarding lavish dress to which northern ministers generally adhered, Ingraham noted that Mississippi Methodists in particular attracted "many of the affluent and a majority of the merely independent planters, throughout the state."[35]

In particular, the Methodist practice of "locating" became increasingly popular in the early 1830s as a way for former circuit riders to become permanent residents in a particular location while remaining a licensed minister who often preached at a nearby church. This practice of locating allowed ministers to concentrate more of their efforts on the actual profits of the cotton kingdom rather than focus on ministering to those who profited. As one example, the

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[33] Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 79.
[34] Gene Ramsey Miller, *A History of North Mississippi Methodism, 1820-1900* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1966), 42.
[35] Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), 2:86, 2:12, 2:72.

minister Orsamus Nash, who decided to preach locally in Columbus, Mississippi, did so because he had accumulated a few hundred dollars in debt in 1835, and desired to join the planter class in east Mississippi. He found opportunity with a land agency owned by wealthy speculators, but all the while he continued to preach locally. William Winans was sad to hear that Nash was leaving the itinerancy, but he believed that if the Agency were profitable, and if Nash had "a conscience void of offense both towards God and towards men," then there could be "nothing objectionable in it."[36] Shrock also moved to Madison County being "sanguine of success in worldly matters," but he became "deeply involved in debt." Another Methodist, Rev. John A.J. Hawkins, located in 1829 when "fortunes were easily and rapidly acquired." Hawkins purchased a drug store in Port Gibson and asked the conference to preach locally. Not satisfied there, Hawkins purchased another drug store in Vicksburg and bought a cotton plantation on credit, but soon he was haunted by his creditors and forced to liquidate all his assets.[37] Every year, as more ministers joined the regular circuit riders, others left the itinerancy, a lifestyle that usually kept them from becoming large planters. Instead they preached locally and tried their hand in the secular affairs of speculating, planting, and shop-keeping, with seven leaving at the 1835 Mississippi Conference, and four in 1836 including Nash.[38]

Like the clergy, the evangelical laity invested in land for profit. Greenwood Leflore, the Choctaw chief who converted to Methodism under the guidance of Alexander Talley, had profited greatly under the terms of the 1830 removal treaty by increasing his ownership of land and people from 250 acres and 32 slaves to over 15,000 acres and about 400 slaves. With his

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[36] William Winans to Orsamus L. Nash, August 29, 1835, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 8, Cain Archives.
[37] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:216, 2:60-61.
[38] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1829-1839*, vol. 2, 398, 435. For another minister who located in Madison County but pursued wealth in other ways, see George W. Stewart, the "talented young physician," in Jones, *History of Methodism*, 3:61-63.

newfound prominence in the Mississippi planter class, Leflore had become popular enough among the voting population of Mississippi to be elected to the state House of Representatives and then re-elected in 1835. In 1842 Leflore was elected to the state Senate and quickly made close friends with the elite of the state including Jefferson Davis. With such elite connections, Leflore went in a joint speculative venture of approximately 60,000 acres in Texas. As the Methodist Church sent missionaries to Texas looking for converts, lay Methodists like Leflore looked to Texas as a land for easy, speculative profits. In one of the many convulsions of the frontier market, however, that land eventually plummeted in value, leaving Leflore and the other owners arguing over their liabilities.[39]

Ministers who located often did so to profit from the cotton mania, but white southerners often regarded local ministers as symbols of stability compared to itinerant ministers, who, like peddlers or gamblers, prompted anxiety about their fragile social order. Foremost among those anxieties was the fear of "counterfeit" preachers. While counterfeiters of bank notes proliferated across the South with operations based in Arkansas Territory, counterfeiters of respectable reverends also were common. Evangelicals had spread throughout the region and gained the confidence of settlers since the early decades of the nineteenth century, so those who posed as itinerants to hide their identity were of the worst nightmares for white southerners in frontier counties. One prominent example was a travelling anti-mission Baptist preacher who went by the name of William Biddle. Biddle styled himself the nephew of the famous naval commodore James Biddle and roamed throughout much of the country preaching, collecting money, and apparently promising marriage to a variety of young women along the way. A local Baptist minister in Franklin, Louisiana recalled that in 1826 Biddle had preached scathing sermons

[39] Nora Jeanne Shackleford, "The Leflore Family and Choctaw Indian Removal," (MA thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1967), 24-29.

against the greed of large-scale missionary societies for three months at his church, and along the way he collected three hundred dollars for his support. When Biddle left with a stolen mule and "a poor deluded young woman" still in Franklin, he continued to preach throughout the lower Mississippi Valley. He re-appeared on the radar of religious publications in early 1837 in Copiah County, was found out, and next headed for the Pearl River farther in the interior with a three-hundred-dollar bounty on his head.[40]

Due to the prevalence of traveling Methodist circuit riders, southwestern Methodists also had problems with detecting impostor preachers. In 1833, it came to the attention of the Mississippi Methodist leadership that a preacher in Natchez named Andrew Adams had left a wife in New York without a justifiable cause, and changed his name from Amos Adams to leave without a trace of his former life. Even with his prompt dismissal, the fears of impostor preachers who profited from gullible followers plagued the region, especially the Methodist church around Natchez following Adams's removal.[41] The story of a fraudulent missionary at an Arkansas tavern on the Mississippi River makes plain the common sentiment of the period. After expressing interest in learning how to play cards, the missionary of "genteel and dignified appearance and manner" gradually won three thousand dollars from a naive clerk, showing that all along "he was a thorough-bred gambler on a special mission" to defraud the clerk. "But that sanctimonious face," the clerk wondered, "under the mask of a missionary was a counterfeit." Like counterfeit notes, preachers travelled from town to town under the assumption that they were licensed, that their character could be credited as trustworthy. In the flush times of the 1830s, residents of the lower Mississippi Valley wanted to believe that their preachers were

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[40] *Southwestern Religious Luminary*, April 1837, 57, 60; *Southwestern Religious Luminary*, May 1837, 69-71.
[41] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:302-303, 2:308;

legitimate and that their money was backed by sound currency, but underneath their confidence were the lurking doubts that all around them were frauds.[42]

The story of highly-leveraged planters, suspected slave revolts, counterfeit notes, untrustworthy peddlers, and impostor preachers brings us back to the far-reaching phenomenon of John Murrell and his Mystic Clan. Although Stewart's account of Murrell was probably exaggerated, if not mostly untrue, the pervasiveness of this problem of counterfeit preachers in a bustling frontier society shows why the story took such firm root in the white southern imagination. Baptists in the 1830s were in the midst of a schism over large-scale missionary and tract societies, much of which centered on suspicions of greedy ministers and profit-minded religious institutions. In Mississippi in particular, one Baptist leader wrote that impostor anti-mission Baptists near Woodville, Mississippi preferred "to *make Christians by trickery*," and that they were "applauded as *wonderful and great tacticians*."[43] Like these other preachers who tore Baptist churches apart, Biddle gained followers by directing their anxiety at large-scale missionary societies, but once found out as a fraud, he perpetuated the same anxiety which he purportedly claim to alleviate.

Although impostor preachers were a problem throughout antebellum America, especially in frontier societies in both the North and South, the additional factors of an enormous cotton bubble and a newly-settled society with a majority enslaved population heightened white settlers' anxieties about any unknown travelling men looking to make a buck or raise money for the cause

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[42] Autobiography of Benjamin Chase, 2:135-138, Benjamin Dorrance Chase Papers, MDAH. For another example of a widely-travelled impostor preacher, see "A Base Impostor!!" *Spirit of Kosciusko*, July 7, 1838.

[43] Ashley Vaughn, quoted in Richard Aubrey McLemore, *A History of Mississippi Baptists, 1780-1970* (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 1971), 90. For more on the Baptist schism over benevolent societies, see Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For an account specifically on Mississippi, see Gordon A. Cotton, *Of Primitive Faith and Order: A History of the Mississippi Primitive Baptist Church, 1780-1974* (Raymond, Mississippi: Keith Press, 1974).

of evangelization. The story of Murrell duping innocent settlers had such a powerful purchase in the Southwest, and even across the rest of the South, because the story seemed so plausible and it played on those fears that were at a fever pitch. The religious element of Murrell's gang was not incidental to the story, but a central component in a society searching for stability and a source of firm unshakeable confidence.

After the arrest of Murrell, the suspected slave insurrection of Madison County in the summer of 1835 set off a firestorm of paranoia throughout the Southwest. When rumors of a slave rebellion began, white residents of this wealthy interior county began pressing slaves for answers, asking for names, and whipping them until they heard information. Not only were slaves suspected, but white residents of the county were named as co-conspirators. The inquisition began holding sham trials, hanging suspected slave stealers who they believed to be in league with the Murrell gang, and torturing each suspect to extract more names. By the end of the ordeal, some twenty slaves were executed along with a handful of white men.[44]

Although the fears of a slave rebellion were foremost among many Mississippians' minds in 1835, the southwestern clergy immediately saw the Murrell story and the Madison County slave conspiracy as a threat to themselves. The *Woodville Republican* reported that the two white Madison County men they knew to have been executed, Joshua Cotton and William Saunders, were "both steam doctors"—itinerant physicians of a new untested medicine—"and occasionally preachers." The newspaper added that those who were most suspected were roving itinerants of various kinds, including "gamblers, itenerant [sic] preachers, steam doctors, and clock pedlars [sic]."[45] These reports threw the Methodist minister William Winans into a frenzy, writing to his fellow minister in Columbus, Orsamus Nash, to ask if Cotton "was a Methodist Preacher, as the

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[44] Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 118-153; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 46-72.
[45] "Postscript: More News from Madison, Hinds, and Warren," *Woodville Republican*, July 18, 1835.

Franklin Republican represents him." Winans believed that these accusations were "to involve the *body* of *Methodist Itinerant* Preachers in suspicion of belonging to the Murrell gang." One local man even "endeavored to fix that suspicion on [fellow Methodist preacher] Brother Cooper personally!" Even as far away as the town of Franklin in the southern Louisiana bayou it had "been attempted to implicate the preachers of the Gospel, and, especially, *Itinerant Methodist Preachers*, in the plots of Murrell and in the mad and mischievous machinations of the Abolitionists."[46]

Only a couple years after the frenzy died down, William Gilmore Simms wrote a fictionalized version of the events which contained many of the central concerns of the 1830s Southwest along with the importance of religion to the story. In Simms's 1838 novel *Richard Hurdis: A Tale of Alabama*—which is set in the borderlands between Mississippi and Alabama—the primary antagonist leads the "Mystic Brotherhood," a vast conspiracy of criminals and rogues clearly inspired by the Murrell gang. Richard Hurdis, the hero of this particular "border romance" by Simms, receives the same kind of offer to join the Brotherhood that Virgil Stewart received when travelling with Murrell. Importantly, *Richard Hurdis*'s antagonist—who goes by Clement Foster, though Hurdis later finds out he "had twenty other names"—poses as an itinerant minister in all of his journeys. "With the cassock of a sanctified profession, which we no more dare assail now than we did four hundred years ago, he made his way not only at little or no expense, but with great profit." Much like Murrell's preaching to Brother Nobs, Foster prayed at a tavern in Columbus, Mississippi, paying "for his bacon and greens with his eloquence," as no other form of payment was desired.[47]

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[46] William Winans to Orsamus L. Nash, August 29, 1835, Winans to E.N. Talley, September 4, 1835, Box 17, Folder 8, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives.
[47] William Gilmore Simms, *Richard Hurdis: A Tale of Alabama* (1838; repr., Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 282.

Simms's ties between itinerant preachers and the Murrell gang played on the common anxieties about preachers in the 1830s, but his descriptions of the Mystic Brotherhood's relationship with the rest of southern society revealed the fragile economic bonds of the cotton frontier. Foster gathered 1,500 men to join his gang, "not professing roguery," but "professing religion, law, physic, planting, shopkeeping." In short, his men were of respectable character. This "fellowship of risk and profits" was "a nice system of cobwebs…as snares to catch and enslave the feeble and confiding" that outsiders could not see. With the vast networks of the Mystic Brotherhood, "crime of all sorts and complexions, seemed reduced to a perfect system, and the hands which ministered seemed to move rather like those of automata than of thinking and resolving men." This system of crime terrified white settlers, but just as pervasive fears of Murrell and slave-stealers reflected the anxious underbelly of the cotton kingdom's flush times, so did Hurdis's description of the Mystic Brotherhood reflect southern anxieties about their social system. Planters, local merchants, and cotton factors all could seem much more like the hands of "automata" in a vast unseen system than "thinking and resolving men" who had control over their economic destiny. The fields full of enslaved people were reduced to mindless "hands which ministered" on the cotton frontier. Yet white southerners depended on this vast economic network of capital, credit, and current prices to propel themselves into unprecedented prosperity. They grasped desperately for something they trusted—a minister or their local church—or they desired to believe in a divine Providence that controlled such a system, but even these institutions, they feared, had become overrun by confidence-men looking to turn a quick profit.[48]

[48] Simms, *Richard Hurdis*, 276, 280, 291.

The Self-Fashioning Preacher: Theodore Clapp

In this fraught environment, some of the more enterprising preachers could hit it big as mass-revivalists, instruments of God, and celebrities, but the stakes were high since even the best of preachers came under the suspicious gaze of an anxious public. Two individuals exemplified this tension between celebrity and anxiety. Theodore Clapp and John Newland Maffitt each created large followings in their different ways. They published sermons, books, and memoirs, but they appealed to different audiences—Clapp to elites in New Orleans and throughout the lower Mississippi Valley, and Maffitt to a wide swath of people throughout the country more interested in the emotion of a dramatic revival. But each minister shared two characteristics of this particular period and region: they self-consciously crafted a God they could preach to large audiences, and they received widespread suspicion and resistance as frauds. In a culture that thrived on different forms of credit, men who successfully spread belief in God were naturally at the center of these conflicting forces.

The path to success for Theodore Clapp may have been unusual, but his difference from more orthodox southern preachers does not make the general themes of his life less relevant to understanding the peculiar place of ministers in the 1830s lower Mississippi Valley. Clapp grew up in Calvinist western Massachusetts in the early years of the republic. In his youth, he experienced doubts regarding the revealed religion as taught at Andover Seminary. Despite his inability to reconcile God's sovereignty and predestination with God's justice and righteousness, he became an ordained minister in 1817 and took a temporary appointment in Lexington, Kentucky, as a personal chaplain and teacher. There he met Rev. Sylvester Larned, the first Presbyterian minister in New Orleans and a famous preacher, who had been invited to speak on a Saturday afternoon in Lexington's Presbyterian church. The substance and style of Larned's

sermons became Clapp's blueprint for his own later in life. Larned did not get bogged down in "abstruse theory," according to Clapp, but spoke in eloquent yet simple terms with the pure object "to persuade men to become good."[49]

Enamored with Larned's sermons, Clapp took a steamboat to New Orleans in 1821 to become a temporary minister at Larned's old Presbyterian church after Larned's death the year before. Although Clapp initially feared the prospect of giving extemporaneous sermons, as his new congregation desired, he quickly found that he was a successful orator. His ability to impress many of the elites who were in attendance for his first sermon, including members of Congress, "physicians, enlightened men, many strangers of distinction, and the conductors of the daily press," puffed up his ego and encouraged him to continue attracting such large audiences.[50] There in New Orleans, he took advice from a well-known, eloquent lawyer on oratory that he claimed "was worth more, as to the secret of speaking well in the pulpit, than all which I had heard from the professors at Andover." If ministers would only learn an easy and simple way of preaching extemporaneously, Clapp argued, "people would find the church a more interesting place than the opera, theatre, ball room, museum, or evening party."[51] As Clapp even admitted, he had "a morbid sensitiveness" to his own popularity "which betrays…an extremely low condition of personal piety." His desire to become popular in the eyes of the regional elites drove him harder to compete with all the other amusements of New Orleans. Clapp did not just preach the Gospel, he self-consciously entertained a sophisticated audience and crafted a cosmopolitan identity that could be published in local newspapers.[52]

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[49] Theodore Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches and Recollections, During a Thirty-Five Years' Residence in New Orleans* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1858), 43-44, 50.
[50] Ibid., 86-87.
[51] Ibid., 90, 93.
[52] Ibib., 86.

But his self-fashioning and entertaining quickly got him into trouble. Already by 1824, accusations had surfaced that Clapp's religious views were too liberal or even heretical. In 1826, charges were filed against him in the Mississippi Presbytery—of which New Orleans was a part—that Clapp had called the doctrine of foreordination—that is, that God had chosen some prior to creation to be condemned—"shocking to common sense," and that he held several balls "composed of slaves and free people of colour" in an "unexemplary manner."[53] Clapp repeatedly denied the doctrinal charges brought against him, arguing that since his sermons were not written word-for-word, he was liable to make theological errors. After a contentious relationship with the rest of the Presbytery, two leading ministers James Smylie and John L. Montgomery, formed a committee of prosecution for a formal heresy trial in 1832, complete with twenty-seven witnesses alleging that Clapp rejected orthodox Presbyterian doctrine. Clapp responded with a letter blackmailing six of the witnesses, alleging that he had a 300-page manuscript that would damage the Presbytery and "would be gratifying to the enemies of religion."[54] When the trial was set to begin, he avoided attending, either by claiming he was too sick to get out of bed or by fleeing north to Kentucky with his wife's poor health as an excuse. In his absence, the Presbytery convicted him of heresy and officially dismissed him from the Presbyterian Church in December 1832. Clapp, in turn, revealed his rumors against the witnesses and claimed that there was a conspiratorial cabal set against him.[55] One New Yorker whose daughter attended Clapp's church wrote that Clapp's behavior was "more befitting an histrionic performer than a Rev. Divine." His

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[53] John Duffy, ed., *Parson Clapp of the Strangers' Church of New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 19.
[54] *A Report of the Trial of the Rev. Theodore Clapp, Before the Mississippi Presbytery, at their Sessions in May and December, 1832* (New Orleans: Hotchkiss and Co., 1833), 97-98; Duffy, 24-25.
[55] Duffy, ed., *Parson Clapp*, 27-34.

"powers of oratory have led captive silly women" and "Unitarian Easterlings," he added, suspecting Clapp of mass deception.[56]

Although Clapp initially fumed at his dismissal from the Presbytery, he quickly saw it as an opportunity to establish himself as an independent preaching entrepreneur. Stripped of any institutional body overseeing his behavior, Clapp found that he was only beholden to the demands of his congregation. In a final speech to the Presbytery after his dismissal, he gloated, "My popularity in Louisiana would be much augmented rather than lessened by an excision from your body."[57] And he was right; despite a few members who left the church, Clapp was wildly popular in New Orleans and attracted visitors who wanted to see the spectacle he had created. In 1834 he preached a sermon essentially declaring his independence from institutional church structures and rejecting the doctrine of eternal punishment altogether. Clapp's theology became increasingly detached from orthodox Christianity and more focused on a general sense of human goodness and flourishing. Rejecting the notion that unbelievers were condemned, Clapp retorted that "*faith in the Son of God* is nothing more nor less than goodness of heart and life."[58] As planters travelling to New Orleans for business flocked to his church to hear the famous preacher, his sermons gained the reputation of attracting transients, and thus was nicknamed the "Strangers' Church of New Orleans." The church was reputed to be "thronged with gay and fashionable worshippers," "the *elite* and *haut ton* of the emporium."

The New Orleans *Delta* and *Picayune* began to publish his sermons, and pamphlets containing his sermons dispersed throughout the region. "Throughout the whole Southwest," wrote a Louisiana correspondent, "and on the western waters whose commerce generally

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[56] John Pintard to Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, February 19, 1833, in *Letters from John Pintard to his Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1941), 4:127.
[57] *A Report of the Trial of the Rev. Theodore Clapp*, 31-32.
[58] Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 96-97, 161-162.

converges to New Orleans, his sermons are extensively circulated" in steamboats, exchanges, saloons, and in homes of both the indigent and wealthy.[59] Listeners attributed the success to his liberal theology, but Clapp wrote in his autobiography that his sermons were based on the experiences of the people of New Orleans. He explicitly "endeavored to accommodate" to the views of his listeners and incorporate his "daily out-door experiences" into his Sunday sermons.[60] In the intellectually liberal, cosmopolitan environment of New Orleans, Clapp thrived as a chief entertainer and leader of the city. He hosted phrenologists in the 1830s and 1840s as speakers in his church, and he received rave reviews in newspapers for his "independent church untrammeled by sectarian forms."[61] Clapp's gradual conversion to Unitarianism was certainly genuine, but he also understood that his sermons were a form of local entertainment—a therapeutic belief in which all people were eventually saved—that was popular in New Orleans precisely because of its central focus on humanity and a more secular understanding of human flourishing. The elites of New Orleans and visitors from the region desired a practical theology and morality that supported their methods of gaining wealth. With such popularity, Clapp liked to boast that "merchants and planters who came to New Orleans…to transact business never left the city without going to '*the American theatre, the French opera, and Parson Clapp's church*.'"[62]

In his accommodation to the day-to-day experiences of people in New Orleans, Clapp began to publicize his support for slavery as part of his general appeal to southwestern white

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[59] Woodsman [pseud.], "Shreveport Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 3, 1852.
[60] Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 283.
[61] Duffy, ed., *Parson Clapp*, 37-40.
[62] Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 251. On Clapp's central focus on humanity, he wrote, "Virtue, heaven, immortality, exist not, and never will exist for us, but as they exist in the perceptions, feelings, thoughts of our mind." See *Autobiographical Sketches*, 19. For more on Clapp and Unitarians in the South, see John Allen Macaulay, *Unitarianism in the Antebellum South: The Other Invisible Institution* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

society. Unitarians had gained the reputation of supporting the abolition of slavery, so Clapp wanted to make it clear to listeners in the lower Mississippi Valley that he was loyal to the white South's enslavements of African Americans. In 1838 he preached a sermon supporting slavery that was reprinted in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*. Much of Clapp's support for slavery reflected some of the other recent pro-slavery arguments of the 1830s.[63] First, he discussed slavery as it existed in the Bible, and argued explicitly against any developing notion in liberal Christian circles that "doctrines and principles…could be understood and carried into effect by degrees." "The principles of morality," as expressed in the Bible, "are, like their author, immutable."[64] Therefore, God would not condone slavery in Scripture yet oppose it in the present.[65] Second, slaveholders, at least in theory, were benevolent paternalists, who "hold the African in bondage for his own *good* and the *public order*." Slavery needed to be perpetuated in the American South out of "Christian love, forbearance and equity."[66] Third, if slavery was "an obligation to labor for a master, without one's consent," as the eighteenth-century English philosopher William Paley argued, then labor without consent occurred in many different circumstances as well, including required militia service. Fourth, slavery was profitable. "From

[63] For one major contemporary defense of slavery, see Rev. James Smylie, *A Review of a Letter from the Presbytery of Chillicothe, to the Presbytery of Mississippi, on the Subject of Slavery* (Woodville, Mississippi: Wm. A. Norris and Co., 1836). Ironically for Clapp, Smylie was one of the two committee members who investigated Clapp's teachings and dismissed him from the Presbytery. The literature on evangelical defenses of slavery is vast, but for a couple important works, see Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

[64] Theodore Clapp, *Slavery: A Sermon, Delivered in the First Congregational Church in New Orleans, April 15, 1838* (New Orleans: John Gibson, 1838), 31, 18.

[65] For an excellent study on anti-slavery Protestants' shift to a belief in the gradual revelation of God's will, see Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[66] Clapp, *Slavery*, 58.

various causes," Clapp argued, slave-labor was "more lucrative than any other that could be employed upon the delta of the Mississippi."[67]

Clapp himself owned at least one slave throughout his life, at some points a man to act as sexton at his church, at other points a domestic servant for his home.[68] His support of slavery was part of a more general admiration for the character of the lower Mississippi Valley, which he described as "not inferior even to Massachusetts and Connecticut in the manifestations of moral excellence, truth, honor, [and] justice." He wrote that those held in bondage lived in "neat white cottages" full of furniture and accommodations like "the great body of laborers in the free states," though without white laborers' "intelligence and enterprise."[69]

With the right read of his audience in New Orleans and the inquiring visitors who showed up on Sundays, Clapp was able to achieve enormous financial success as a preaching entrepreneur. He gained the support of many wealthy congregants, yet his most important supporter was not even a church member or a Christian, but a wealthy Jewish philanthropist named Judah Touro. Touro's patronage, in fact, was necessary to begin his ministry in New Orleans in the first place. Before agreeing to be full-time minister at what was originally the city's Presbyterian church, Clapp discovered that the church was $45,000 in debt. To pay this debt, the church applied to the state legislature to hold a lottery to raise funds. According to Clapp, "the scheme was sold to the agents of Yates and McIntyre, New York for twenty-five thousand dollars."[70] As New York merchants reaping the profits of a lottery started to support a New Orleans church, Touro, a merchant originally from New England, paid the remaining

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[67] Ibid., 4-5, 39.
[68] T. Clapp, New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S. Census, 1850, Slave Schedule; Timothy F. Reilly, "Parson Clapp of New Orleans: Antebellum Social Critic, Religious Radical, and Member of the Establishment," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 16 (Spring 1975): 185-186.
[69] Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 63, 65..
[70] Ibid., 94.

$20,000 to buy the church. Although some New Englanders were suspicious of a Jew owning a Christian church, Clapp praised his generous patron for his liberality. Touro, a successful businessman in the hub of the domestic slave trade, he claimed, exemplified true Christian character in his bequests of around $500,000 to various causes throughout his life. Besides this large sum, Touro never charged rent for the church and gave almost the entirety of the church's annual income of about $5,000 in pew rents to Clapp. Touro also helped Clapp with any other expenses, adding up to about $20,000, Clapp estimated.[71] Near the end of his life, Clapp was able to quit his ministry in New Orleans and buy $20,000 of lake-shore property in Chicago in addition to his retirement home in Louisville, Kentucky.[72] Just as Clapp had hoped, his ability to broadcast a message of universal salvation and therapeutic Christianity to southern elites brought him fortune from the region as well as widespread fame.

Yet many more orthodox and conservative Christians became increasingly suspicious of Clapp and resented his growing celebrity. In the early years of his feud with the Presbyterian Church, a fellow minister in New Orleans wrote that Clapp had thrown off his connection with the Presbyterian Church—which was not quite true yet—but that he was "still sound in the faith." But his preaching, the minster feared, was not "well calculating to make Christians."[73] Perhaps this minister meant "orthodox" Protestants, because later critics voiced their disgust that Clapp's popularity continued to grow. By 1844 a Methodist minister, William Curtiss—who had previously shared an amicable relationship with Clapp—wrote privately that he prized his popularity "far more than the salvation of souls."[74] The prominent Methodist William Winans

[71] Ibid., 94-103; Timothy F. Reilly, "The Conscience of a Colonizationist: Parson Clapp and the Slavery Dilemma," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 39 (Fall 1998): 437. For more on Judah Touro, see Max J. Kohler, "Judah Touro, Merchant and Philanthropist," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 13 (1905): 93-111.
[72] "Great Sale of Real Estate in Chicago," *Charleston Courier*, October 9, 1855.
[73] W.M. Goodrich to William Winans, October 13, 1830, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[74] W.M. Curtiss to Benjamin Drake, December 9, 1844, Benjamin M. Drake Papers, Box 4, Folder 22, MDAH.

met with Clapp extensively, and found that this "scarcely-disguised wolf" was averse to "experimental religion" and arrogantly "gloried in his superior rationality."[75] Despite "doing all he can, in his ministry, to deserve universal desertion and contempt," Winans wrote furiously, "his congregations continue large and brilliant."[76] For these Methodists and quite a few other Christians of the lower Mississippi Valley, Clapp was a fraud who posed as a Christian but gathered larger crowds because his sham-religion played to those "affinities [that] are not very unlike depraved human nature."[77]

Clapp and the Strangers' Church represented one creative extreme of the religious self-formation encouraged by the lower Mississippi Valley's yearning for faith. Yet his success in fashioning such an attractive God brought suspicion from outsiders and criticism from other Christians who saw his church as a heretical bastion that only encouraged the region's vices. Although other parts of America experienced the same kind of creative religious self-formation, Clapp's was peculiar to New Orleans and the surrounding area. For southwestern planters, merchants, and professionals, Clapp's equation of enlightened human beings with God could give them faith in their social system without the baggage of self-sacrifice or criticism of their wealth. In this sense, Clapp was a successful product of his region, a foreigner who arrived in the capital of southern commerce and sold a liberal pro-slavery faith that matched his religious consumers' ideas of who God should be.

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[75] William Winans to Benjamin Drake, February 23, 1843, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 11, Cain Archives.
[76] William Winans to Benjamin Drake, January 24, 1844, Drake-Magruder Papers, Box 13, Folder 6, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (hereafter LLMVC)
[77] Woodsman, "Shreveport Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 3, 1852.

“Like Omnipotence on Earth”: John Newland Maffitt, the Preaching Entrepreneur

In the midst of Clapp’s self-fashioning, John Newland Maffitt arrived in New Orleans. Clapp recalled in his autobiography that “a clergyman of great celebrity passed through New Orleans in the autumn of 1834.” Although Clapp left the clergyman unnamed, readers familiar with famous travelling preachers of the time would know that this was John Newland Maffitt, a Methodist minister and renowned revivalist who had arrived in the Southwest in 1833 and began tours throughout the region over the next few years. Naturally Clapp met Maffitt and debated the points of theology that set them apart. He had recently announced his belief in universal salvation, but according to Clapp, Maffitt argued, “The doctrine of *God’s infinite, eternal wrath* is a main pillar in the gospel of our Lord.”[78] In some ways, Maffitt was more typical of southern Protestant ministers than Clapp. He held more orthodox evangelical beliefs, he supported revivals, and he was also an itinerant, a position many ministers held for at least a portion of their careers. But Maffitt and Clapp both became famous in the lower Mississippi Valley by leveraging widespread belief in God and in themselves to propel them to a successful career. Even more so than Clapp, Maffitt’s fame was national, consistently making headlines in the *Christian Advocate* and the *National Police Gazette*. From the beginning of his career until his death, accusations of infidelity and impropriety dogged him, and he always seemed to be in the midst of a libel suit against his opponents, but his popular appeal throughout the country never seemed to falter from controversy.

Maffitt was an Irishman raised as a Methodist in Dublin, but like Clapp his career as a preacher began in New England soon after moving to the United States with his young wife in 1819. Within the first few years of his connection with the New York Methodist Conference,

[78] Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 176.

Maffitt created a stir as he travelled and preached through New England. At the age of 27 he had already published a memoir of his life titled *Tears of Contrition*. The next year, 1822, accusations swirled that he had told other ministers that he doubted the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, that he secretly mocked those penitents who were converted at his New England revivals, and that he displayed "loose, light and lascivious behaviour" with "certain young ladies."[79] When these accusations were published in the *New England Galaxy*, Maffitt sued the editor for libel but lost in court.[80] Already in the 1820s, pamphlets supporting and opposing Maffitt circulated widely. One anonymous writer called him a "theological swindler," "a notorious impostor" who did not believe what he preached, and a licentious hypocrite, preaching for monetary gain and his own vanity.[81] In 1831, he decided that he would pursue "worldly matters" and left his connection with the New York Conference.[82]

Maffitt's choice for where to pursue such "worldly matters" was telling. In the 1830s, the frontier for gaining easy money and new evangelical converts was in the Southwest. His reputation there began with glowing reports. Sometime early in 1833 he arrived in Louisville, Kentucky as an anonymous Methodist preacher, but he began a six-week long revival that resulted in hundreds of conversions. The local minister found that Maffitt was "a splendid man, highly imaginative, rich in metaphor…and always eloquent and very theatrical." Even compared to the famous Methodist revivalist Henry Bascom of Kentucky, Maffitt exceeded him as the most "official, and able conductors of revivals."[83] Over the next couple years, Maffitt toured

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[79] *Report of the Trial of Mr. John N. Maffitt, Before a Council of Ministers, of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Boston: True and Greene, 1823), 12-13.
[80] Joseph T. Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections of Editorial Life* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852), 1:105-110.
[81] Candour [pseud.], *Theological Pretenders, or, an Analysis of the Character and Conduct of the Rev. J.N. Maffit, Preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Society* (New York, 1830), 7, 23-24, 31.
[82] Robert E. Cray, Jr., "High Style and Low Morals: John Newland Maffitt and the Methodist Church, 1794-1850," *Methodist History* 45 (October 2006): 36.
[83] S. Luckett to John C. Burruss, February 6, 1833, John C. Burruss Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, LLMVC.

mostly in the Southwest, making lively appearances in New Orleans, Natchez, and the surrounding areas that had been settled for at least a decade or so. In New Orleans, where the Methodist clergy felt they were "weak handed," Maffitt was described as "a Host of himself" with "the power through God…to slay the Soldier in the field of Battle."[84] After a revival in Natchez, Maffitt moved to the small town of Woodville, Mississippi, south of Natchez. Woodville was the county seat of Wilkinson County, home of over 11,000 inhabitants, nearly 8,000 of whom were enslaved.[85] Maffitt's enthusiastic preaching made a particular impact on the most respectable of Woodville's sizeable planter class. "The Judge and many Gentlemen of the Bar," the Woodville minister, William Winans, bragged, "were among those who openly bore testimony to the power with which [Maffitt] preached the Cross of Christ."[86]

As Maffitt scorched the earth with his revivalist enthusiasm, he extracted money from those respectable converts, both for local Methodist churches and himself. His preaching in New Orleans helped to raise three thousand dollars in subscriptions for the erection of a church on Poydras Street. The remaining ten thousand dollars needed for the church was put up as a loan by the wealthy Methodist benefactor, Edward McGehee, placing confidence in Maffitt as the new preacher at the Poydras Street church.[87] The *Times-Picayune* called on the rest of the city of New Orleans to be generous to Maffitt and the local Methodist church. "When a spirit of enterprize and adventure is animating every class of citizen," the newspaper wrote, "when the wings of commerce are waxing with every breeze the treasures of our native soil to be exchanged for the luxuries of foreign regions…shall the voice of religion be paralyzed and silent?"[88] For himself,

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[84] W. Nools to Charles Kimball Marshall, February 27, 1835, Charles Kimball Marshall Papers, Folder 2, MDAH.
[85] *Abstract of the Returns of the Fifth Census*, (Washington: Duff Green, 1832), 36.
[86] William Winans to Rev. Lewis Garrett, May 8, 1835, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 8, Cain Archives.
[87] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:348-349.
[88] "New Methodist Church," *Times-Picayune*, March 18, 1838.

various local churches generally allowed Maffitt to give extra lectures on particular topics, such as education, which would only admit paying attendees. Although some expressed concern that Maffitt's converts were prone to backsliding once the excitement calmed down, most reveled in the rapid growth of both converts and money.[89]

To strengthen his presence in the region, Maffitt became co-editor of a new Nashville-based Methodist newspaper in 1833, the *Western Methodist*. With subscribers in both West Tennessee and Mississippi, Maffitt gained a platform for his sermons, writings, and poems that would become essential to increasing the popularity of his preaching. While he was nominally co-editor of the journal with the Methodist Lewis Garrett, Maffitt was rarely in Nashville for the actual work of editing a newspaper. Instead, he continued touring through the Southwest, raising money for the *Western Methodist*, acting as official agent for collecting funds to support LaGrange College in northwestern Alabama, and contributing a few articles here and there. In the summer of 1834, he held a months-long revival in Huntsville, Alabama, reportedly attracting thousands from the likes of drunkards, gamblers, swearers, in addition to planters and professionals. It was also at this point that Maffitt began to style himself "the Stranger," paralleling the successful anonymity of Clapp's "Strangers' Church" in New Orleans.[90] As Maffitt toured, he often encountered resistance, presumably from people who either suspected a "stranger" for a preacher, or from those who had heard of his dubious past in New England. In one town he was "calumniated, pelted with rotten eggs and hung in effigy," but he was apparently able to convert even some of the most hard-hearted who previously had only slandered him.[91]

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[89] W.H. Richardson to William Winans, April 7, 1835, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, Cain Archives.
[90] "Lagrange College," *Western Methodist*, November 8, 1833; "Revival in Huntsville," *Western Methodist*, August 1, 1834. For identity as "the Stranger," see "Huntsville, Alabama," *Western Methodist*, August 22, 1834.
[91] William Winans to Lewis Garrett, May 8, 1835, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 8, Cain Archives.

In addition to raising funds and gaining converts, however, Maffitt was able to use the *Western Methodist* as a platform from which he could launch his literary career. In June 1834, articles appeared advertising Maffitt's future publications. Subscriptions were raised for the publication of his *Oratorical Dictionary*, a handbook for "the practical business of public speaking," containing words for the "higher English scholar or the professional gentleman."[92] The paper also published advertisements for Maffitt's future book of poems to be titled "Man," which later appeared in 1839 but simply under the title "Poems" alongside a separate book of sermons.[93] He even began to make a temporary home in Natchez in 1836 after officially separating from Garrett and the *Western Methodist* to try his hand at his own journal, the *Mississippi Christian Herald*, supported by the Mississippi Methodist Conference. And still Maffitt travelled and preached, giving lectures along the way on various topics from mechanics, education, money, and global revolutions. With his reputation for eloquence, revivalist energy, and expertise on various topics, he reached the pinnacle of his public career with a position as Chairman of the Department of Elocution and Belles Lettres at Lagrange College in 1837 and finally Congressional Chaplain in 1841.[94]

In his sermons, but especially in his more far-reaching lectures, Maffitt touched on subjects that resonated with the southwestern public that paralleled Theodore Clapp's method of appealing to his regional audience. At the heart of Maffitt's appeal was his admiration of American—and especially southwestern—society and his elevation of mankind to something

[92] John Newland Maffitt, *The Oratorical Dictionary* (Nashville: Western Methodist Office, 1835), iii-iv. Promotional ads for Maffitt's publications in *Western Methodist*, June 13, June 20, and July 25, 1834.
[93] Maffitt, *Poems* (Louisville, Kentucky: Prentice and Weissenger, 1839); Maffitt, *Pulpit Sketches* (Louisville, Kentucky: W. Harrison Johnston, 1839).
[94] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:345; Anna G. Taylor to William Winans, December 29, 1836, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 18, Cain Archives; W.H. Richardson to William Winans, April 7, 1835, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, Cain Archives; Cray, "High Style," 37. As one example of his lectures, see Maffitt, "Era of Revolution: An Oration," *Western Methodist*, March 21 and March 28, 1834.

like divinity. Maffitt identified the people of the “South West” as “pious specimens of the true American character,” “never satisfied with the past—in religion—sentiment—pathos—affection,” virtue, and other glowing traits.[95]

In particular, Maffitt was enamored with the region’s push for commercial progress through technological innovation. As the spree for chartering banks and railroad corporations was near its peak in 1836, Maffitt spoke in Vicksburg on “The Glory of Mechanism.” Mechanism—which Maffitt understood as the material advancements that distinguished different civilizations—was the defining feature of national identity. Yet even more important than perfecting the mechanical arts of society was imitating “the Most High, the mechanist whose work should stand forever.” As white Mississippians chartered railroad banks and began to build the infrastructure of the cotton kingdom, they were not only manifesting their own peculiar national identity, according to Maffitt, they were building up their collective minds into the divine image.[96]

Maffitt also claimed that the path to divinity was not solely through building up the mind, however, it was through conveying ideas to the masses and transforming public opinion. Maffitt sold his *Oratorical Dictionary* on the basis that “expression in eloquence is…an approximation to spirituality.” “Man becomes like God,” he wrote, “when he can by a word unchain the impulses” of goodness “which ever throbbed in the bosom of humanity.”[97] Using the American Revolution as an example, Maffitt wrote that “opinion influences the will of community, and the public will, when aroused to decisive measures is like Omnipotence on earth.” To study the leaders of the American Revolution, the Irishman argued, was to see “the great sum or aggregate

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[95] “An Editor’s Letter to Himself,” *Western Methodist*, May 2, 1834.
[96] Anna G. Taylor to William Winans, December 29, 1836, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 18, Cain Archives.
[97] Maffitt, *Oratorical Dictionary*, xvi, xviii.

of human actions" as well as "God behind the smoke of conflict," who "moved the machinery of independence." Much like Clapp's praise for New Orleans and his belief in the innate goodness of mankind, Maffitt publicly admired white Americans of the Southwest and compared their spread of civilization, Christianity, and knowledge as god-like acts. Although the processes of mortgaging land and slaves, selling cotton, buying stock, and trading bank notes constantly tested the boundaries of belief in the Southwest, Maffitt assured listeners that the risks were underwritten by God who moved the machinery of modern capitalism in the cotton kingdom.[98]

As he gained fame and wealth, however, Maffitt, like Clapp, encountered resistance by both the clergy and the secular press. Some regarded Maffitt as more harm than good for the state of Christianity. He might burn a town to the ground with revivals, but critics charged that converts went back to their former ways more stubborn than they were before.[99] Others charged him with deception, that his adjective-laden sermons were a fancy veneer to cover a lack of theological or intellectual knowledge. "You think at one moment that you discover a substance," wrote one critic, "grasp at it, and lo! 'tis moonshine."[100] One newspaper witnessed a Maffitt lecture in Louisville, and remarked that "save in the way of hyperbole and awkward, mixed metaphors, festooned with no small amount of floridity," the speech "was quite common-place."[101]

Beyond theological vacuity, Maffitt also confronted consistent allegations of sexual impropriety with women throughout his career. He married Ann Carnie in Ireland while just twenty years old, a few years before they moved to the United States. Together they had seven

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[98] Maffitt, "Era of Revolution: An Oration," *Western Methodist*, March 21, 1834.
[99] William Winans to Charles K. Marshall, October 18, 1852, William Winans Papers, Box 18, Folder 14, Cain Archives.
[100] W. Nools to Charles Kimball Marshall, February 27, 1835, Charles Kimball Marshall Papers, Folder 2, MDAH.
[101] *Times-Picayune*, Novemeber 10, 1847.

children, but rumors of Maffitt's "excessive gallantry" with other young women began to circulate in his early years of itinerancy, and Ann left with the children in 1830.[102] Beyond "excessive gallantry," one early critic noticed that of all his followers, "there is but *one male* in the whole number."[103] While he and his wife slowly worked out a divorce by the late 1830s, Maffitt toured through the Southwest as a freelance revivalist, making a reputation as particularly popular with young women along the way.[104] Observers in Nashville remarked that Maffitt paid undue attention to young women. His "peculiar *proclivity*" was apparent one night at the Tennessee revival, when "his sole attentions were paid, the entire night, to a beautiful lady of fashion, the elegant and accomplished Miss H. of Nashville." Such a scene caused "a mild reproof" from the presiding elder of the local Methodist district.[105] By 1847, Maffitt had run into trouble yet again, this time with allegations of indecent exposure to a woman who was a servant at the house in which he was temporarily staying. Although Maffitt insisted it was a mistake, the Methodist clergy seemed to think this was not the first time such an accident had occurred with the preacher.[106]

In many respects Maffitt's story does not sound particularly southern—he was a national celebrity after all, and his most famous scandal occurred in the 1840s in New York. Evangelical preachers in both the North and South could become extraordinarily popular and financially successful through eloquent preaching. They also increasingly profited from publications

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[102] Cray, "High Style," 32-36.
[103] Candour, *Theological Pretenders*, 24, 8.
[104] *American National Biography*, s.v. "John Newland Maffitt"; Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 21-22.
[105] Moses Elsemore, *An Impartial Account of the Life of the Rev. John N. Maffitt, with a Narrative of the Difficulties Attending His First Marriage, and a Circumstantial and Correct History of All the Facts of His Late Marriage to Miss Smith, of Brooklyn, and the Causes of Her Death, with Many Particulars Never Before Published* (New York: John F. Feeks, 1848), 11.
[106]Cray, "High Style," 39. For more contemporary accounts of suspicion regarding Maffitt and women, see "Johnny Maffitt and the Ladies," *Times-Picayune*, March 23, 1842.

directed towards a growing evangelical audience. And charges of preachers being impostors was common to both regions. These similarities suggest that the economic and social dislocations occurring throughout the antebellum North were also common to the South, especially along their western frontiers. Yet the distinction between the Northwest and Southwest was in the degree of anxiety caused by the more volatile export-economy of the Southwest along with the extreme paranoia that an untrustworthy roving preacher might spark a mass slave insurrection.

Beyond just vague spiritual platitudes, Maffitt's message of a mechanical society governed by God through the popular will struck a comforting chord in the lower Mississippi Valley. In the machine-like society Maffitt described to his listeners, enslaved people would not rebel, and the fluctuations of prices and railroad bank stocks were directed by God through the vehicle of the market's demands. As southern planters and merchants were still constructing this society through the bodies of enslaved African Americans, the demand for belief in a providential God who guided their actions was supplied by evangelicals like Maffitt. With speculators hyping new bank stocks and Maffitt encouraging their optimism, it seemed that nobody could lose on an investment, and the price of cotton and land would continue to rise inexorably. But underneath the surface of loose credit and revivalistic belief was the fear of another Murrell—a sham preacher who had sold them a worthless god, stole their enslaved property, and took their money in exchange. Clapp and Maffitt were the most successful of these ministers because they understood the religious market better than others, and they had the oratorical skills to sell that belief. But they could never solve the problem of doubt that lurked beneath a society built on credit between planter and factor and between preacher and layperson.

In 1837—after the federal government demanded payment in specie for federal lands, credit tightened from England through the United States, and the price of cotton plummeted—

those doubts rose to the surface. Investors in New York and London lost confidence in highly-leveraged planters. Once-valuable railroad bank notes turned into worthless shinplasters. The years preceding the Panic of 1837 hinted at what was to come, that human beings were not so easily commodified, that itinerants of all sorts could not be trusted, and that the whole system was not bound together by a providential invisible hand. The realization as to what had happened would come slowly in some quarters of the lower Mississippi Valley, but gradually everyone knew that the confidence-game was up.

CHAPTER FOUR

REBUILDING CREDIT NETWORKS: MINISTER-MERCHANTS AND TECHNOLOGIES OF FAITH

The Panic of 1837 destroyed the confidence that fostered the lower Mississippi Valley's economic boom in land and cotton. After the Panic, Americans realized that at the root of the financial calamity was a lack of trust between individuals. Whether between creditors and debtors or between masters and slaves, Americans, particularly in the lower Mississippi Valley, looked for better ways to develop confidence between the different individuals that fueled their economic engine. The doubts about their economic system had spread to evangelical ministers, yet the resolution of those doubts resided within the networks of faith that bound ministers together. To regain economic confidence, southerners in the lower Mississippi Valley built on the pre-existing infrastructure of religious denominations that had quickly spread throughout the state. The most important institution capable of verifying the credit-worthiness of merchants, planters, and shopkeepers throughout the lower Mississippi Valley was the church. Although economic historians have generally regarded financial networks built on religious lines as a relic of premodern economics, the particular success of evangelicals in the 1820s and 1830s lower Mississippi Valley created a respectable group of planters and merchants who, by the late 1830s and early 1840s, could facilitate the expansion of a highly-capitalized slave-based economy. Evangelicals mapped financial networks onto religious networks transforming the ties of religious faith into a different kind of profit-minded commercial faith.

In addition to working within religious institutions, more modern and supposedly scientific methods of gauging the trustworthiness and character of others, particularly credit reporting and phrenology, were popularized in these years. Yet they too emerged from the work of religious networks as well as a belief that Christian virtues were necessary for the functioning of a modern capitalist society. As capitalists around the country began developing new methods of gauging the trustworthiness of others, these new methods actually built on the networks of religious institutions that already existed. Additionally, the innovators of credit-reporting and phrenology believed that Christian virtue and an over-arching providential spiritual force could and should guide economic behavior. Although these methods were developed outside the South, they were embraced by southerners in the lower Mississippi Valley who were looking for ways to regain confidence in their social system and in each other.

The Panic of 1837 and Reverend Lane's Methodist Cotton

It was not clear what was happening and who was at fault in 1837, but everyone in the lower Mississippi Valley knew that "existing embarrassments" of debt in the region were causing an unprecedented level of economic distress. Historians today generally attribute the Panic of 1837 to a variety of factors. Many point to the monetary policy of the Jackson administration in 1836, which redistributed federal revenue away from southwestern states while requiring that federal lands be purchased with hard currency, something that most southwestern banks lacked in significant reserve. The demand for specie caused unease about the viability of banks, and already by March 1837, southwestern banks had suspended specie payment to customers. Other historians have pointed to the British economy that was dipping into a recession and the Bank of England's tightening of credit to American cotton growers. Many

major Liverpool cotton trading firms had closed by early 1837, and the cotton exchange at Le Havre in France was shut down the same year. With overproduction of cotton and a lack of demand in Britain, cotton prices plummeted, and the overleveraged planters and commission merchants in the Southwest were left with worthless paper money and cotton that was not even worth its price in transportation.[1]

For contemporaries who experienced the economic shock firsthand, however, the causes were unclear. In the initial months, planters decried what they saw as a deliberate conspiracy between banks and mercantile firms against the "producing classes of society." When credit tightened, banks were still willing to loan large New Orleans firms millions of dollars, *The Mississippian* argued, but if they had extended "the same accommodations they have rendered the commission merchants, there would have been no distress in the community."[2] Criticism extended to the now-defunct Bank of the United States for beginning the tide of over-speculation in the early 1830s. Democrats saw the financial panic as a scheme designed to lure citizens into supporting another national bank based on paper money principles instead of basing the currency on "a sound specie basis."[3] As time went on, Mississippians even accused bankers of being counterfeiters and "negro thie[ves]." Nothing separated bankers who printed "rags," sold them to "unsuspecting planters," and bought them back up at a fraction of their value from outright

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[1] Quotation about "existing embarrassments" from "Banks and Banking—No. XIII," *The Mississippian*, June 9, 1837. For short summaries of the Panic of 1837, see Joshua D. Rothman, "The Contours of Cotton Capitalism: Speculation, Slavery, and Economic Panic in Mississippi, 1832-1841," in *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, ed. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 135-137; Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 272-278; Rowena Olegario, *The Engine of Enterprise: Credit in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 44-52. For more detailed discussions of the Panic of 1837, see Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter L. Rousseau, "Jacksonian Monetary Policy, Specie Flows, and the Panic of 1837," *Journal of Economic History* 62 (June 2002): 457-488; Peter Temin, *The Jacksonian Economy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969), especially chapter four.
[2] "Banks and Banking, No. XI," *The Mississippian*, May 5, 1837.
[3] "Banks and Banking, No. XIII," *The Mississippian*, June 9, 1837.

counterfeiters, and "'financiers' who rob the community of hundreds, thousands, nay, millions are permitted to run at large, drink 'hard cider' and shout for 'Tippecanoe,'" while a "'negro thief,' who robs a single citizen of one slave," spent years in the penitentiary.[4] The Mississippi Whig candidate for Congress Ebenezer Wells, however, demanded a return of the Bank of the United States to provide "a general circulating medium" with "gold and silver as its basis." To imagine that "the busy mass of American people, pushing their various enterprise into all extremes and imaginable pursuits," could reduce their "gigantic efforts to the piddling system of an exclusive metallic currency" was ridiculous, he argued.[5]

Regardless of the remedy, Mississippi bank notes in the wake of the Panic of 1837 were often sold at a discount of half or even a quarter of their face value.[6] Like a natural disaster—"an act of God"—the economic crisis was the result of confusing, unseen forces. The Panic of 1837 affected the entire country, but in the lower Mississippi Valley, where planters and speculators were most vulnerable to tightening credit, the Panic amounted to a crisis of faith in general. A lack of trust between investors and planters destroyed the loose credit that enabled the Southwest's cotton boom, and planters and merchants in the region were left pointing fingers at each other or at outsiders to pin down the blame.

In this disastrous period for southwestern planters and merchants, Reverend John Lane attempted to patch up that trust, at least for the network of men he represented. Rev. Lane, a leading Methodist minister from Vicksburg, must have spent a great deal of time in New Orleans collecting cotton from Methodist planters in the Mississippi Conference, which encompassed both the states of Mississippi and Louisiana. At the conference's annual meeting in Natchez that

[4] "Financiering," *The Mississippian*, April 19, 1839; "Thieves—Thieves and Murderers!!" *The Mississippian*, June 12, 1840.
[5] Ebenezer M. Wells, "Circular: The Voices of Attala County," *Central Register*, September 21, 1839.
[6] "Mississippi Money," *Spirit of Kosciusko*, June 9, 1838.

December in 1837, Lane had been appointed to a “new and unprecedented agency.”[7] When southwestern bank notes had become practically worthless, New York Methodist agents Thomas Mason and George Lane—no relation to John—demanded a different form of payment than bank notes. Mason and Lane were publishers and agents of the Methodist Book Concern in New York, the hub of American Methodist publications. They printed the books and periodicals that local preachers bought, often on credit, to be sold to the laity.[8] Preachers generally bought a set of certain books under the assumption that they would pay full price for those books after they sold them. So when the bill came due, Mason and Lane had a different idea; they “requested that [payment] be invested in cotton by an experienced agent and the cotton be shipped to them.”[9]

John Lane was that experienced agent. He had been a Warren County cotton factor early in his life but since had settled down in Vicksburg, most recently to superintend a new boys’ academy to serve the Methodists of Warren County. For most of Lane’s life, however, he was satisfied to serve as a judge and minister in Vicksburg, a town that Lane practically inherited from his father-in-law, Newit Vick, before it became a bustling river-port. He made his fortune in the 1820s and 1830s organizing and selling town lots, and still in 1838 he owned ten town lots worth thirty-five thousand dollars, in addition to his more modest 102 river-front acres for cotton cultivation.[10] As the consequences of the Panic of 1837 set in, preacher-planters pushed their enslaved workforce to produce as much cotton as possible and sent their cotton to their temporary factor, John Lane, who tallied the claims on each debtor and shipped the product to

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[7] John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, Tennessee: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 2:389.
[8] John Lanahan, *The Era of Frauds in the Methodist Book Concern at New York* (Baltimore: Methodist Book Depository, 1896), 256.
[99] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:389.
[10] James Morris Perrin, “Reverend Newit Vick: Founder of Vicksburg, Mississippi, His Ancestry, Relatives, and Descendants” (Hammond, Louisiana: J.M. Perrin, 1990), 14, 24; 1838 Warren County Tax Rolls, Combined, Series 1202: County Tax Rolls, 1818-1902, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson (hereafter MDAH), http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/taxrolls/Warren/1838/Combined/20 (accessed April 4, 2017).

New York. The ties that bound New York and New Orleans had been severed in the recent panic, so a trusted minister, planter, and merchant like Lane was needed to knit the web back together. Although Lane's role as both minister and cotton factor may seem unusual, it was far from it. The dual roles of many evangelicals—particularly Methodists—as merchants and ministers, opened a window for evangelical denominations to take the lead in rebuilding trusted financial networks. At the center of this transaction of cotton and evangelical literature was the rebinding of previously powerful ties of faith—both religious and commercial.[11]

Minister-Merchants

To see how religious denominations helped restore faith in the extractive slave-based cotton economy, we go to 61 Poydras Street in New Orleans, the home of the mercantile partnership of Curtiss and Wailes. There sat the leading Mississippi Methodist Rev. William Winans, meeting with merchants, ministers, and friends, reading the news, and writing sermons. Winans was frequently in New Orleans "on business," as he wrote in his journal, and he generally stayed at "Bro. Curtiss' counting-room."[12] All around Winans, clerks wrote receipts to clients of cotton sales minus commission and fees, alongside notes anticipating future prices based on the latest news from New York and Liverpool. From the office of Curtiss and Wailes, Winans could step outside, and if he looked up and down Poydras Street, he would see rows of similar establishments—merchant houses that dealt in cotton and other wholesale goods to be

[11] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1829-1839*, *Volume II* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 436; Receipt of Sale of Cotton from John Lane for Levi Rogers, John and John A. Lane Papers, *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War*, Series G, Part 5, Reel 28; William Winans to Messrs. Fountain and Lane, November 8, 1838, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 9, J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps-Wilson Library, Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter Cain Archives).
[12] William Winans Journal, Typescript, Millsaps-Wilson Library, Millsaps College, March 15, 1842. Other mentions of Winans at Curtiss's counting-room from Winans Journal, March 3-24, 1842, November 8, 1842, January 21-23, 1843, and January 7-8, 1844.

sold back to planters. As dockworkers unloaded and loaded cotton bales at the levee, commission merchants like Curtiss and Wailes sampled those bales, judged the state of the market, and consigned and sold the cotton to buyers in New York or Liverpool. This Rev. Winans was the same minister who in the 1820s sent Talley to the Choctaws and in the 1830s feared widespread reprisals against itinerant ministers after the Murrell scare in Madison County.

Besides the business Winans could conduct at Curtiss and Wailes's office, Winans stayed at Curtiss's counting-room because he trusted Curtiss and Wailes, both of whom were devout Methodists. Curtiss, in particular, was a fellow minister and member of the Mississippi Conference. In the years following the Panic of 1837, the firms that could develop networks of trust, in which they felt assured that planters would pay their debts and that merchants would be trustworthy, would be able to survive. The religious denominations that had become so successful in the 1830s had an advantage in this capacity, as they had already developed those trusted institutional networks. There in Curtiss's counting-house, where Winans conducted his business, religious institutional networks initiated the renewed trust-building that was necessary to rebuild the economic infrastructure after the shockwaves of the late 1830s.[13]

The role of cotton broker and wholesale merchant for a network of Methodists flowed naturally for William Curtiss after his initial experience with the denomination in the lower Mississippi Valley. The first time Curtiss left Natchez for New Orleans in 1827, he went there as a missionary and fundraiser for the first Methodist church in the city. But the second time in 1831, it was business of a religious sort that brought Curtiss to New Orleans. The Methodist

[13] 1842 New Orleans City Directory, Louisiana Division, Main Branch, New Orleans Public Library, http://files.usgwarchives.net/la/orleans/history/directory/1842cdaf.txt (accessed April 4, 2017). For a description of the New Orleans cotton market and the role of cotton merchants, see Scott P. Marler, *The Merchants' Capital: New Orleans and the Political Economy of the Nineteenth-Century South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-11; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 256-262.

Conference appointed Curtiss to run a book depository in the city with the intention of publishing and distributing Methodist periodicals and books, alleviating their dependence on the Cincinnati and New York Methodist book publishers. Other Methodist leaders appointed Curtiss to investigate the prospects for a Methodist newspaper that would cater specifically to the lower Mississippi Valley as opposed to the denominational paper in Nashville. By then Curtiss had already located in New Orleans as a permanent preacher and resident of the city with the freedom to conduct his own business during the week. In 1839, Curtiss formed a partnership with his in-laws, the Wailes family, as a commission merchant company.[14]

Perhaps it was merely a coincidence that Curtiss went into the mercantile business in the immediate years after the Panic of 1837, but it could not have been a better time to start for the Methodist planters who knew and trusted him. For years he had worked for the conference as a loyal business-minded minister, and now they trusted him with the sales of their cotton. When the price of cotton dropped off for the second time in early 1839, Curtiss assured one Natchez Methodist that "our next advices will be more favorable than the last," and he forecasted that there would be "improvement in the Liverpool and Havre markets." With every bill, receipt, and prediction came the latest list of current prices in New Orleans, along with the total number of bales of cotton shipped to Liverpool, Le Havre, New York, and Boston.[15] Using the network that these Methodists had developed, Curtiss gained the reputation of a merchant who would "execute any order" which planters would send him, "as well as if [they] were on the short."[16] Planters trusted him with shipping hard money to them via steamboat as well as buying notes

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[14] J.B. Cain, *Methodism in the Mississippi Conference, 1846-1870* (Jackson, Mississippi: The Hawkins Foundation, 1939), 340-343; Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:278-279, 2:320, 2:364, 2:389.
[15] William Curtiss to Benjamin Drake, March 11, 1839, Benjamin M. Drake and Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 18, MDAH.
[16] Benjamin Drake to Nathaniel Magruder, February 18, 1839, Drake-Magruder Papers, Box 5, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (hereafter LLMVC).

from a variety of banks at discount to make the best deal for them.[17] In one instance, Curtiss divided the money from his client's cotton sales between Union and Natchez banks "with the exceptions of one hundred twenty dollars Rodney," which could be redeemed at face value at Natchez banks, but, Curtiss bragged, "I buy them all 7% disc[ount]!"[18] Yet in another instance he deferred buying notes in New Orleans for the same planter because "the best I could do" was an eight percent discount, and "I presume you can buy on as good terms in Woodville or Natchez as here."[19]

John Lane, the minister who sold cotton for Methodist literature in 1837, was also tied to the Methodist cotton network. When he was not occupied as a cotton factor, he sold the cotton produced on his Mississippi plantation through William Curtiss.[20] Lane also served as a node of financial trust by allowing for references for those interested in becoming employed as a merchant in the state. William Winans wrote in 1841 to Lane about a friend, James Fugua, who wanted to go into business in Vicksburg. "He is a sober and steady young man and a member of our Church," Winans wrote, and also had "some practical knowledge of mercantile business." Church membership along with personal recommendations of character could tie friends of well-connected ministers to business partnerships and financial networks that otherwise excluded religiously unaffiliated men.[21]

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[17] Curtiss to Drake, November 17, 1840, January 2, 1842, Benjamin Drake Papers, Box 3, Folder 31, Cain Archives; Drake to Curtiss, October 6, 1843, Benjamin Drake Papers, Box 3, Folder 36, Cain Archives.
[18] Curtiss to Drake, April 15, 1839, Benjamin Drake Papers, Box 6, Folder 47, MDAH.
[19] Curtiss to Drake, May 19, 1843, Drake Papers, Box 3, Folder 21, MDAH. Curtiss was also a factor for David W. Haley, Mississippi planter and politician. See Curtiss and Wailes to Hailey, September 1, 1841, David W. Hailey Papers, Folder 3, MDAH.
[20] Perrin, "Reverend Newit Vick," 14, 24; 1838 Warren County Tax Rolls, Combined, Series 1202: County Tax Rolls, 1818-1902, MDAH, http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/taxrolls/Warren/1838/Combined/20 (accessed April 4, 2017); Curtiss and Wailes to John Lane, January 17, 1840, John and John A. Lane Papers, *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations*.
[21] Winans to Lane, October 29, 1841, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 10, Cain Archives.

At the center of these religious and financial ties was kinship. Evangelical denominations developed a fictive kinship for each member, as their titles for each other as “Brother” and “Sister” suggest. They were bound one to another through a common denominational discipline, and could be punished or even excluded from the church if they broke that discipline. Faith in God and in fellow members of Christ’s body, the church, greased the wheels of financial trust necessary to return to economic activity after a shock like the Panic of 1837. Baptists had the most notoriously strict disciplinary proceedings, including adjudicating disputes over debts between members. Yet the larger more institutionalized network of Methodists and Presbyterians allowed for disciplinary control over a larger area, and especially over the clergy in that area who were involved in commerce with one another.[22]

This fictive kinship, however, was often supplanted by actual kinship. For many of the religiously-affiliated merchants and businessmen of the antebellum Southwest, their ties were made through marriage, especially through the sisters and daughters of prominent church members. John Lane, for instance, came to his lucrative Vicksburg inheritance by marrying Sarah Vick, the oldest daughter of Newit Vick, Methodist minister and founder of Vicksburg. With her marriage to John Lane, a respected minister and a “first-class financier,” according to fellow Methodists, Sarah actually found herself in greater control over the family’s inheritance than her siblings, as later litigation among the thirteen Vick siblings over control of the town lots testified. Yet another Vick daughter, the much younger Amanda Vick, married the minister

[22] On discipline within southern churches, see Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), chapter 9; Monica Najar, *Evangelizing the South: A Social History of Church and State in the Upper South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 130-136; Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 12-16.

Charles Kimball Marshall, who later became one of the wealthiest ministers in the entire South. Eleanor Wailes, daughter of the prominent Methodist layman Levin Wailes, and sister of the famous Mississippi intellectual Benjamin L.C. Wailes, also tied families together with her marriage to William Curtiss, providing the foundation for Curtiss's business partnership with the Wailes family.

Among Presbyterians as well, the ministers James Smylie and William Montgomery approved of a kinship-building marriage between their children Amelia Smylie and Joseph Addison Montgomery. As the son and son-in-law of prominent minsters, Joseph gained the connections to work with the New Orleans mercantile firm of Charles C. Lathrop, another devout Presbyterian layman in that city. While Joseph was away in New Orleans, Amelia oversaw day-to-day activity on the plantation outside Natchez. If ministers and their sons and brothers performed most of the business transactions connecting planters to merchants, evangelical women created the family partnerships that solidified these economic ties.[23]

Religious institutions also facilitated the trust necessary for financial transactions by allowing for the pooling of economic resources. In 1824 Mississippi Methodists established the Preachers' Fund, an endowment that was to be "loaned on interest on good security" with profits paying the salaries of itinerant ministers in "extreme, necessitous cases." The Preachers' Fund had a president and board of directors who governed how the funds were used, while the

[23] Perrin, "Reverend Newit Vick," 14-16; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 248; Cain, *Methodism in the Mississippi Conference*, 340-343; James Smylie to unknown doctor in Pine Grove, January 29, 1829, Amelia Montgomery to James Smylie, December 22, 1830, Smylie-Montgomery Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, LLMVC; Joseph Montgomery to Amelia Montgomery, May 18, 1844, January 2, 1847, Joseph Addison Montgomery Papers, Folder 3, LLMVC; Amelia to Joseph, December 9, 1846, Joseph Addison Montgomery Papers, Folder 3, LLMVC. For Lane as a "first-class financier," see John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Volumes III and IV* (Jackson, Miss.: Commission on Archives and History, Mississippi Conference, United Methodist Church, 2015), 250. For C.C. Lathrop's involvement with the New Orleans Presbyterian Church, see W.A. Scott, *The Duty of Praying for Our Rulers* (New Orleans: Toy, 1843), 3-4.

majority of ministers in Mississippi and Louisiana joined as members through annual dues. Early in its existence in the 1820s and early 1830s, the fund, acting as a religious bank, made small, safe loans to respectable borrowers. But once the fund had accumulated about five thousand dollars, the board invested the money in a variety of stock and banking institutions that were assumed to be safe. Meanwhile, a wealthy Methodist died and bequeathed to the conference thirty shares of stock in the Planters' Bank of Mississippi. With the addition of this investment, the Preachers' Fund had over ten thousand dollars at its disposal. For ministers in debt, the Preachers' Fund was a social safety net, allowing for their subsistence and the repayment of debts, while respectable Methodist planters and businessmen could profit from the donations by applying for loans from the fund.[24]

In addition to pooling money, religious denominations pooled the most valuable economic resource in the region: their enslaved workforce. While this was not done at the institutional level or through the Preachers' Fund, more informal agreements, like those between trusted cotton factors and planters, allowed for religious institutions to mediate sales and loans of enslaved people. William Winans, that well-connected minister-planter in Wilkinson County, Mississippi, seemed to delight in working out a slave sale between William P. Dickson and Francis D. Richardson, a Winans relative and sugar planter in St. Mary's Parish, Louisiana. Dickson had learned through Richardson's brother Edward that Richardson was "disposed to purchase his Smith, Colbert, and proposed giving $1500. for him." Winans then notified Richardson that Dickson had been offered $1,800 for him, but "I, myself," Winans wrote, "think he would be to you well worth $2000." "A better Plantation-Blacksmith is probably not to be found in Mississippi and Louisiana," Winans asserted, pointing out that he was "an excellent

[24] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:315, 2:370-376.

plough-stocker and pretty good carpenter" and "a very ingenious and mechanical man." If Richardson agreed to the deal, "Dickson will deliver him to you by the first of September."[25] Finally Richardson and Dickson agreed to the price of $1,650 for the sale of Colbert with Winans, in the words of his biographer, "thoroughly enjoying every step in the negotiations."[26] Slaves could also be shifted from master to master among a network of trusted denominational affiliates, such as when Benjamin Drake loaned "three boys" to "Bro. Joshua James" to pick cotton in Tensas Parish, Louisiana. Drake owned fourteen slaves and four hundred acres, but he often could realize a greater profit by renting them to larger planter-ministers like James. In a letter thanking Drake, James reported that his workforce had picked over two hundred bales already and he expected them to surpass five hundred bales.[27]

Even within the trusted network of a religious denomination, however, loans and investments were not secure from default. After the Methodist Preachers' Fund accumulated over ten thousand dollars in the 1830s, the Panic of 1837 wiped away the value of the thirty shares of Planters' Bank stock. "Alas for the stability of all moneyed investments," the minister John G. Jones lamented. They still had the rest of the Preachers' Fund, yet with worthless paper currency in the state, the dues and loan repayments were made with devalued shinplasters. A group of supposedly respectable ministers took out loans with the funds available to pay off their debts, to which request the Board complied. But when the second shock in prices came in 1840, the indebted ministers were unable to make payments on the interest of their loans, and

[25] Winans to Francis D. Richardson, April 15, 1847, William Winans Papers, Box 17, Folder 12, Cain Archives.
[26] Ray Holder, *William Winans: Methodist Leader in Antebellum Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977), 182-183; Cain, *Methodism in the Mississippi Conference*, 184. See also Richard J. Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 127. John G. Richardson was not only a fellow Methodist but Winans's brother-in-law. See Ray Holder, ed., "Long Live 'Tippecanoe'! Letters of a Mississippi Whig, 1840-1841," *Journal of Mississippi History* 45 (February 1983): 43.
[27] Joshua James to Benjamin Drake, December 5, 1851, Benjamin Drake Papers, Box 8, Folder 70, MDAH.

ultimately most either left the itinerancy or the conference entirely, claiming that they were unable to ever pay the Preachers' Fund back. Mississippi Methodists thought that "the business of our Society was transacted with the strictest integrity, and the Fund was sacred to religious purposes," but with the combination of personal debts, greed, and a dramatic drop in cotton prices, no source of trust or religious confidence was sacred.[28]

Despite the possible breakdown in mutual confidence that was shown by the failure of the Preachers' Fund in the 1840s, religious denominations created useful networks for instilling commercial confidence when it was sorely needed. Back at Curtiss's counting-house, Winans was able not only to do cotton and religious business, but he made contacts with some of the most powerful politicians. Curtiss was an important intermediary between Winans and presidential candidate Richard Johnson. Henry Clay, who was passing through Louisiana and the Gulf Coast in early 1843, was also a notable person with whom Winans could make contacts through Curtiss. While in New Orleans, Winans also frequently met over dinner with the former governor of Louisiana, Henry Johnson.[29] These connections were the result of a network of respectability and trust that religious denominations had the unique ability to create.

Evangelical Denominations and Financial Networks

The reach of these religious networks throughout the region allowed for commission merchants like Curtiss, Lane, Montgomery, and Lathrop to verify the creditworthiness of their clientele from the Red River Valley in Louisiana up through the Mississippi interior along the Yazoo, Big Black, and Pearl Rivers. The rate of expansion for Methodist ministers in particular

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[28] Jones, *History of Methodism*, 2:316, 2:370-376.
[29] Winans Journal, January 9, 1843-February 3, 1843, April 20, 1843, May 13, 1842, September 13, 1842, and August 25, 1843.

preceded the economic growth of each area. At the 1834 Mississippi Methodist conference, there were forty-six ministers on assignment not counting the ministers who preached locally. Generally the conference only tracked those on assignment because they were the only ones who received payment from the conference. The New Orleans District had twelve ministers assigned, including Curtiss as New Orleans book agent and William Winans assigned to Wilkinson County, Mississippi along with another minister, William Langarl. The Natchez District was similarly well-covered for a small area, with eight assigned ministers covering the district around Natchez along with one outlying circuit along the Pearl River to the east. But the three other districts, Louisiana, Chahta, and Vicksburg, had twenty-three ministers covering an area from Natchitoches, Alexandria, and Claiborne Parish in Louisiana to Madison and Yazoo counties and reaching up to the Tallahatchie and Yalobusha Rivers in North Mississippi. The total membership of the denomination recorded at conference was 9,707.

Just six years later in 1840, however, the Mississippi Conference had grown to assign 79 ministers alongside a recorded 165 ministers who preached locally in the state, a total of 224 ministers in the conference. The majority of the ministers remained in the most heavily-populated areas along the Mississippi River in the Natchez District and Baton Rouge District. But fifteen of the total seventy-nine now made up the new Sharon District, an area that used to be covered by only seven ministers in the Chahta District, and by 1840 had two ministers assigned to Louisville, and two each in Attalla and Carroll counties up the Yazoo and Big Black Rivers. This total also did not include the nineteen ministers in North Mississippi who were affiliated with the Memphis Conference, stretching from Tishomingo County in northeast Mississippi across the northern towns to the Moonlake mission by Greenwood Leflore's plantation. Likewise in Louisiana, districts were realigned to create both the Monroe District and

the Alexandria District with a total of sixteen ministers. The former frontier river port of Alexandria had become inundated with ministers, and the new frontier of Methodists reached up the Red River to Caddo Parish along the Texas border in northwestern Louisiana.[30]

The Presbyterians and Baptists experienced growth during this period of general population increase in the region as well, but they followed different patterns. In 1842, the Presbyterian Synod of Mississippi could brag about having some of the wealthiest members, but only thirteen ministers preached in the synod and their geographic reach mostly remained in and around the Natchez district. Baptists, on the other hand, had expanded in 1840 to have sixty ministers throughout the state of Mississippi with 134 churches spread across the landscape. From the beginning of the denomination's history in the lower Mississippi Valley, Baptist churches were vigilant about their local congregational control and generally thrived in smaller, rural areas. Although the membership had increased to about 15,000 by 1844, their institutional structure was more disparate than both Methodists and Presbyterians. Presbyterian merchants like Lathrop and Montgomery could tap into the trusted and wealthy Presbyterian clientele around Natchez, including the famous agricultural experimenter, Rush Nutt, who developed the popular hybrid Petit Gulf strand of cotton, but their denominational connections in the newly-settled country was limited. Baptists had the opposite problem; with a significant population scattered across the state, they had only minimal institutional connections binding them all together through the state conference. The most significant governing body for Baptists was the local church and the association, of which there were twenty-one spread throughout the state. Methodists had both a tight institutional structure and a large reservoir of circuit riders and local

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[30] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1829-1839, Volume II*, 304; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1839-1845, Volume III* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 116-118, 112.

preachers—many of whom were also cotton planters—who could be relied on as dependable business partners. Those ministers, such as Robert R. Gill in Caddo Parish, Louisiana, or William G. Gould and Lorenzo D. Langford in Carroll County, Mississippi, could form a nexus from which to build connections between merchants like Curtiss and trustworthy newly-established planters in their communities.[31]

By analyzing the change in cotton production by region over time, it becomes apparent that cotton production grew alongside the networks laid out by religious institutions, particularly the Methodists. Planters just in the state of Mississippi produced ten million pounds of cotton in 1821, a figure that jumped up to seventy million in 1833 and eighty-five million pounds in 1834. By 1834, Mississippi had surpassed Louisiana in total cotton production by twenty-three million pounds, which was partly the result of southern Louisiana's heavy investment in sugar production. Still, the vast majority of Mississippi's 1834 cotton production took place along the Mississippi River, with smaller amounts produced partway up the Pearl, Big Black, and Yazoo Rivers. But in 1840, just six years later, Mississippi planters had ratcheted up production to reach 193 million pounds, an increase of 127%. Nearly half of the state's cotton was grown in the six Mississippi River counties from Wilkinson County in the south to Washington County north of Vicksburg. But nearly a quarter of the state's cotton in 1840 was grown in the four counties along the Yazoo and Big Black Rivers of Madison, Yazoo, Hinds, and Holmes. The other major rising areas followed along the same routes farther north in Carroll County and Yalobusha County. North Mississippi as a whole had dramatically increased the amount of cotton produced

[31] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Stated Clerk of the Assembly, 1842), 153-155; *Sixteenth Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Presented by the Executive Board at the Anniversary at New-York, May 11th, 1848* (New York: American Baptist Home Mission Rooms, 1848), 81; *Twelfth Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Presented by the Executive Board at the Anniversary in Philadelphia, April 23, 1844, with the Treasurer's Report* (New York: American Baptist Home Mission Rooms, 1844), 50; John Hebron Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-Bellum Mississippi* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), 35.

in the region by 1840 to a total of 28.4 million pounds. Although that was a modest total compared to the immense twenty million pounds grown in Adams County alone, it was a dramatic departure for an area that had produced relatively little cotton when it was Choctaw and Chickasaw country in the 1820s. Compared to Alabama's total 1840 cotton production of 117.1 million pounds, the areas of Mississippi outside the six major river counties produced just 16.5 million fewer pounds, yet they only produced about fifty-two percent of the state's cotton.[32]

These two trends of the growth of Methodist ministers and cotton production in the same regions point to the conclusion that planters who extended into new territory in central Mississippi or the Red River valley used the institutional connections provided by ministers to access credit. As the growth of cotton production continued to rise in the region between Natchez and New Orleans, so did the number of ministers concentrated to serve this population. But Methodist ministers in particular grew in numbers and stretched out along the same corridors that saw increased cotton production. While Presbyterians remained mostly in the wealthy and heaviest-producing areas around Natchez, and Baptists were strongest in the northern and eastern countryside of Mississippi, Methodists connected distant planters in emerging cotton-producing counties to reliable cotton factors and sources of credit. The vast majority of these ministers did not keep meticulous records that remain extant, so it is impossible to verify the degree to which Methodist ministers acted as intermediaries between planters and commission merchants. But the number of Methodist ministers who had become local preachers and full-time planters or merchants, like John Shrock in Madison County or William Curtiss in New Orleans, and who

[32] *Writings of Levi Woodbury, LL.D., Political, Judicial, and Literary* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1852), 3:260; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 2:890; *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States…from the Returns of the Sixth Census* (Washington: Thomas Allen, 1841), 228, 216.

used their connections as ministers to find reliable factors and clients, indicates that the overlap between these two growth trends was not a coincidence.

This kind of argument has a precedent with Max Weber. During his tour through the United States in the early twentieth century, Weber found that Protestant sects, particularly those that "would only accept for membership one whose 'conduct' made him appear to be morally qualified beyond doubt," became a convenient networking tool for businessmen.[33] The kinds of "disorderly conduct" that might be disapproved sounds like a checklist for bad business behavior—"Frequenting taverns? Dance? Theatre? Card Playing? Untimely meeting of liability?"[34] Weber also noted that of all the denominations, Methodists seemed to be the ones who most commonly favored one another for business. Although Weber's thesis of Protestant sects was merely anecdotal and based on a different time and place than the antebellum lower Mississippi Valley, it provides an insightful window into the ways Protestant denominations and business ties frequently crossed paths.[35]

Over a half-century after William Curtiss sold cotton in New Orleans, Weber's thesis echoed the dual role of Curtiss's counting-house as a home for both religious business and financial business. Within the church, intra-denominational marriages and fictive kinship bonds that created business partners worked to make family out of otherwise independent men with little basis for mutual trust. Even for those outside of the official membership of the Methodist Church, ministers in far-flung counties who were in contact with Curtiss could indicate who was trustworthy and who should be avoided. Most of all, evangelicals strove to instill habits of

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[33] Max Weber, "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism," in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism with Other Writings on the Rise of the West*, 4th ed., trans. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 188.
[34] Ibid., 187.
[35] Ibid., 197.

industry and integrity in their ranks, and they had the power to discipline wayward members who were untrustworthy in business. In a depressed and unstable economic environment, religious denominations were the most socially-ingrained and disciplined institution capable of providing the security and faith for planters and merchants to operate once again by producing and selling the maximum amount of cotton planted and picked by their enslaved workforce.

Credit Reporting: Centralizing Denominational Networks

While the lower Mississippi Valley was revitalizing credit networks through religious institutions, a combination of merchants and scientists in New York were hoping to accomplish the same goal but through different means. Although they were far away from planters in Mississippi and factors in New Orleans, their methods had far-reaching consequences for the lower Mississippi Valley. The religious networks built on institutional discipline stretched through the frontiers of different regions, but they could only stretch so far. The task of these New York innovators was to make credit-worthiness modern and scientific. Yet still these innovators built on the religious foundations laid by evangelicals and their ideal for a godly social order as they set about to reshape long-distance credit networks. Most importantly, the two trends that were popularized in this period—credit reporting and phrenology—were exemplary of the cotton kingdom's need to verify the identity and character of distant individuals in an increasingly connected modern society and economy.

In 1841, Lewis Tappan was an unlikely candidate to create a business entirely devoted to credit. He and his older brother Arthur contracted around one million dollars of debt in their failed silk merchant firm after the Panic of 1837, primarily because they extended credit too loosely to distant merchants. As a general principle, Lewis despised lending and credit, but his

experience with failure led him to create a new firm, vaguely titled the Mercantile Agency. The agency would gather information about merchants and shopkeepers around the country and sell it to subscribing mercantile creditors in New York. Such a business plan was in keeping with Lewis's attempts to sanctify business in America. As Lewis put it, the Mercantile Agency "checks knavery, and purifies the mercantile air."[36] To accomplish this, the agency recruited notable locals around the country, most commonly lawyers, who were required to give reports on local merchants, storekeepers, and other business owners twice a year. Lewis's active involvement as an abolitionist initially kept him from doing business with southern merchants, but subscribers to the Mercantile Agency's information pushed him to find ways to expand to the South, where potential profits were high but the risk was notoriously even higher. Finally by 1847, Tappan made Benjamin Douglass, a supporter of slavery and a former cotton factor and commission merchant in New Orleans and Charleston, a co-proprietor in 1847 under the name of the Jabez Pratt Company in Baltimore. This move made southerners who were reluctant to work for Tappan more open to recruitment, beginning the expansion of the Mercantile Agency's reach as well as the concept of credit reports to the South.[37]

Credit reports read like local rumors—accounts of an individual or firm's reliability in paying debts, their character and integrity, as well as their estimated worth. John Whelan of Canton, Mississippi, for instance, was listed as "Teacher, Post Master, Negro Trader." In addition to this diverse set of trades, Whelan also had "some idea of going into the China and H[ar]dware bus[iness], but has not done so as yet." Most importantly, he was "Y[ou]ng, of strict integrity, w[orth] some 2 to 3 [thousand] $." Later rumors appeared by local agents that Whelan

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[36] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "God and Dun & Bradstreet, 1841-1851," *Business History Review* 40 (Winter 1966): 441.
[37] Wyatt-Brown, "God and Dun & Bradstreet," 432-450; Rowena Olegario, *A Culture of Credit: Embedding Trust and Transparency in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 45-61; Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 100-111.

might try “speculating in Western produce; but as yet he continues his old trade” of slave trading.[38] Other reports, however, revealed the vices of businessmen. One doctor in Napoleon, Arkansas, according to a local agent, “Drinks Hard,” but “owns negroes and R[eal] E[state] wor[th] ab[ou]t 15 [thousand] $.”[39] A shopkeeper in New Orleans “drinks heavily,” according to an 1847 report, but by the next year, the New Orleans agent seemed cautiously pleased to report that he “has ref[orme]d his habits and does not drink, [but] is not strong, and should be looked after some.”[40]

Religion also played a major role in some credit reports, especially for anyone who was Jewish or was a clergyman of any denomination. Charles Ourey and Co., owner of a general store in Woodville, Mississippi, had “a pretty g[oo]d St[oc]k of Goods,” but he “attempted to run off not long ago.” Ourey was known to be “a shrewd and intelligent Jew” who “needs to be watched.”[41] Charles Kimball Marshall, the husband of one of the Vick daughters, was specified as “a Methodist member and a very eloquent preacher and is perfectly good for his engagements,” a favorable endorsement despite the fact that he was “said to be quite slow in the payment of his debts.”[42]

Although historians have pointed out that credit-worthiness in the nineteenth century was based on character traits such as honesty and thrift, they have missed the precedent of religious institutions for those information networks. Instead of replacing local and regional networks based on religious institutions, Tappan’s agency was meant to consolidate them into a single database. In a close analysis of credit reporting and honor in antebellum Charleston, South

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[38] Mississippi, Volume 15, (John Whelan), 143, R.G. Dun and Company Credit Report Volumes, Baker Library Special Collections, Harvard Business School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (hereafter BLSC).
[39] Arkansas, Volume 5, (Dr. J.C. Burgess, M.D.), 8, BLSC.
[40] Louisiana, Volume 9, Orleans Parish Volume 1, (J.C. Morgan), 78, BLSC.
[41] Mississippi, Volume 22, (Charles Ourey and Co.), 144, BLSC.
[42] Mississippi, Volume 21, (C.K. Marshall), 68, BLSC.

Carolina, Amanda R. Mushal has found that "the credit agency itself, by collecting and distributing [personal and business] information, re-created the face-to-face world it was in the process of replacing."[43] Honor depended on personal reputation in the community, but religious denominations employed the same kinds of behavioral policing of their members over a larger institutional space. Instead of credit reporting necessarily replacing religious institutions, it more accurately connected existing networks of information and discipline into a universal institution. Religion and the virtues verified by religious institutions became a short-hand for credit-worthiness. Credit reporting clerks filled out hundreds of ledgers full of character descriptions that matched the ways in which William Winans discussed his recommendation for his friend for a merchant job in Vicksburg or his endorsement of the slave Colbert for sale to the fellow Methodist Francis Richardson. If credit reports were Lewis Tappan's attempt to "revitalize moral responsibility in commerce," as one historian has written, then Tappan's Mercantile Agency was simply building on an earlier model of religious institutions and universalizing it.[44]

Religious denominations created networks of respectable businessmen and had the power to discipline and exclude them, but Tappan dreamed of uniting these disparate networks into something like a universal commercial church. Once southern merchants began subscribing to Tappan's Mercantile Agency, they had access to the webs of local and regional networks of knowledge that previously had only been known by religious insiders. As it became more comprehensive and standardized, credit reporting could overtake the utility of religious denominations for information on far-away planters and merchants, but that transition did not

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[43] Amanda R. Mushal, "'A Very Honorable Man in His Trading': Honor, Credit Reporting, and the Market Economy in Antebellum Charleston," in *The Field of Honor: Essays on Southern Character and American Identity*, ed. John Mayfield and Todd Hagstette (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 68. The economic historian Rowena Olegario generally agrees that nineteenth-century credit reports focused on character traits rather than religious affiliation, although she points out that the networks of Jewish merchants were exceptions. See Olegario, *A Culture of Credit*, 92-103, 114, 125-127.
[44] Sandage, *Born Losers*, 109.

sufficiently occur in the lower Mississippi Valley until after the Civil War when the number of individuals and firms examined increased significantly. Until that point, the most reliable institution for the job was the church. Even then, the concept of the reports remained in line with how ministers connected business partners along denominational lines. At the heart of credit reports on commission merchants, cotton factors, peddlers, and planters, was the mission of New Orleans and Natchez creditors to reward proper social behavior, discourage vices, and sanctify the region's commerce. All of this was designed to further the broader mission of harnessing the region's slave-based commercial activity for the greater glory of God.[45]

Phrenology: A Scientific Religion of Individual Identity

Back in lower Manhattan, another industry was thriving that at first glance bore little resemblance to Tappan's credit reporting agency: the Phrenological Cabinet, run by the publishing and lecturing firm of Fowlers and Wells. Although phrenology was not solely for the purpose of facilitating commercial transactions, the historian Scott Sandage has suggested that its location near the Mercantile Agency belied an underlying commonality between the two types of business.[46] This peculiar science emerged from Europe but was popularized in the United States by Orson and Lorenzo Fowler. Phrenology posited that the brain was the primary organ of the mind, and that the physical characteristics of the brain, observable through the shape of the human skull, revealed the characteristics and propensities of a given individual. Critics charged phrenologists with being materialists and discounting the concept of the soul, but phrenologists denied that charge; rather, they claimed that the immaterial human mind operated on the brain as

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[45] For more on Lewis Tappan and sanctifying commerce, see Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 105-111.
[46] Sandage, *Born Losers*, 112-116.

"a medium of its manifestation," just like humans could see through the material organs of their eyes.[47] The brain itself was not as much a single organ, however, but "a congeries of organs," as one historian has described phrenological theory, made up of many faculties that determined the "talents, disposition, and character" of human beings.[48]

By 1840, soon after the Panic of 1837 and around the time Tappan began the Mercantile Agency, phrenology became a popular scientific panacea throughout the country. Americans, especially well-educated social reformers, flocked to phrenological lectures and read phrenological literature. What phrenologists claimed to measure was knowledge about an individual's identity and character. Like credit reports, the unique characteristics supposedly unveiled by phrenological study could be used to make decisions regarding intellectual potential, marriage compatibility, and business acumen. People like mercantile creditors who met merchants and storekeepers to decide on their credit-worthiness could now turn to a new science to determine merchants' trustworthiness and acquisitiveness based on the easily observable qualities of the skull. If a full phrenological exam was not possible, phrenologists even claimed that character traits were betrayed by other outward mannerisms and signals, such as how a person shook hands, walked, or laughed. This science of human character could be used in business, but ultimately its proponents saw it as a science of the human soul, and therefore the perfect handmaid of Christianity. Since the faculties of the human brain could be expanded and retracted through personal discipline, phrenologists argued that they could measure the religious

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[47] "Phrenology and Religion," *Annals of Phrenology* 2 (August 1835): 154.
[48] Madeleine B. Stern, *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), x-xi.

progress of individuals based on their measurements of the particular faculties of reverence, conscientiousness, and benevolence.[49]

From its initial popularity in the Northeast, the excitement surrounding phrenology quickly spread to the Southwest. Newspapers frequently advertised phrenological lectures taking place around the country and the region. In Woodville, Mississippi, Mary McGehee, wife of a prominent Methodist judge and planter, wrote to her brother John W. Burruss on "the stir which Phrenology has made among the heads of Woodville, brains aside." Mocking the popularity of phrenology in Woodville, she remarked that "Dr. Powell, a concealed infidel, delivered a course of lectures, which turned them, (the heads) upside down and all the talk has been of Phrenology since."[50] The Dr. Powell Mary referred to had indeed gained publicity throughout the Southwest as the foremost phrenological authority in the region. As Professor of Chemistry and Lecturer in Phrenology at the Medical College of Louisiana, W. Byrd Powell had been invited the previous year to speak at Theodore Clapp's church in New Orleans to enlighten Clapp's liberal Christians on the latest scientific advances, enhancing his credibility with the medical community of the Southwest.[51]

Later that year, Powell published an extended phrenological exam of John Murrell in the *Nashville Republican*. Before even making any measurements of Murrell's head, Powell commented on Murrell's facial features, which indicated he had "a strong and sprightly intellect…considerable slyness, watchfulness, and benevolence…cunning…[and] self-confidence." The measurements of Murrell's skull led this phrenological expert also to

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[49] Stern, *Heads and Headlines*, 16-17; "Phrenology and Religion," 162. For a more specific contemporary discussion of commerce from a phrenological perspective, see "Commercial Distress," *Annals of Phrenology* 2 (August 1835): 212-218.
[50] Mary McGehee to John W. Burruss, July 21, 1836, John C. Burruss Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, LLMVC.
[51] John Duffy, ed., *Parson Clapp of the Strangers' Church of New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 37; "Letter from Clapp's Church to W. Byrd Powell, June 5, 1835," *Journal of Human Science* 1 (January 1860): 29.

recommend possible professions within Murrell's capability, suggesting he might have been a successful politician. He added that Murrell was prone to "petit and grand larceny" but also showed high levels of benevolence.[52]

For phrenologists like Powell and those who were curious about the truth of this ground-breaking scientific field, these measurements, observations, and summaries allowed others to "form a judgment of the natural capacities and character" of any person. Of course, "capacities" did not dictate the behavior of people, as the different faculties of the brain could be exercised or neglected due to "early example and instruction" and "respectable connexions or society." But the measurements of faculties such as "Secretiveness," "Conscientiousness," and "Cautiousness" could be utilized to understand the individuals in a southwestern social setting that was still in flux in the 1830s and 1840s. Planters could "know" the traits of overseers and factors, and merchants could prejudge the propensities of shopkeepers. Merely the fact that Murrell was the subject of a famous exam—by both Powell and Orson Fowler—suggests that this legendary deceiver was someone phrenological studies could unmask in the future. Phrenological examinations of character and capacity like Powell's, combined with the novel credit reports based on the information of knowledgeable agents, formed a new, supposedly scientific, basis for discovering the "real character" of people and predicting their future behavior.[53]

Despite characterizations of phrenology that seem devoid of religious meaning, many phrenologists saw the science as a new modern religion that would most effectively join science with the human soul. Critics of phrenology sometimes accused the science of materialism, but in fact phrenology would be better characterized as a science of spirituality. Phrenologists

[52] Reprinted from the *Nashville Republican* as Dr. W. Byrd Powell, "A Phrenological Examination," *The Mississippian*, November 27, 1835.
[53] Ibid. For more on the search for "real character," see Sandage, *Born Losers*, 115.

attempted to answer the broad questions of individual identity in modern society. The human spirit did exist, they assured skeptics; the science only linked the spirit to particular organs.

But not only did the spirit within each individual body exist, a central spirit led the "congeries of organs" of every race and every society. The scholar of religion John Lardas Modern has described the ways in which concepts of a spirit guiding the central machine of society formed the basis of modern secularism. Modern argues that a wide variety of antebellum Americans, including evangelicals, liberal Protestants, phrenologists, and spiritualists, saw the advance in religion work in tandem with the "circulations of industry," binding Americans together through a "chain of sympathies," according to William Ellery Channing, or "a vast nervous network of spiritual communication," according to his nephew William Henry Channing. In a society increasingly conceived as "a complex interplay of forces"—a barrage of words, media, pamphlets, and advertisements—the crisis of the self in such a network could be solved by recognizing those forces and searching out the central spirit-power that controlled the machine.[54]

Like the northern Protestant intellectuals that Modern analyzes, white southerners in the cotton kingdom expressed an overwhelming sensation of helplessness during the Panic of 1837. The dizzying array of bank notes, speculative frenzies, and global price changes, along with the ever-present fear of revolt by unknown slaves, seemed to be the new technologies guided by a spectral Providence. A contributor to Clinton, Mississippi's *Southern Marksman* in 1838 made this connection between modern technology and understanding the power of spirit. "This age of improvement and progression," he wrote, necessitated "a misterious [sic] and unavoidable belief

[54] John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America: With Reference to Ghosts, Protestant Subcultures, Machines, and their Metaphors; Featuring Discussion of Mass Media,* Moby-Dick*, Spirituality, Phrenology, Anthropology, Sing Sing State Penitentiary, and Sex with the New Motive Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 26-32.

in supernatural things." "We are all superstitious," he continued, and "the bending of these supernatural energies" was an improvement "almost as great as the discovery of steam." The "labor of the Ghost," the writer suggested using the metaphor of a prism and light, was to order modern society to maximize productivity and the accumulation of knowledge—"the sun of wisdom and wit."[55] Evangelical institutions formed the most important series of networks to recover trust in the capitalist marketplace of the lower Mississippi Valley, but even those who searched for methods of verifying the identity of others through other institutions leaned back on the idea that God or "the Ghost" directed the world's resources.

The connection between phrenology and a modern, commercial religion was not lost on white Americans in the lower Mississippi Valley. As lecturers like Powell toured through the Southwest, advertisements and articles frequently appeared in the region's newspapers while locals talked about the possibilities for phrenology as a science of the human mind and soul. In April, 1837, the *Times-Picayune* advertised that the "practical phrenologist," B. Hyatt, would be lecturing and experimenting in the city, and that "all will be satisfied that their CHARACTERS have been explained."[56] Newspapers kept up with phrenological news going on around the country, especially advertising the arrival of the famous Scottish phrenologist George Combe to the United States. Booksellers advertised phrenological books for sale.[57] Within a year, a small, local newspaper in Liberty, Mississippi, could confidently assert that "all of [phrenology's] enemies, by the force of its truth have been overthrown and silenced, many of whom had become converts." The writer insisted that the ancient Greeks believed in a similar science, and that "only those who have had very large heads have been truly great—have originated or led

[55] "Ghosts, No. 1," *Southern Marksman*, December 11, 1838.
[56] "Phrenology," *Times-Picayune*, April 21, 1837.
[57] *Times-Picayune*, October 11, 1838, June 12, 1838, April 22, 1841; Baton Rouge *Daily Advocate*, April 2, 1858; *The Daily Picayune*, February 6, 1850.

revolutions in science, religion, or government."[58] Others like the Presbyterian merchant Joseph Montgomery mentioned phrenology and cranial measurements in passing to his father-in-law Rev. Smylie—one of the ministers who excluded Theodore Clapp—when discussing a Rev. Parker's "talent of recognizance" in public speaking.[59] The Natchez Methodist woman Anna G. Davis revealed that she had received a phrenological exam in 1837, and that she had "been told by Phrenologists that in my head distinctiveness is absent, and combativeness very small."[60]

These frequent and often passing references to phrenology in the late 1830s and through the 1840s reveals the omnipresence of the science as well as the more general tendency of Americans of this period to search for the true identity and characteristics of themselves and others. Like Americans in other regions, those in the lower Mississippi Valley had become conscious of the need to measure the character of others in a modern, connected society, but for those in the lower Mississippi Valley where the economic fluctuations and possibilities of slave insurrection were always a possibility, the need was even greater. Even if New Orleans commission merchants were not explicitly hiring phrenologists to test the "reverence" or "conscientiousness" of planters and shopkeepers, they were increasingly searching for new methods of understanding the true character and trustworthiness of others, and the capacity to do so through physical appearance was an attractive option.

More specifically relevant to Americans in the lower Mississippi Valley, phrenology, along with its related and older science physiognomy, could be used by slaveholders to judge the character of slaves upon purchase as well as to justify the institution of slavery itself. If the physical appearance of individuals offered a window into their true character for the purpose of

[58] "Phrenology," *Piney Woods Planter*, March 3, 1838.
[59] Montgomery to Smylie, May 3, 1836, Joseph Addison Montgomery Papers, Folder 2, LLMVC.
[60] Anna G. Davis to Winans, March 3, 1837, William Winans Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, Cain Archives.

credit-worthiness, then it could easily do the same for enslaved men and women who were easily probed and examined during a sale. After the 1835 hysteria in Madison County, Mississippi, the need to judge slaves' behavior and character *before* they were purchased was paramount, and phrenology offered to meet that demand. In his popular book *Hereditary Descent*, Orson Fowler argued that certain characteristics of human beings were universal, "yet different races, masses, nations, and individuals," he argued, "possess in them different DEGREES OF DEVELOPMENT." These "details of character and ability" descended from ancestors to their progeny, resulting for "the African race" in "long and narrow" heads that were "high at the crown." The measurements of each faculty, according to phrenologists, provided Africans with exceptional "politeness, urbanity, excellence as waiters…timidity…fondness for and patience with children, and consequent excellence as nurses." This "African mentality" matched characteristics that antebellum American readers would see as naturally fit for enslavement, and Fowler concluded that, "like the Indian," the African race would inevitably yield "its place to those naturally superior."[61]

Additionally, the famous Louisiana phrenologist Dr. Powell wrote in *The American Phrenological Journal* that the servile qualities of slaves were passed down to their descendants, giving them skulls that marked them as lower on "the scale of moral excellence." "Of free and slave Africans," he wrote, "I find that those [skulls] whose ancestors were always free" were thin, and therefore more advanced, while "those of slaves, whether foreign or domestic, are most frequently thick and heavy," and thus lower on the scale of moral excellence according to phrenological theory.[62] These characteristics were what slaveholders looked for when they went

[61] O.S. Fowler, *Hereditary Descent*, quoted in Mason I. Lowance, Jr., ed., *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America, 1776-1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 294-296.
[62] W. Byrd Powell, "Remarks on the Human Skull," *American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* 1 (1839): 431.

to the slave market for a purchase. As Walter Johnson has pointed out, "buyers 'discovered' associations they had themselves projected, treating the effects of their own examinations as if they were the essences of the bodies they examined."[63] Powell's remark about a "thick and heavy" skull was one characteristic that phrenologists and knowledgeable slaveholders more broadly understood as what made an individual a naturally-enslaved African. The bodily and behavioral characteristics of slaves in the market formed part of a broader matrix of tell-tale signs that signified a slave's character and potential utility as a field-hand, domestic servant, or tradesman.

The successful proliferation of evangelical denominations throughout the lower Mississippi Valley provided a ready-made financial network in the years after the Panic of 1837. Ministers made good judges of the trusted planters and shopkeepers in their locality, and they could connect cotton factors, many of whom were also ministers, with trustworthy clients. Credit reports, though seemingly more scientific than denominational networks, simply centralized the methods of information gathering that was already established by evangelical denominations in a single database. The popularity of phrenology in the lower Mississippi Valley also pointed to a more general need to verify the identities of others while understanding the relation between the body and soul. Through these different methods, evangelicals and other southerners facilitated the expansion of the slave-based cotton economy. They built networks of faith and trust, and they spread the capitalist virtues of honesty and industry, whether through the discipline of the church or the market. As they regained confidence in the global market and each other, their understanding of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" in the 1840s and 1850s became more confident

[63] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 149.

and versatile to include writing reports, sizing up skulls, grading cotton bales, keeping account books, and carrying whips.

CHAPTER FIVE

CAPITALIZING ON BELIEF: PUSHING SLAVES AND GOD'S WILL

One of the central figures in the emerging Mississippi Methodist financial network of the 1840s, Reverend William Winans, had an infatuation with accounting. As presiding elder of the Natchez District, which stretched as far south as New Orleans, Winans frequently rode from house to house to oversee his territory. He also kept a journal of his daily life that year, noting the number of miles he rode each day. "Rode to Bro. J.W. Bryan's, 9 miles," "Rode to Woodville on business, and put up at Bro. Wailes, 16 miles," are common entries in the journal. At the end of the volume, which began in January and ended in November, 1842, he concluded the journal with a bare statement: "3746 miles." Another volume from December 1, 1844 to February 22, 1846 ended in the same terse account: "7429 miles." The number of miles ridden represented a quantitative measure of Winans's ministry. He began the volume with an inscription from the English poet Edward Young, "Time flies! Death urges! Knells call! Heav'n invites! Hell threatens! All exert! In effort all! More than creation labors!" His reference to Young's "Night Thoughts," that "Time destroy'd/ Is suicide," and Winans's recording of the miles he rode, suggest he had become obsessed with labor and industry to prove his worth to

God. To ride, preach, work, and never to waste a day, was Winans's Weberian "calling," and his measurement of all that labor could be summed up in one unarguable fact—a number.[1]

But Winans did not just measure his own industry and worth for God's kingdom in numbers, he also measured the labor of the enslaved workers on his plantation near Centerville, Mississippi. Beginning in 1825, Winans began recording the daily cotton picking totals for each of his slaves, with just five or six slaves picking cotton that year. Back then he was a small slaveholder in Wilkinson County who had sporadic assignments as a circuit rider or presiding elder in the Natchez District. But by 1840, Winans was firmly entrenched as a leader of the state's Methodist Church, and the number of slaves picking cotton on his property had increased to nineteen at the most intense period of the picking season. Although Winans hired an overseer to do the daily work of watching over the plantation, he religiously recorded the daily total of each slave, added up that slave's weekly total, and combined all of them together for a weekly total for all slaves on the plantation. On blank pages, Winans divided his slaves into two columns—one for those who picked more than last week and one for those who picked less. Like a chart of debits and credits, the left side read, "Joe picked more 69. Tony picked more 18," and the right read, "Rose less—43. Doll --- --- 30. Winter --- --- 110." One week in late August, 1840, Winans sent nineteen enslaved people to pick cotton. The leading pickers that week were two women, Vina and Susan, who picked 1,074 and 1,038 pounds, respectively, for the week. Leaving Sunday off as the Lord's Day, the total cotton picked on the plantation that week was 10,267 pounds.[2] Of all the labor to be done on Winans's plantation—the hoeing, chopping,

[1] See William Winans Journal, Typescript, December 19-24, 1844, January 2, 1845, J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps-Wilson Library, Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter Cain Archives). For Edward Young poem, see "Night Thoughts," in *The Poetical Works of Edward Young with a Memoir* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, and Company, 1879), 29.
[2] Cotton Crop Record Book, Box 20, Folder 1, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives.

picking, ginning, and other various jobs throughout the year—the total pounds of cotton picked became the quantifiable measure for each slave's contribution, the proof that they were industrious and obedient servants who had faithfully done their master's will.[3]

Despite his careful records of cotton picking totals, Winans did not write much about life or work on his plantation, but for the enslaved people who did the work, the lash was the constant threat that drove them to maximize productivity every day. He only sporadically mentioned whipping slaves in his journal, but the constant attention to cotton picking totals suggests that his overseer was more directly involved in pushing slaves by whatever means necessary, including granting small prizes to those who picked large amounts and whipping those who fell short of their expected picking totals. Perhaps Joe and Tony received a small bit of cash or some extra food, while Rose, Doll, and Winter may have been subjected to whatever punishment the overseer thought was necessary to maintain proper order and industry. As masters like Winans attempted to maximize the efficiency of their enslaved workforce, they created a science of "labor management" and cotton cluster bolls, measuring their methods with a series of numbers that supposedly revealed their efficacy. Like the total number of miles he rode, after all the labor of 1840, the only number that mattered to Winans—like other Mississippi slaveholders—was the grand total of 117,963 pounds of cotton.[4]

As southerners regained confidence in the market after the Panic of 1837, they capitalized on that renewed confidence in the 1840s and 1850s by buying more slaves and land to produce more cotton. This chapter argues that evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley like Winans,

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[3] For a comparison with northern "accounting" of each day's labor, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).
[4] Cotton Crop Record Book, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives. For labor management and cotton cluster bolls, see Ian Beamish, "Saving the South: Agricultural Reform in the Southern United States, 1819-1861," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2013), 1-47; Caitlin Rosenthal, "Slavery's Scientific Management: Masters and Managers," in *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, ed. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 62-86.

and the brand of Christianity they embraced, were instrumental in creating increasingly systematic ways to maximize productivity and efficiency on cotton plantations and the ideology that supported these developments. Planters experimented with methods to increase efficiency, such as through different ways of organizing labor, new cotton seed varieties, and horticultural techniques, but the foundation of all these factors depended on a highly-disciplined labor force driven by the lash. At the forefront of these new methods for efficient production were evangelicals who not only adopted them but also sanctified them as part of the ideal labor regime. Although historians have emphasized one aspect of this evangelical slave-labor regime—the Biblical patriarchal household—they have neglected the diligent attention that many evangelicals like Winans placed on production and profits. God willed that cotton productivity would grow, they believed, so that industry would thrive, and the commercial progress brought about by this growth would enrich the world, aid in converting slaves, and help spread God's kingdom. In this way, paternalism did not necessitate leniency on enslaved people, as some historians have suggested; rather, in the lower Mississippi Valley, paternalism and profits melded into one grand ideology based on profits, industry in the service of God, and plantation labor management. At this same time in the 1840s, evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley aided in the creation of Biblically-based physiological racial theories that justified their slave-labor regimes. A racial ideology based on a combination of Biblical prophecy and scientific observations spurred evangelical slaveholders to push slaves faster and harder while doubling down on their defense of slavery.

Quotas, Whippings, and Evangelical Masters

The idea of accounting debits and credits for enslaved cotton pickers is not new; most recently Edward Baptist has provocatively argued that overseers set strict personal quotas for each slave and extracted their daily "debt" with the whip if they fell short of their quota. I have already summarized that historiographical argument in chapter one, but a general comment on it needs to be emphasized in order to show what Winans's account book represented. The assertions of Baptist's critics, especially Ian Beamish, that cotton picking totals varied greatly day to day is borne out in Winans's book, in which numbers fluctuated dramatically depending on the time of year. Even the labor itself is broken up for the stated reasons of "rain," "gathering corn," "sick," "dying child," or, peculiar to a devout Methodist, "camp meeting." The idea that Winans's overseer kept a constant personalized daily quota for each slave in which laborers were whipped for every pound they fell short of that quota is highly unlikely. Yet that does not mean that a more general quota system that varied according to the time of year was not used, and that whipping was not part of the disciplinary system. Despite the problems with Baptist's claims, his primary points should not be ignored: cotton planters searched for new ways to maximize their output of bales per acre and bales per hand, and even if agricultural advancements like new seed varieties were part of that increase in output, the foundation of the plantation system rested on force and coercion at the end of a whip.[5]

Omitted from Baptist's account, however, is the central role evangelical Christians played in shaping the system. Baptist's claims can be distilled in a single anecdote in which a

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[5] Cotton Crop Record Book, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives. Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 131-132, 141-142. For Baptist's critics, see Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "Biological Innovation and Productivity Growth in the Antebellum Cotton Economy," June 2008, NBER Working Paper no. 14142, June 2008, National Bureau of Economic Research, http://www.nber.org/papers/w14142 (accessed July 13, 2017); Ian Beamish, "Saving the South," 1-47.

former slave describes a literal “whipping machine,” but missing from his invocation of the device and the particular slave narrative from which it comes is that slave’s frequent references to Christianity and his master, who he characterized as “kind and religious.” In his old age, the ex-slave, Henry Clay, described the whipping machine as “a funny thing.” It was “a big wooden wheel with a treadle on it” that spun the wheel around with “four or five big leather straps with holes cut in them to make blisters.” Immediately after describing the wheel, and mentioning that it was generally not used by his master except for the purpose of intimidation, Clay quickly transitioned to mentioning “a little church on the plantation where we set on Sunday and heard the Mistress read out of the Bible to us and then we all sung good songs and prayed.” “Old Master,” he said earlier in the interview, “would preach a little sometime or maybe teach sunday school.”[6] Clay’s easy transitions from the whipping machine to Sunday School, and from a kind, benevolent master who preached occasionally to one who scared his slaves into submitting through a torture machine, suggests how commonplace Clay’s connection of whipping and religion must have been. It should also be clear from the narrative that Clay did not think he was describing a “metaphorical” machine, as Baptist argues.[7] It was, rather, a tangible object that his master proudly displayed and even “loaned…out to a man one time,” who actually used it.[8] Reading the rest of the narrative makes it obvious that Clay was not making a broader critique of the “cotton labor camp” and “torture as its central technology,” as Baptist has suggested.[9]

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[6] Interview with Henry Clay, *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, ed. T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 82.
[7] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 142.
[8] Henry Clay, *WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, 82.
[9] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 142.

There is little evidence in the historical record of an actual whipping machine, but one brief example comes from a novel written by a New England writer, Epes Sargent.[10] In *Peculiar: A Tale of the Great Transition*, the main character, Peculiar Institution, is born on a plantation in Marshall County, Mississippi to a master Herbert. Herbert "used to read prayers every morning," "went to church twice every Sunday," and whipped Peculiar "twice, and then not badly." Later in Peculiar's narrative of his life as a slave, he mentions that after moving to New Orleans he "heard some bad preachers, and some good. Heard Mr. Clapp preach. Heard Mr. Palmer preach," and after trying to run away, "was caught and taken to a new patent whipping-machine, recently introduced by a Yankee." Like Clay, Sargent's character Peek—Peculiar's nickname—shifted seamlessly from religion to violence, from talking about a devoutly religious master to the same master who also whipped him, and from the famous New Orleans ministers who supported slavery to the city's whipping machine that tortured escaped slaves. Sargent's account was fictional and published in 1864, but it suggests that the idea of a whipping machine was not unheard-of in nineteenth-century America, and that it was commonly connected with Christian masters attempting to intimidate and discipline their enslaved labor force.[11]

But the question of why devout Christian masters would be connected to the whipping machine remains, and it cuts counter to the dominant ways historians have described the proslavery Christianity that developed in the antebellum era. It is possible that Henry Clay's narrative and Sargent's fictional account of violent Christian slaveholders and the jolting juxtaposition of Christian ministers and a brutally efficient whipping machine was meant to mock the idea of a slave society being Christian at all. For a New England abolitionist writing in

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[10] Another notable instance of a "whipping-machine" in contemporary records comes from the northern minister Henry Ward Beecher, *Eyes and Ears* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co., 1862), 77, in which the device is not a physical object but something "we can imagine."
[11] Epes Sargent, *Peculiar: A Tale of the Great Transition* (New York: Carleton, 1864), 22-23.

the midst of the Civil War, a violent and intemperate so-called Christian in Mississippi or New Orleans would have offered a convenient way to discredit southerners' claims that they were the truly orthodox Christians they claimed they were. Such a depiction of southern evangelicals is not far off the mark from how some historians have described antebellum proslavery evangelicals as culturally captive.

More recently, however, historians have characterized proslavery evangelicals as genuinely attempting to sanctify the institution of slavery by making it more humane, Christian, and paternalistic. Instead of Christianity being a veneer that concealed evangelical slaveholders' material interests, it became a central justification for treating slaves as dependent members of a patriarchal household. Paternalism may have allowed enslaved people greater leniency on plantations, these historians have argued, leading to a backlash among other planters who worried about the potential for rebellion by semi-autonomous slaves. These historians have even gone so far as to argue that evangelical churches had to negotiate with enslaved African Americans over their position in the church in order to attract them as members.[12]

But these historians cut evangelicals off from the other, presumably secular slaveholders, who pushed their enslaved work force to maximize productivity with brutal efficiency and split up enslaved families in order to profit from their offspring. Putting Sargent's novel aside, the long memory of Henry Clay's experience as a slave brings these two themes together, suggesting

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[12] See chapter 1 for an analysis of this historiography. For culturally captive evangelicals, see John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972). For evangelical paternalism and cultural negotiation, see Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). For a detailed account of the emergence and acceptance of paternalism as the reigning defense of slavery in the South, see Lack K. Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

that evangelical paternalists were also brutally efficient taskmasters bent on maximizing labor and output on the plantation.

And Henry Clay was not the only one to make this connection—slave narratives from the nineteenth century repeatedly mentioned brutal Christian slaveholders, especially in the lower Mississippi Valley. Louis Hughes was one of those enslaved people. He was sold in Richmond, Virginia in 1844 to a prominent Mississippi cotton planter. Hughes described in agonizing detail the work he endured on his master Edward McGee's plantation in North Mississippi, including the imposition of a general quota of 250 pounds of cotton to be picked each day during picking season. Hughes wrote that he "often saw Boss so excited during the [picking] season he [McGee] scarcely ate." To ease McGee's anxiety and encourage the fastest picking possible per hand, he set punishments for those who fell short of the quota while also encouraging races between two teams in which the winning team with the most cotton would receive a tin cup of sugar. As part of the punishment slaves received on McGee's plantation, Hughes described a "bull ring," with slaves being forced to whip fellow bondspeople, including women and children. Another method was "to buck" a slave, that is, "fasten his feet together, draw up his knees to his chin, tie his hands together, draw them down over the knees, and put a stick under the latter and under the arms." The victim would then be whipped in this unbearable position until he was finally "left helpless and bleeding upon the ground."[13]

McGee's regime created an environment of terror designed to extract the most work out his enslaved labor force, but Hughes did not fail to mention that the McGees were devout, "church-going people," who "never failed to attend service on Sunday." "They were Methodists," he continued, but they alternated between attending the nearby Methodist church

[13] Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom* (Milwaukee: South Side Printing, 1897), 32, 45-46.

and a closer Baptist church. By the time Hughes published his narrative in 1897, he had begun to interpret the Christianity of his master's family as "an offset, probably, to such diabolical cruelties as those which were practiced upon me in common with nearly all the slaves in the cotton region of the south." For Hughes, McGee was a false Christian who "took pride in having all his slaves look clean and tidy at the Sabbath service," with clothing that covered up their "backs lacerated with the lash."[14]

Henry Bibb's account of his sale as a slave to a Baptist deacon in Louisiana mirrors Hughes's narrative in many respects, with a conscious juxtaposition of the religious profession of his master with his master's treatment of his slaves. The deacon Francis Whitfield bought Bibb and his family in New Orleans and brought them to his cotton plantation in Claiborne Parish, Louisiana, but Bibb soon found out "that [Whitfield] was far more like what the people call the devil, than he was like a deacon." Whitfield was ruthless with his punishment of slaves, especially in enforcing efficient labor on the plantation. Recalling the highly-regulated environment of a factory, Bibb described plantation life during cotton picking season, with the morning horn blown two hours before sunrise, a bit of time for breakfast, and any remaining whippings that were neglected from the night before. Then, "when it [was] barely light enough," they worked with a quota system similar to one employed on McGee's plantation, including small prizes and whippings as inducements for maximum productivity. After trying to escape from this horrific environment, Bibb wrote that he prayed to God, and he "thought of Deacon Whitfield." "I thought of his profession," he wrote, "and doubted his piety; I thought of his handcuffs, of his whips, of his chains, of his stocks, of his thumb-screws, of his slave driver and

[14] Ibid., 51-52, 90-91.

overseer, and of his religion."[15] Bibb's account, like the narratives of Hughes and Clay and the novel written by Sargent, presents a jarring contrast between how devout Christians were supposed to behave and reports of the violence that actually occurred on these Christian masters' plantations. Ex-slave Solomon Northup, who experienced the cruelty of Peter Tanner, a deacon in Louisiana, made similar observations, as did William Wells Brown, who told of a neighboring Baptist deacon who often beat his slaves nearly to death.[16]

The stories of these enslaved people recurred with a particular kind of trope—the hypocritical Christian slaveholder—that especially resonated with Christian abolitionist audiences, and these stories have sometimes pushed historians to ignore the religiosity of southern masters. Bibb in particular "doubted his [master's] piety," and William Wells Brown and Solomon Northup implicitly did as well. But there are also exceptions to this trope, and Northup himself provided one in recounting the behavior of his first master in Louisiana, William Ford. Northup described him as a relatively lenient master and a devout Christian, who spent Sabbath mornings reading from Scripture and preaching to his slaves. Remarkably, Northup wrote, "it is a fact I have more than once observed, that those [like Ford] who treated their slaves most leniently, were rewarded by the greatest amount of labor," describing it as "a source of pleasure to surprise Master Ford with a greater day's work than was required."[17]

It is interesting here to note the contrast between Northup's own account of labor and production and how historians such as Baptist have used Northup's account. For Baptist, the enormous increase in cotton production per slave occurred due to the ratcheting up of torture

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[15] Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (New York: Henry Bibb, 1849), 112, 114-117, 126.
[16] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 126-130; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William Wells Brown, an American Slave* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), 34-38.
[17] Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 97-98.

through whipping and slaves' "secret" ways of learning how to pick cotton faster, whereas Northup seems to argue that more labor was done on Ford's plantation than on the subsequent plantations on which he worked where the masters and overseers operated the plantation with bare cruelty.[18] Regardless, there is no need to see Ford's plantation as any less capitalistic, market-oriented, or efficient because it was less violent. The important part here is to understand that evangelical planters employed different methods for extracting the maximum amount of labor from their work force. To understand those methods, it is imperative that historians look to the evangelical ethics of plantation life and the actual commercial transactions of white evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley, without losing sight of how former slaves described these beliefs and practices.

The Duties of Christian Masters: A Slaveholding Commercial Ethic

Holland Nimmons McTyeire's *Duties of Christian Masters* outlined the evangelical proslavery ethic as understood by a southwestern evangelical in the late 1850s. McTyeire was a Methodist minister originally from Virginia who had gradually moved west in the 1840s and 1850s, as pastor of churches in Mobile and Demopolis, Alabama, Columbus, Mississippi, and, later, in New Orleans.[19] In contrast to earlier defenses of slavery from the region such as the works of Mississippians James Smylie and Thomas C. Thornton in 1836 and 1841, respectively, by 1859 McTyeire assumed there was no need to defend slavery Biblically; instead, he devoted his attention to the reciprocal relations between masters and slaves.

[18] Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 131-132.
[19] "Bishop H.N. McTyeire," *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans*, ed. William S. Speer (1888, repr.; Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2003), 407.

Much of what McTyeire wrote was paternalistic, describing the master as something akin to a feudal lord who ruled over his manor, yet the language McTyeire used also suggested that the master must exercise complete control over a labor force that should be consistently kept at work. He introduced the master-slave relationship as one in which "you control all their time; they labor and rest at your bidding." Echoing the Bible, he wrote, "You say, Go, and they go; Come, and they come, Do this, and they do it. You direct their labor and receive the proceeds of it."[20] On work and industry, he argued that enslaved people were naturally slothful and needed to be pushed to labor for their own good. "Idleness is the fruitful parent of vice," he argued, and "physical employment is a blessing and relief to those whose minds are listless, and whose resources of enjoyment are few." To emphasize the point, McTyeire wrote, "It is no favor to servants to give them little or nothing to do."[21] On the other hand, McTyeire cautioned against what he called "heavy cropping," his term for what Baptist calls "the pushing system."[22] Heavy cropping was often "heralded with a flourish and boast," McTyeire acknowledged, but "has two

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[20] H.N. M'Tyeire, *Duties of Christian Masters* (Nashville, Tennessee: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859), 18.

[21] Ibid., 31.

[22] Ibid., 43. Baptist claims that enslaved people called their labor regime "the pushing system," but he does not cite a specific source, and there does not appear to be any mention from either ex-slaves or slaveholders of the term "the pushing system." See Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told*, 116; Edward E. Baptist, "The Slave Labor Camps of Antebellum Florida and the Pushing System," in *Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration*, ed. Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 31. His one reference comes from an anti-slavery source that quotes an old slave as saying, "Men grow mighty *pushing* when they are trying to get rich," and another that says, "Folks are mighty pushing about here." See Baptist, "The Slave Labor Camps of Antebellum Florida and the Pushing System," 43, 46. The only contemporary source that seems to use the term "pushing system" in the way Baptist uses it is about slavery in Jamaica. See T. Clarkson, *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies, with a View to their Ultimate Emancipation* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1824), 169. As late as December, 2016, Baptist has insisted, "enslaved people actually used the term 'pushing system' to refer to ways that enslavers forced them to work faster." See Richard Ernsberger Jr., "Slavery as an Industrial Cornerstone: Interview with Edward E. Baptist," last modified December 20, 2016. http://www.historynet.com/slavery-as-an-industrial-cornerstone-interview-with-edward-e-baptist.htm. Following Baptist, other historians have attributed the term to contemporaries. For instance, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler write, "brutal labor regimes for slaves…known as the 'pushing system," proliferated in the American South. See Dillon and Drexler, "Introduction: Haiti and the Early United States, Entwined," in *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies*, eds. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 11.

sides to it." McTyeire reminded masters that the crop was made "not by machines, but mostly by human beings." "Has their work been relieved by proper intervals of rest and sleep?" he asked. "How much night work there?....Did the day begin before the night ended, and end long after the night began?"[23]

The questions McTyeire asked assume that such practices were common when masters were engaging in "heavy cropping," attempting to maximize the number of pounds of cotton picked. Ultimately, McTyeire argued that enslaved people, despite being human beings, were much like livestock. "There is an excess of physical exertion, both in man and beast," he wrote, "which the constitution cannot bear." Whether "overstraining be procured through force or persuasion," that is, either by the whip or a prize, as described by formerly enslaved people, the result will be "real injury and depreciation of property." These practices of overworking were not necessarily evil in and of themselves, but they were often economically counterproductive, he argued.[24] Still, regarding the use of the whip, McTyeire assured masters that it was a "mawkish sentimentalism that pronounces against all corporal punishment and deals in moral suasion only," something that "must be deferred to the millennium." Masters had duties to take care of the basic needs of their slaves, McTyeire argued, which was consistent with the paternalist proslavery ethic. But he also assumed that a long-term plan for maximizing the economic potential of the plantation was the master's goal, and the firm and exacting hand who drove the labor needed to be mindful of overworking through "heavy cropping" if he wanted to have a profitable plantation over the long term. Building up God's kingdom on earth could not be done through a single year's cotton production, but over many years, perhaps generations, evangelical masters aimed to maximize enslaved laborers' output and slowly spread the Gospel. Instead of

[23] M'Tyeire, *Duties of Christian Masters*, 43.
[24] Ibid., 31-32.

making arguments against market-oriented plantations, McTyeire recommended ways to make sure that Christian masters were not greedy for short-term gain at the expense of their souls as well as their most valuable capital—their slaves.[25]

Another window into the evangelical proslavery ethic is through someone who was not explicitly working from a religious perspective but was nonetheless influential with southern evangelical planters: the account book innovator Thomas Affleck. From Washington, Mississippi, outside Natchez, Affleck produced the most comprehensive and popular cotton and sugar plantation account books in the late 1840s. By laying out a comprehensive set of forms including daily cotton picking totals, inventories of stock, supplies, and slaves, and the total valuation of assets, planters were able to see their plantations as a series of costs and revenues. Enslaved people were valued with a dollar amount at the beginning of each year, sometimes as part of an aggregate group of "prime hands" or "hands that were not full," which could be added up as a pool of commodified labor.[26]

But Affleck also discussed the master's duties regarding slave management as an appendix to his account book. In language similar to that which McTyeire employed a decade later, Affleck argued that "overwork…insufficient clothing, improper or badly cooked food, and night rambles" were often causes of disease and therefore harmful to the management of the plantation. Additionally, Affleck asserted that "an hour devoted every Sabbath morning to [slaves'] moral and religious instruction would prove a great aid to you in bringing about a better

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[25] Ibid., 88. For more on managing plantation labor regimes through prizes and punishments, see Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Rosenthal, "Slavery's Scientific Management," in *Slavery's Capitalism*, 62-86.
[26] Rosenthal, "Slavery's Scientific Management," 75-76.

state of things amongst the negroes." "As a mere matter of interest," he argued, "it has proved to be advisable, to say nothing of it as a point of duty."[27]

McTyeire made a similarly pragmatic point when he relayed a report by the Agricultural Society of Union District, South Carolina. He wrote, "Aside from all considerations drawn from a future world, it is the best policy and highest interest of the master to afford good religious instruction to his servants." "The committee take the ground," he continued, "that [religious instruction] pays, for this world, as well as for that which is to come." Investing in the preaching of the Gospel paved the way for masters and their enslaved laborers to enter Heaven, but this side of the grave, the Gospel cultivated "a stronger sense of duty upon the part of the negroes to obey" and "a feeling of fear to offend against the obligations of religion."[28] Although Affleck's account book and recommendations for plantation management were not specifically made for Christians, all masters could see that Christianity was a vital part of slave management, and that firm but moderate punishment along with industrious habits would aid in producing the largest profits while minimizing the depreciation of the enslaved capital. Preaching and pushing slaves were Christian proslavery capitalists' dual methods for producing greater profits in this world and the next.

Both before and after the release of Affleck's plantation account book, evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley exhibited an intense interest in the value of their slaves, new technology to improve their plantations, and the fluctuating prices of different staples. Beyond the ideals that Affleck and McTyeire wrote about, the commercial transactions of evangelicals suggest that they were conscious of their enslaved workforce as a pool of commodified labor. The Methodist minister Benjamin Drake frequently wrote to his fellow Methodist factor William

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[27] Thomas Affleck, "The Duties of an Overseer," *DeBow's Review* 18 (March 1855): 340, 345.
[28] McTyeire, *Duties of Christian Masters*, 199-200.

Curtiss about a "load of slaves" and a "lot of slaves," hoping "that they had been favourably disposed of" by Curtiss to pay off Drake's debts.[29] Drake was also party to the sale of sixteen slaves, put up as collateral for a Dr. Sims, who owed money to Drake among others. Drake held three notes from Sims worth one thousand dollars each, and the merchant at the center of the sale, Joseph Dunbar, planned to "afterwards either divide the negroes in proportion to the claim of each, or make some other arrangement to suit all parties."[30] When the business was all said and done, Drake had made a pro rata dividend on his three notes of between twenty and twenty-five percent.[31] Drake, Curtiss, and their partners in business saw slaves as commodities that could be added together into an aggregate pool and divided up to pay off notes.

While evangelical slaveholders in the lower Mississippi Valley managed factories in the fields, their media organs, the denominational newspapers, focused as much on commercial news for planters as they did on religion. The stated purpose of the Methodist-run *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, edited by Holland Nimmons McTyeire, for instance, was to "contain the latest and most reliable information as to the *markets*, and such other *commercial* and *general intelligence* as all are interested in."[32] The front page generally contained religious articles, but the rest of the four-page newspaper was filled with world news and a complete page on current prices of various commodities with a particular focus on news affecting the global price of cotton. Tips on slave management, cotton crop prospects in August, reports on cotton shipments in September, and news of the latest industrial inventions made up the bulk of the newspaper's

[29] Curtiss to Drake, January 27, 1841, Box 6, Folder 49, Benjamin M. Drake Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter MDAH); Curtiss and Wailes to Drake and Magruder, April 12, 1842, Box 6, Folder 50, Benjamin M. Drake Papers, MDAH.
[30] Dunbar to Drake, December 31, 1844, Box 13, Folder 6, Drake-Magruder Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter LLMVC).
[31] Dunbar to Drake, June 27, 1845, Box 13, Folder 7, Drake-Magruder Papers, LLMVC.
[32] "Prospectus," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 10, 1850.

space.[33] *The Southwestern Religious Luminary*, run by Baptists in Mississippi, also contained commercial news, seemingly alternating between discussing revivals and technological innovations. One such innovation was an English steam plow. When "set in motion by means of two long flexible belts of iron, revolving around two wheels attached to the engine," the plow could turn a furrow "18 inches broad, 9 inches thick, and more than 300 yards long in less than four minutes," and that with uncommon precision.[34] For evangelicals in Mississippi and Louisiana, a keen focus on profits from cotton planting through technology and the commodification of human beings as valuable capital went hand-in-hand with the latest religious news of the day.

With an understanding of evangelical planters' commercial transactions and ideals for their cotton plantations, Winans's views on slavery and commerce can be placed in context. Early in his career, as a leader in the newly-dominant Methodist Church in Mississippi, Winans was a proslavery firebrand, defending the property rights of slaveholding ministers in the South. At the 1836 General Conference, Winans replied to a northern anti-slavery minister that although he was from Pennsylvania, in Mississippi he had become "a slaveholder on principle." "It was highly advantageous that he himself should hold slaves," a conference reporter wrote, paraphrasing Winans's speech. The problem with slavery was immoral slaveholders, Winans argued, so it was "important to the interests of slaves…that there be christians, who were slaveholders…diffused throughout the south." "Yes sir," he continued with ecumenical fervor, "Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, should be slave-holders." From members to deacons and

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[33] See the following articles from *New Orleans Christian Advocate*: "The Management of Slaves," May 20, 1854; "Prospect of the Crops," August 20, 1853; "Press and Export of Cotton," April 20, 1853; September 11, 1852; "Charleston Cotton Market," March 6, 1852; "Industrial Fair in New Orleans," March 6, 1852.
[34] "Ploughing by Steam," *The Southwestern Religious Luminary* Vol. 2 (December 1837): 15.

among elders and bishops too, he added with a flourish, all Christians should partake of the institution.[35]

Although Winans saw it as a moral obligation for a Christian to be a slaveholder, he still often viewed his own slaves as commodities. In an extended written debate over the morality of slavery with a friend and northern Methodist minister, Daniel De Vinne, Winans quoted the book of Exodus to defend his argument that "the Slave *is his money*."[36] Although slaves were people and had souls to be saved, Winans argued that God regarded slaves ultimately as the master's property. Winans also responded to De Vinne's argument that free labor was more cost-effective by referring to slaves first as commodities. "You northern men," he charged De Vinne, "or your fellow-philanthropists of England or both together" must "*refund* to us the money you received for these slaves, when *you* furnished them to us." He continued, "Since the capital has been less profitably invested than was yours of the price of these slaves invested by you in free-labor, and since you now require us to relinquish the advantage of the investment," then it would only be just to reimburse slaveholders for the value of their slaves.[37] In an even clearer sense of how Winans had fully commodified the enslaved people who worked on his Mississippi plantation, he asked, "Having passed *counterfeit* coin upon us, can you refuse, when, by your own fist, it must be nailed to the counter, to return us at least half the value you received from us for it?" If slavery were to be ended as an economic system, Winans feared, then they would be like counterfeit coins, a deception that tricked the buyer. Like earlier fears of counterfeit preachers, bank notes, and peddlers in an economic system based on unseen forces, commodified laborers

[35] *Debate on "Modern Abolitionism," in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Cincinnati, May, 1836* (Cincinnati: Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, 1836), 19-21.
[36] Winans to De Vinne, December 23, 1842, Box 2, Folder 20, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives.
[37] Ibid., January 3, 1843.

could seem like genuine slaves to their masters, but they too could be a deception designed to dupe the buyer into believing that they were actually valuable.[38]

Based on his opinions on slavery as well as his regional contemporaries, Winans's account book represents an early attempt by a well-regarded and middling planter-class Methodist minister to produce the maximum number of bales per hand possible. The mere existence of the daily cotton book does not mean, as Baptist has suggested, that each day that a slave fell under the previous day's total, she was automatically whipped. The page of weekly totals that compares with past totals is suggestive of some kind of quota for each slave. Here the evidence offered by the slave narratives provides a clear window into how those quotas often functioned, with overwhelming evidence that planters, especially Christian planters, punished missed quotas with whippings. Regardless, however, of how many times Winans's overseer whipped slaves who fell short of their expected totals, all planters, including evangelical proslavery masters, understood that the whip was the most basic tool of the overseer to maintain firm discipline. Industry was a God-send to the laborer, McTyeire argued, and Winans made sure that his slaves would always work to their fullest potential and therefore receive God's grace. Even more important than the whipping, however, is the intense interest of this Methodist minister in maximizing production and profits, while also seeing himself as a Biblical patriarch within the paternalist evangelical ethic. While on one hand Winans could look at his plantation and regard himself as an instrument of God and a blessing of Christianity for his slaves, on the other hand he could return to his account book for the raw data of production and sales to experiment with new scientific methods of maximizing bales per hand, bales per acre, and minimizing the damage to his enslaved capital.

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[38] Scrap in notes for letters to De Vinne, Box 2, Folder 20, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives.

Missionary Cotton: The Price of Paternalism

While these two sides of Winans and other evangelical slaveholders seem contradictory to many historians, an examination of the financial foundations of slave missions helps to bridge the gap between profits and paternalism. Historians have divorced these two facets of slaveholding, but evangelical masters understood that profits fueled paternalism. Evangelical missions to the slaves were the cornerstone of the proslavery paternalistic argument. Christians of the master class occasionally groaned about the supposed burden of slavery that hung over their heads, but while they had a literally captive audience, they thought the least that could be done was to preach to their enslaved laborers and exhort them to follow Jesus Christ. The evangelical Mississippian Thomas C. Thornton's 1841 *Inquiry into the History of Slavery* quoted the Virginian Henry A. Wise's belief that "slavery on this continent is the gift of heaven to Africa." "If this was not the Divine will," Wise concluded, "let those who object tell me how came *African* slavery here?"[39] To preach to the slaves, however, evangelicals needed particular preachers and missionaries for that purpose. Ministers often either preached to both free and enslaved church-goers in the same service or created an additional afternoon service for enslaved African Americans, but Methodists also created specific positions within the Mississippi Conference that were entirely devoted to slaves. In 1840, the Mississippi Methodists had five ministers entirely devoted to "people of colour," particularly in areas in which African Americans outnumbered whites by a significant margin, such as Madison and Yazoo Counties, Wilkinson County, and the Natchez area. Like the Choctaw mission of the 1820s, Mississippi

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[39] T.C. Thornton, *An Inquiry in the History of Slavery* (Washington: William M. Morrison, 1841), 277. For more on the place of slave missions within evangelical paternalism, see Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 169-209.

Methodists genuinely believed that they were carrying on God's divine commission by sending preachers to save the souls of enslaved African Americans.[40]

But these missions as well as others around the conference and abroad required funds, so in the early 1840s, prominent Methodists began donating bales of cotton to pay for missions. They gave the bales to Winans, who used the proceeds from the sales to support the missions. In December, 1844, for instance, Curtiss wrote to Drake, while Drake was at the annual conference meeting in Port Gibson, that "the balance of proceeds for Missionary Cotton was paid to Bro. Winans and a statement of the account lauded him for you."[41] Two months later, Drake wrote back to Curtiss with "the promise of some eight or nine bales of cotton being shipped to you for the benefit of the Missionary Society." "Please pay to brother Winans to be credited on missionary drafts," he wrote.[42] Again in August of the same year, Drake heard from "brother Watkins" that there was "a pressing necessity for missionary funds in New Orleans," and that he had sent "[brother Watkins] a draft on you for any funds that may be in your hands to my order." He continued by mentioning that "a considerable number of persons promised to send cotton to you last winter for Missionary purposes."[43] Meanwhile, Winans reported that part of the funds to pay for the missionary drafts had come through Curtiss from "the proceeds of Sister Grayson's Missionary Cotton," while Winans was raising money for the missionary cause through camp meetings in the Natchez District and from the laity of New Orleans. Mississippi planters' free gifts of valuable cotton bales showed their sincere belief in the work of building up God's kingdom among enslaved people.[44]

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[40] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1839-1845. Volume III* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 117-118.
[41] Curtiss to Drake, December 9, 1844, Box 4, Folder 22, Benjamin M. Drake Papers, MDAH.
[42] Drake to Curtiss, February 5, 1845, Box 4, Folder 22, Benjamin M. Drake Papers, MDAH.
[43] Ibid., August 15, 1845.
[44] Winans to Drake, June 8, 1843, Box 17, Folder 11, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives; Winans to Drake, September 24, 1845, Box 4, Folder 22, Benjamin M. Drake Papers, MDAH.

The evangelization of slaves depended on the Missionary Society, and the Missionary Society depended on funds from cotton sales—thus Methodists and the lower Mississippi Valley could look at the profits in their account books as something holy and ordained by God. The devout and prominent Methodist, Mary Burruss McGehee, exhibited the intertwining of a paternalistic defense of slavery with the sanctification of plantation profits. McGehee, who was the wife of Judge Edward McGehee, one of the wealthiest evangelical businessmen in Mississippi, and a daughter of a prominent Methodist minister, wrote in 1836 to her brother John W. Burruss, "*Duty* plainly calls you to the station of a 'Planter' and a planter here, is the *master of slaves*." She expressed misgivings about the institution of slavery, but concluded that enslaved African Americans "need *restraint*, *discipline*, and however *painful*, and painful it is, what judicious parent will withhold *discipline* when its infliction is necessary."[45]

McGehee's invocation of the supposed burden of slaveholding was a common trope of paternalism, but in a letter to Burruss four months later, she wrote concerning the wealth they had accumulated and her own sense of duty in light of Christian morality. Although she claimed to despise the avarice of wealth, she argued that wealth could be useful if made "by honorable toil"—which presumably included the toil of the McGehees' slaves—"and used to diffuse the blessings of refinement and the fine arts, to supply means for the cultivation of the mind and taste." "'Ye cannot serve both God and mammon,'" she quoted from Jesus' lips, "and I do not intend to serve mammon, but to make it serve us and our cause, which is I trust, the cause of God."[46] McGehee proclaimed that the profits the household made from their 120 slaves in Wilkinson County on over two thousand acres of property were used in the service of the Lord

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[45] Mary McGehee to John W. Burruss, March 17, 1836, Box 1, Folder 8, John C. Burruss Papers, LLMVC.
[46] Ibid., July 21, 1836.

and ultimately the evangelical cause of spreading Christianity and refined civilization.[47] By pushing slaves harder and maximizing the profits from each "hand" and acre, evangelicals made plantation efficiency and mass production do the work of God.

Recent historians of slavery and capitalism, however, leave out the place of God in planters' world view. Walter Johnson has described the formula for what he calls "slave racial capitalism" as an almost mystical alchemy that transformed "lashes into labor into bales into dollars into pounds sterling," but Johnson's formula, as useful as it is, misses the spiritual element that was integral to the system for many aspiring paternalists in the cotton kingdom.[48] The metaphysics of commodity exchange for evangelicals made even more transformations, converting dollars into missionaries and books into proslavery Christianity. Proslavery Christianity, preached by southwestern missionaries to slaves and free people, and circulated in denominational newspapers, was designed to flourish and expand, creating yet more plantations, lashes, and labor. Efficiency and maximizing production were regarded as end goals in and of themselves by southern evangelicals, as evidenced by their attention to these aims in their literature and private correspondence, but the profits from productive plantations were also the financial basis upon which evangelical slaveholders built paternalism. Planters around the state could contribute to a holy cause such as the Methodist Missionary Society through the donation of cotton bales, which were sold by evangelical commission merchants and donated to missionaries and publishers. Paternalism was an integral part of the master-slave relationship, at least in the minds of the master class, but it came at a cost—for Drake, "eight or nine bales of cotton." Evangelical slaveholders could push their enslaved laborers at maximum speed,

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[47] Edward McGehee, 1836 Wilkinson County Combined Tax Roll, Mississippi County Tax Rolls, 1818-1902, MDAH.
[48] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 244.

mortgage them, and sell them, yet still see themselves as saving enslaved people from their own supposed savagery. Lashes—whether through a "whipping machine" or not—and prizes metamorphosed into labor into cotton into dollars into missionaries, and ultimately into the salvation of benighted souls and the instrumentality of God's holy will.

Samuel Cartwright: Physician and Biblical Exegete of White Supremacy

As evangelical planters bought paternalism through cotton sales, they also turned to emerging racial theories that joined their literal understanding of the Bible with cutting-edge physiological and anatomical research in Europe. According to these theories, the Bible ordained—and scientific observation confirmed—that African Americans were naturally lazy but would thrive in an environment in which they were forced to labor for Euro-Americans. Through this social system, the world would ultimately be Christianized and civilized. Among the developers of these racial and labor theories was a notable doctor of the lower Mississippi Valley, Samuel Cartwright.

Historians have discussed Cartwright at great length, particularly as a point of origin for scientific racism, but they have tended to neglect the fundamental role of the Bible and Biblical prophecy in Cartwright's science. In the 1820s, Cartwright was one of the elites of Mississippi society who contributed to the state's Missionary Auxiliary Society. Closely connected to prominent ministers and Christian planters in the Natchez District, it should be no surprise that the Bible was foundational to Cartwright's anatomical and racial research.[49] For Cartwright, as for many other Christian natural philosophers of the early nineteenth century, the empirical truths observed in nature could not contradict Scriptural revelation "as an axiom, universally

[49] Members of the Mississippi Conference Auxiliary Society, Box 11, Folder 75, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives.

applicable." But in those cases when it seemed they did, "deeper and more extensive researches into the very science which has engendered the objection," he insisted, "will prove the truth of the Book."[50] Just as Johnson's formula for slave racial capitalism, his treatment of Cartwright ignores the numerous references back to the Bible to substantiate Cartwright's ideas in a higher law. With his materialist interpretation of history, Johnson may disregard Cartwright's religious views as a post hoc justification that was superfluous to his racial theories, but Cartwright and planters in the lower Mississippi Valley would have strongly objected. For them, the best minds of Europe in Hebrew philology and natural philosophy formed the intellectual structure from which these ideas emerged.[51]

Using the latest physiological theories from France and Germany, and combining those with German research into Hebrew philology, Cartwright proposed a theory that the races were actually distinct species yet equally human. Despite Cartwright's plain acknowledgement of the humanity of Africans and their descendants in the Americas, his theory of racial distinctiveness and comparative anatomy made it more palatable for evangelical planters to push enslaved laborers to work harder, believing that it was African Americans' lot in life appointed by God and nature. Like belief in God's providence guiding the commercial progress of America, belief in the divinely-ordained place of enslaved African Americans fed into the increased production of cotton that characterized the capitalist lower Mississippi Valley.

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[50] Samuel Cartwright, *Essays, Being Inductions Drawn from the Baconian Philosophy Proving the Truth of the Bible and the Justice and Benevolence of the Decree Dooming Canaan to Be Servant of Servants* (Vidalia, Louisiana: n.p., 1843), 4.
[51] See Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 200-203. Other historians have mentioned Cartwright's discussion of the Bible in his proslavery literature, but they generally emphasize his contributions to medical science and scientific racism rather than his ties to southern Protestant proslavery thought. See David R. Roediger and Elizabeth D. Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 54-58.

At the foundation of Cartwright's theory was a debt to contemporary European biblical scholars. He based much of his biblical exegesis on the work of the German philologist and Biblical scholar Wilhelm Gesenius, who argued that the races of mankind descended from the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Using Gesenius's Biblical interpretation of Genesis to explain race in the nineteenth-century world, Cartwright argued that the enslavement of Africans was natural. Africans in the colonial past were "drawn [to America] by an impulse of his nature to fulfil his destiny of becoming Japheth's [Europeans'] servant."[52]

Cartwright's real contribution to this theory, however, was to argue that the facts of anatomy and physiology confirmed the racial identification of Noah's three sons with Cartwright's three racial groups. In other words, Cartwright's scientific findings backed up Gesenius's Biblical theory. "The knife of the anatomist," he claimed, "has demonstrated that the brain, proper, is smaller in [Africans] than in *other* races of men," and that other characteristics of different brain size and anatomy based on race has caused the "*savans*" of Paris to deny the common origin of mankind. But when combined with careful study of the original Hebrew in Scripture, Cartwright concluded that Africans' identity of "servant of servants is *re-written* in his anatomical structure, as plainly as it is in the original Hebrew of the Bible." Instead of supporting the idea of polygenesis, as some scientists were doing, he asserted that the "recent discoveries of the *savans* of France," properly understood, was "proclaiming the truth of Revealed Religion."[53]

In a later, more detailed classification of this conclusion, Cartwright acknowledged the Christian idea of monogenesis as the unity of mankind, but he distinguished between different species of men under the same genus. The "Caucasian" and the "Mongolian" were two separate species, he argued, and Africans formed another "prognathous" race, "more like the monkey

[52] Cartwright, *Essays*, 10.
[53] Ibid., 11, 14.

tribes and the lower order of animals than any other species of the genus man."[54] Such a distinction required the development of "comparative anatomy"—Cartwright's medical specialty. Different races of mankind were anatomically composed in different ways, and the diseases and treatments for those diseases varied by race. For example, Cartwright argued that African Americans could not develop full-blown "phthisis," or tuberculosis, because that disease only emerged "when the sanguineous system becomes fully developed and gains the mastery…over the lymphatic and nervous systems." But such a development never occurred among African Americans, he argued; instead, they remained like children for the duration of their lives, with strong digestive powers that supposedly prevented "phthisis."[55] Likewise, Cartwright argued that anatomical observation showed that African Americans consumed less oxygen, and had larger nerves, smaller brains, and greater digestion, features that led to laziness, heightened appetite, and less discriminating senses.[56]

The distinctive racial characteristics Cartwright outlined seemed to make Africans and their descendants biologically fit for service and labor in the American South. African Americans had a uniquely weak will, Cartwright argued, but naturally followed the strong wills of those from superior races, particularly white men who knew "the character of negroes." This power of the will Cartwright tellingly referred to as "the white man's spiritual empire," an immaterial force that emanated from supposedly natural leaders partaking of the divine "Infinite Will" of God.[57] The spiritual inferiority of African Americans joined their physical characteristics, or

[54] Samuel Cartwright, "Natural History of the Prognathous Species of Mankind," in *Cotton is King, and Proslavery Arguments*, ed. E.N. Elliott (Augusta, Georgia: Pritchard, Abbott and Loomis, 1860), 707.
[55] Samuel Cartwright, "Slavery in the Light of Ethnology," in *Cotton is King*, 693.
[56] Cartwright, "Natural History of the Prognathous Species of Mankind," 709-710. Also see Cartwright on the "membranous wing" on the eyelid that supposedly made "the race of Canaan" more fit for the bright sun and outdoor work: Cartwright, *Essays*, 14-15.
[57] Samuel Cartwright, "On the Caucasians and Africans," in *Cotton is King*, 719. See also Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 176-208.

"ethnical peculiarities," as Cartwright called them, that made them the only people capable of enjoying the specific labor they performed on cotton and sugar plantations. In the American South, "the white man, from the physiological laws governing his economy, *can not labor and live*," according to Cartwright, but "the negro thrives, luxuriates and enjoys existence more than any laboring peasantry to be found on the continent of Europe."[58] This ability to labor in the American South was "planted in Canaan's nature by an all-wise and beneficent Creator."[59]

In opposition to the supposedly natural characteristics of being mild, good-natured, and obedient, Cartwright labelled the resistance of African Americans to plantation labor a disease. Drapetomania, "the mental disease that provokes slaves to run away," and Dysaesthesia Aethiopica, a condition in which black blood filled the brain, commonly called "rascality" by overseers, were diseases that Cartwright coined and claimed were unique to "the Negro Race." Generally these diseases were caused by poor labor management, he observed, either of masters being "too familiar" with their slaves or treating them cruelly and denying them "the necessaries of life." If, however, they did not have reason for a turn towards rascality, then a common suggestion was "whipping the devil out of them."[60]

Through the enslavement of Africans, Cartwright concluded, white Americans had contributed to the ultimate happiness of slaves as well as the prosperity of the country and world. Embedded in his religious and scientific argument was God's divinely-ordained providence. In a letter to Rev. Peter Cartwright of Illinois, an anti-slavery Methodist minister, that was published in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, Cartwright defended slavery as an institution based on the Bible but then asserted that experience with free black men, "with snakes in [their] bosom[s]

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[58] Cartwright, "Slavery in the Light of Ethnology," 705.
[59] Cartwright, *Essays*, 18-20.
[60] Samuel Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *DeBow's Review* 11 (September 1851): 331-335.

engaged in a species of heathen worship," should convince Christians "that whatever evils may be attached to negro slavery, it is fairly entitled to the merit of greatly improving the African race, physically, morally, and mentally."[61] The inherent "hebetude of body and mind" of the "Canaanitish race" made it "a mercy and a blessing to negroes to have persons in authority set over them, to provide for and take care of them." As an example, Cartwright said, northerners might "hear of the poor negroes, or colored people, as you call them, being beaten with many stripes by their masters and overseers," but their inherent racial characteristics made them "suffer more from corporeal or other punishments in the cellars and dark lanes and alleys of Boston, New York and Philadelphia, by the cruel tyranny practiced by the strong over the weak and helpless."[62]

In an 1851 article in *DeBow's Review* on "How to Save the Republic," he explained not only how southerners believed slavery blessed the enslaved but also formed the cornerstone of the American economic engine. "The products of slave-labor form a very essential part of the wealth and prosperity, not only of our entire republican confederacy, but of the world at large," Cartwright bragged. "A single product of that labor"—African American slavery—"furnishes a cheap clothing for the inhabitants of the globe, who, having less to pay for clothing, have more to expend in purchasing knowledge, and more time to spare in cultivating the moral virtues." Again, Cartwright emphasized the "new and important basis of manufacturing and commercial wealth" that depended on the enslavement of supposedly inferior races. "Products which their labor alone could produce," Cartwright believed, could "supply the wants of mankind."[63] Tying

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[61] "Letter of Dr. Cartwright, of New Orleans, to Rev. Peter Cartwright, of Illinois," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 13, 1858.
[62] Cartwright, "Slavery in the Light of Ethnology," 701.
[63] Samuel A. Cartwright, "How to Save the Republic, and the Position of the South in the Union," *DeBow's Review* 11 (August 1851): 189, 192.

together all of the strands in Cartwright's arguments brought southern planters to see slavery as the foundation for commercial progress, civilization, prosperity, and God's will for each race through Biblical prophecy.

Despite his dubious Biblical genealogy and his bizarre ideas about miasmas and prognathous races, Cartwright's ideas easily translated into the worldview of evangelicals like Winans and McTyeire in the lower Mississippi Valley and helped reconcile modern science, commerce, and Christianity for many southerners. Winans responded to Cartwright's letters with enthusiasm. "To overthrow a formidable portion of infidel Philosophy," he wrote, "and to 'Justify the ways of God to man,' are of so much importance that to be, in any way, concerned in their accomplishment, would be highly gratifying to me." Additionally, Winans opined that "the policy, advocated too extensively in the South, of suppressing discussion on the subject of Slavery [was] the very worst that could have been adopted" since slavery was defensible, he believed, "on any ground, of politics, morality, or religion."[64] The prominent Methodist minister, Charles Kimball Marshall, frequently corresponded with Cartwright as well, writing him that he "greedily devour[ed] everything from your pen," and sent him "a thousand thanks for so noble a contribution to the cause of science and humanity."[65] Marshall agreed with Cartwright that slavery was right and "of Divine appointment," as well as "Salvation and paradise to the Negro," before inquiring further into whether a "flat footed negro may be produced from a mulatto."[66] Even the Presbyterian minister Joshua B. Stratton and the future Confederate President Jefferson

[64] Winans to Cartwright, February 24, 1842, Box 17, Folder 10, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives.
[65] C.K. Marshall to Cartwright, October 23, 1854, Box 1, Folder 3, Samuel A. Cartwright Papers, LLMVC; Marshall to Cartwright, August 30, 1853, Box 1, Folder 2, Samuel A. Cartwright Papers, LLMVC.
[66] Marshall to Cartwright, October 23, 1854, Box 1, Folder 3, Samuel A. Cartwright Papers, LLMVC.

Davis corresponded with Cartwright on the value of slavery for the spread of Christianity as well as enslaved laborers' pivotal role in the global economy.[67]

Despite this vast, admiring audience, some historians have dismissed Cartwright as a radical outlier in southern racial and intellectual thought, but at least by the 1850s, Cartwright's views were mainstream enough to be included in the proslavery collection of essays *Cotton is King*.[68] Cartwright came to his particular racial views in a way that blended evangelical faith with empiricism and capitalistic fervor. Emblematic of the lower Mississippi Valley, he saw God in the work of enslaving Africans, Christianizing them, and then pushing them to produce the goods that circulated in the global capitalist machine. And he did so, importantly, in line with the reformed Biblical interpretation that was common in the region, in opposition to his scientific adversaries who supported the theory of polygenesis. Jefferson Davis wrote to Cartwright of slavery as "the mildest servitude to a christian" which brought "the light of revealed religion" to the enslaved. He also praised the "new channels of commerce" opened by slave labor which brought "different nations into closer intercourse and greater dependence, which is to strengthen the bonds of national unity and to industry, security and happiness."[69] Slavery, in the minds of the lower Mississippi Valley's master class, was a blessing to African Americans, a boon to commerce, and a part of the great unfolding of God's providence in the world.

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[67] Joshua B. Stratton to Cartwright, January 12, 1858, Box 1, Folder 3, Samuel A. Cartwright Papers, LLMVC; Jefferson Davis to Cartwright, June 10, 1849, Box 1, Folder 1, Samuel A. Cartwright Papers, LLMVC.

[68] For Cartwright as an outlier, see Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 56. For other interpretations of Cartwright, see Roediger and Esch, *The Production of Difference*, 54-58; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholder's Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 523. In Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 966, O'Brien actually argues that Cartwright was among those proslavery intellectuals who were mainstream, as opposed to the "most original" and "idiosyncratic" southern thinkers of the 1850s, George Fitzhugh and Henry Hughes.

[69] Davis to Cartwright, June 10, 1849, Box 1, Folder 1, Samuel A. Cartwright Papers, LLMVC.

The toil of African Americans under the burden of the whip produced the wealth that helped spread Christianity and justified slavery, something evangelical southerners well understood. They consciously pushed their slaves using whatever efficient means they could discover, whether through punishment or prizes, and the production that resulted justified whatever means were used. The surplus value of their crops bought not only the lifestyle of a southern cotton planter, but it bought paternalism. It paid for missionaries and tracts, and, they hoped, the expansion of God's kingdom. Instead of holding slaveholders back from transforming their plantations into factories in the fields, evangelicals led the charge as business-savvy planters, using account books and manuals for slave management. Even if whipping were necessary, and they all agreed that it was, their belief that enslaved people had inherited their lot from the biblical Canaan propelled them to steel their resolve and know that it was God's hand who pushed the economic engine of the cotton kingdom.

As William Winans filled his daily journal with the miles he rode and his cotton account book with the pounds his "hands" picked, he meditated on the day's production and prayed that his service and that of his slaves would be pleasing to God. When the next day began, he would ride and preach, while his slaves picked cotton for God, who through some unseen spiritual alchemy, transformed the fibers into dollars into missionaries and yet more plantations and slaves.

CHAPTER SIX

COMMERCIAL PROGRESS AND THE BUSINESS OF RELIGION

Enslaved labor on plantations formed the foundation of the lower Mississippi Valley's economy, but white southerners had a larger vision of prosperity that included infrastructure and industrial development. A diversified economy, they believed, would further increase profits for the spread of the Gospel. For evangelical businessmen, profits and faith were two sides of the same coin. The surplus labor of slaves constructing railroads or working in textile mills paid for the construction of churches, the salaries of missionaries, and the publication of evangelical literature. Evangelization itself underwent a transformation towards becoming more business-like with the proliferation of denominational newspapers and charitable institutions. As the drive to industrialize, modernize, and spread the Gospel picked up the pace in the 1850s, evangelical southerners in the lower Mississippi Valley focused increasingly on religious, economic, and eventually political independence.[1]

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[1] On antebellum southern industry, see Gavin Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Frank J. Byrne, *Becoming Bourgeois: Merchant Culture in the South, 1820-1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006); William N. Parker, "Slavery and Southern Economic Development: An Hypothesis and Some Evidence," *Agricultural History* 44 (January 1970): 115-125.

Evangelicals and Railroads

In 1840, the Panic of 1837's effect on cotton prices continued. The value of the crop was low and Mississippi planters were hurting financially. Despite the economic depression, Judge Edward McGehee would not give up his dream of building a railroad that connected his town of Woodville, Mississippi to the Mississippi River. The West Feliciana Railroad had been chartered in 1831 to connect St. Francisville, Louisiana to Woodville, Mississippi, but the construction process had been slow. Many Mississippians and Louisianans saw this rural short line of twenty-six miles as a way to use state tax dollars to fund an infrastructure project that would only benefit the wealthiest elites. Regardless, the railroad needed investors ever since the initial building contractor had bailed on the project in 1837. That year, Isaac McCord and Company, employing mostly white railroad workers from Louisville, Kentucky, were supposed to be paid a total of five hundred thousand dollars to complete the project, but the method of payment was in paper notes issued by the West Feliciana Railroad Bank in Woodville. When those notes were discounted between fifty and seventy-five percent in May, 1837, the company walked out on the job. Planters and investors in Woodville were left with nothing—just wasted West Feliciana Railroad Money, stock in the railroad company, and a useless rail line that only stretched for a few miles up the river.[2]

It was left to the planters' own initiative and resources to finish the job. McGehee, a wealthy slaveholder in southwestern Mississippi and a director of the railroad, picked up the majority of the slack from 1840 to 1842. Throughout the 1830s, he had been one of the chief

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[2] Merl E. Reed, *New Orleans and the Railroads: The Struggle for Commercial Empire, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 47-49; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 168; Dunbar Rowland, *Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form* (Atlanta: Southern Historical Publishing Association, 1907), 2:991.

promoters of the railroad. As a stock commissioner, he pushed for the private and public sales of West Feliciana Railroad stock, especially when sales were slow. James H. Muse, a legislator from East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, recalled being struck by the "simplicity and gentleness" of McGehee, as the two men quickly got down to business concerning the state's share in aiding the railroad's construction. With his impressive ability to appeal to those in power, Muse remembered, "of course he obtained what he desired at the hands of the legislature."[3] Like other short lines in Louisiana, over half of the capital was invested by the state itself, with the remainder coming from stockholders like McGehee. With the railroad floundering after 1837, McGehee, while still a company director, contracted himself out to finish the job. Whenever he had the time to spare forty of his approximately 140 slaves, he sent them to grade and construct the remaining miles of the road until he completed the connection in 1842. As compensation for the work of his enslaved labor force, he received between twelve hundred and fifteen hundred dollars per mile, not including materials, while his expenses averaged less than five hundred dollars.[4] Being a stockholder of the West Feliciana Railroad Company, for McGehee the situation presented nothing but opportunity: he not only paid himself to complete the railroad, the railroad also brought substantial returns on the investment for all stockholders as well as strengthened the economic position of Woodville itself.

The West Feliciana Railroad offered Wilkinson County commercial advantages, but since its investors were regular Methodist patrons, it also further contributed to the wealth and resources of the state's Methodist Church. McGehee had come to Mississippi as early as 1808, and from the beginning of his settlement as a slaveholding planter, he was a prominent Methodist

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[3] *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891), 1:1196.
[4] Reed, *New Orleans and the Railroads*, 55, 50.

donor.[5] In 1825, he fronted the two thousand dollars needed to buy a lot in New Orleans where a Methodist church would be constructed and then paid the for the church's construction costs. In 1836, he loaned ten thousand dollars for the cost of a new, larger New Orleans church that would be overseen by the fiery evangelical John Maffitt. When the Mississippi Conference was unable to pay all the funds, he simply donated the rest of the money to the church.[6]

But McGehee was not the only Methodist investor involved in the West Feliciana enterprise; Edmund H. Wailes, the son of the minister Levin Wailes, was also an early stockholder and superintendent. In 1839, Wailes was acting agent as stock salesman for many planters in East Feliciana Parish, and at least by that time he had also assumed the role of superintendent. Like McGehee, Wailes was a major donor to the Methodist Church in Mississippi. With his brother-in-law William Curtiss, he was well connected with the commercial networks of the church. By 1851, when McGehee was appointed president of the company and Wailes the cashier, the profits of the corporation served the direct interests of the Methodist Church in Mississippi and Louisiana. McGehee and Wailes helped unite their small town of Woodville to the rest of the world via locomotive, and this technological advancement could enhance both their business and religious interests.[7]

After the chartering of the West Feliciana Railroad in 1831, and as it was finally completed in 1842, other railroads appeared throughout the region as part of the same commercial vision. For most of the antebellum period, southern capitalists assumed railroads would complement the steamboat traffic of cotton and other goods through the river ports of

[5] *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi*, 1:1192-1193.
[6] John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, Tennessee: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 2:79, 348-349.
[7] Stephen Mead to E.H. Wailes, August 27, 1839, and Moses Liddell to John Liddell, October 20, 1839, Box 1, Folder 8, Moses Liddell, St. John R., and Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter LLMVC); *American Railway Guide, and Pocket Companion, for the United States* (New York: Curran Dinsmore and Co., 1851), 60.

Natchez and Vicksburg rather than compete with steamboats. The object of these railroads was to connect the interior of the state to the rivers. The most economically significant of these was the Vicksburg and Jackson Railroad, which began connecting the prosperous plantation region on the Big Black River to the Mississippi River in 1838. In 1846-1847, the Vicksburg and Jackson was hauling thirty-two thousand bales of cotton in a season, and just two years later they reported forty-nine thousand bales transported. Instead of planters relying on the stagecoach roads from Jackson to Vicksburg which then connected to New Orleans by steamboat, they could pay for freight on the railroad at a small fraction of the cost. The Natchez and Jackson Railroad, a line intended to compete with the Vicksburg and Jackson, began laying tracks in 1836, but the Panic of 1837 slowed their progress, and ultimately the tracks never reached Jackson.[8]

Despite failures and a lack of support by some citizens of the region, railroads effectively transformed the economic landscape for much of the lower Mississippi Valley. North-south feeder roads connected outer reaches of the planting interior like Canton, Brandon, and Raymond to the Vicksburg and Jackson by the 1850s. As the cotton market entered a renewed boom cycle in the 1850s, southern capitalists planned for more railroad construction across the South with east-west railroads that would connect Georgia to the Mississippi River. Additionally, they built north-south main lines such as the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern Railroad that in 1858 connected New Orleans with Jackson, allowing for rail traffic to operate continuously from New Orleans north through Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio.[9]

With this increased reach of railroads, cotton production soared yet again. While the rest of the South remained relatively static, exports from New Orleans more than doubled from 394,000 bales in 1832 to 873,000 bales in 1842. Low cotton prices in the early 1840s encouraged

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[8] Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 164-168.
[9] Ibid., 168-176.

many of the older and wealthier areas of the state to cut back on cotton production, but in northern Mississippi, cotton plantations proliferated from 1839 to 1849. Adams County, center of the old Natchez District, decreased its output of cotton from about 50,000 bales in 1840 to 17,473 bales in 1850, but Marshall County in northern Mississippi increased cotton production from about 2,500 bales in 1840 to be the leading county in the state in 1850 with 32,775 bales. Overall production remained virtually the same for the state, but the increased reach of railroads had democratized space in the Mississippi backcountry. By the end of the 1840s, farmers in the North Mississippi hill country could profitably produce cotton for the market. As prices rebounded in the 1850s, and railroads began to bind the region together, cotton production increased like it had in the 1830s, tripling statewide from 1850 to 1860.[10]

McGehee and Wailes had their own direct interest in promoting the West Feliciana Railroad, but an earlier Baptist minister, Elisha Battle, had also promoted railroad investment for its supposedly Christianizing effect on the countryside. In 1835, Battle wrote a long article in *The Mississippian* explaining how Christianity and the expansion of railroads would mutually reinforce each other. Railroads would create "respectable commercial towns" out of "*Black Jack Ridges*…sterile plains…[and] useless marshes." By promoting prosperity, they "will have a direct tendency to aid the benevolent institutions of the day." In later years, Battle could use the example of McGehee's profits from the West Feliciana Railroad to support his argument. Railroads would also help spread the Gospel, Battle claimed, by increasing the flow of religious tracts and ministers across the country, allowing religious and commercial information to move

[10] Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 2:900; *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States* (Washington: Thomas Allen, 1841), 228; *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), 458; O.C. Stine and O.E. Baker, *Atlas of American Agriculture, Part V: The Crops, Section A: Cotton* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 16-17.

with greater rapidity. Battle additionally argued that Christians were best suited to the construction of railroads because they had a "spirit of enterprize in the public works of utility, of a secular nature." The "*ardor* and *zeal*" of Christians should be directed, not only to spiritual purposes, he asserted, but to "the construction of Rail Roads, and in all other enterprises which aim at the amelioration of the condition of the human race, hoping thereby to contribute to the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom."[11]

While Battle may have been ahead of his time in thinking that railroads might aid in Christianizing the country, by the 1850s such a sentiment had become more widespread. With a return to prosperity, Methodists in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* preached on the moral and religious aspects of the railroad. One reason railroads were holy, they argued in 1852, was, as Battle had argued many years before, that railroads civilized the countryside. "Out of worthless lands and idle workmen and useless commodities," the *Advocate*'s author wrote, railroads "*create* capital." Railroads also "redeem[ed] the time," meaning they saved time to be better used for other useful works or holy meditation on God. Furthermore, with much faster travel times, railroads would cut down on alcohol use and promote rest on the Sabbath. Long travel times on the steamboat promoted drinking and travelling on Sundays, but railroads would no longer give travelers the excuse to drink alcohol or break the Sabbath. By promoting railroads throughout the region, and even the country, evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley like McGehee, Wailes, and Battle believed that they were promoting the kingdom of God and spreading the Gospel more efficiently.[12]

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[11] "Letters from Mississippi, No. 23," *The Mississippian*, July 31, 1835. For author of the "Letters from Mississippi" in *The Mississippian*, see Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 199.
[12] "Morality of Railroads," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 28, 1852.

Evangelicals and Manufacturing

As planters around Woodville reaped the benefits of the West Feliciana Railroad after 1842, Judge McGehee turned to manufacturing to improve not only his commercial and religious position but also that of his neighbors in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. In 1849, he travelled to Lowell, Massachusetts to study the workings of the largest textile factory in the country. He returned to Mississippi with an experienced manufacturing agent, James Woodworth, and hired Thomas Weldon of the Natchez firm G. and T. Weldon to build a textile factory in Woodville.[13]

When McGehee opened the doors of the Woodville Manufacturing Company the following year, the business quickly proved to be a success. The *Mississippi Free Trader* praised the new Woodville Manufacturing Company and its principal stockholder McGehee, who they remarked was "as much at home building churches and academies as he now appears to be in building steam cotton mills."[14] Just one year later, the *Mississippi Free Trader* declared that the factory was producing cotton and wool textiles "as good, as strong, and as durable" as New York or Massachusetts factories and at the same rates. Four stories high, with four thousand spindles and eighty looms, it employed about "50 hands," but expected to hire 150 more soon.[15] The initial laborers were all free white people, many of whom were men and women who had been recruited from the Dog River mills near Mobile, Alabama.[16] By the fall of that year, the factory was producing thirty-eight thousand yards of "lowells" with a workforce of 125 laborers making $4.25 per week and living in three two-story company buildings.[17]

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[13] *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi*, 1:1193; Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 227.
[14] "Wilkinson County Enterprise: The New Cotton Factory," *Mississippi Free Trader*, June 19, 1850.
[15] "The New Factory at Woodville," *Mississippi Free Trader*, June 8, 1851.
[16] *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi*, 1:1193.
[17] Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 227-228.

But just as the Woodville Manufacturing Company was expanding its production and hiring more workers, the company, led by McGehee, decided to fire Woodworth from his position as superintendent and transition from a free to an enslaved labor force. These changes appear to have been driven by exigency rather than ideology. Woodworth was already seeking investors in 1852 for a new textile factory in Natchez when the Woodville Manufacturing Company began going bankrupt trying to attract workers. Instead of sticking with white laborers, it bought a labor force of about one hundred slaves, most of whom were owned by McGehee. After that transition, the company began reporting consistent annual dividends of ten to fifteen percent on its investment. In 1855, McGehee, the wealthiest of the company investors, bought out the other shareholders and took sole control of the plant and its enslaved labor force. Despite white Americans' common concerns that African Americans were not capable of producing quality manufactured goods, observers continued to praise the quality of "Woodville lowells" in the late 1850s, and by 1860, census records indicate that McGehee had turned a profit of $29,034, a return of twenty-six percent of the capital invested.[18]

While McGehee was able to make a significant profit by shifting to enslaved labor with his Woodville Manufacturing Company, white Mississippians and southerners in general disagreed about the efficiency of enslaved labor in factories. In 1840, only about twelve percent of the total investment for textile manufacturing was in the South, and Mississippians only began investing in the textile industry in the 1840s and 1850s. The earliest factory in Natchez, constructed in 1842 with two thousand spindles and ten looms, employed thirty enslaved laborers but went bankrupt before the decade was over. The Mississippi Manufacturing Company,

[18] "The Woodville Factory," *Woodville Republican*, September 9, 1851; "Project of a Cotton Factory in Natchez," *Mississippi Free Trader*, July 21, 1852; Starobin, *Industrial Slavery*, 149; *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi*, 1:1193; Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 227-228.

however, which opened in 1858 in Choctaw County, Mississippi, employed eighty free men and women, and reportedly became a model of efficiency. As companies found different ways to manage labor and turn a profit, southerners continued to disagree about the profitability of slave versus free labor in factories.[19] Outside of Mississippi, the State Engineer of Louisiana wrote a detailed report on the expenses of enslaved labor versus free labor for state projects. He concluded that even with the interest and depreciation taken into account for the purchase of enslaved people, the wages for free laborers had cost the state over twice that of enslaved laborers. Additionally, he argued, enslaved African Americans were more efficient laborers because "twenty negroes will perform as much hard labor as thirty white men."[20]

Southern investors willing to divert capital away from cotton production to industrial pursuits were often hesitant to employ enslaved African Americans in factories, assuming that white laborers were more naturally suited to skilled labor, yet on an aggregate level, those who utilized the labor of slaves in factories realized greater profits than those who did not. Four-fifths of slaves working in industrial occupations were owned outright by the company rather than rented out. Among southern textile mills that owned their enslaved laborers, the average rate of return on investment was sixteen percent.[21]

Although the South, especially the Deep South, remained a couple decades behind the American North and England in manufacturing investment and infrastructure, by 1860 the South made up about twenty percent of the nation's total capital investment in industry. In the boom times of the 1850s, Mississippi's industrial capital investment increased from a meager $50,000 to $345,000. Increasingly southerners began to see slavery as an advantageous tool to increase

[19] Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 220-225.
[20] J. McRae to J. Gadsden, November 4, 1849, in Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, 161-162.
[21] Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, 12, 149.

southern commercial independence from the free-labor North and compete with northern and foreign industry.[22]

The profits from slave labor in textile factories allowed southern capitalists like McGehee to be regional benefactors for a pro-slavery Christian civilization. McGehee had helped construct churches in Mississippi, and in 1845 he used his profits to buy Centenary College for ten thousand dollars on behalf of the Mississippi Methodist Conference. Over time, the proceeds from McGehee's various commercial pursuits funded donations totaling seventy thousand dollars to the southern Methodist college throughout his lifetime. Additionally, they went to fund women's education in Woodville, allowing McGehee to endow both the Woodville Female Academy and the Woodville Female Seminary, later named the McGehee College for Girls.[23] By endowing southern colleges and schools, McGehee was responding to a broader southern insistence on protecting the next generation from the "fanaticism" and "radicalism" of northern abolitionists.[24] By expanding his commercial reach into railroads and textile factories, he seemed to agree with newspapers in the area, who saw these commercial and cultural developments as indicative of a "successful effort at making the South independent in the development of her industry."[25] The *Woodville Republican* likewise assumed that the Woodville Manufacturing Company would "no doubt prompt other planters and capitalists in Mississippi to invest their finances, in the same channel" of manufacturing.[26] Observers in Woodville noted all the new

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[22] Ibid., 11

[23] William Winans Journal, Typescript, June 13, 1845, J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps-Wilson Library, Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter Cain Archives); *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi*, 1:1193-1194; Rowland, *Mississippi*, 2:991-992.

[24] Antebellum southerners desired their own schools due to increased abolitionist sentiment. See *Proceedings of the Southern Commercial Convention, Held in the City of New Orleans…January, 1855* (New Orleans: The Crescent, 1855), 13. See also "Southern School Books," *DeBow's Review* 13 (September 1852): 258-259. On antebellum southern educational institutions, see Alfred L. Brophy, *University, Court, and Slave: Pro-Slavery Thought in Southern Colleges and Courts and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[25] "The Woodville Factory," *Woodville Republican*, July 8, 1851

[26] "Woodworth Discharged," *Woodville Republican*, September 9, 1851.

developments of the town in 1853 and gleefully reported that the railroad and factory had helped propel the town to have its own educational institutions, a necessary factor in developing an independent class of leading men apart from northern anti-slavery institutions.[27]

Southern planters who reinvested their profits in industrial pursuits and benevolent enterprises understood the reciprocal relationship between these two aspects of their civilization. Commerce and Christianity mutually benefited each other, and the enslaved labor of African Americans was assumed to be the most effective tool for increasing the reach of both. In line with McGehee's actual investments, J.D.B. DeBow believed that for civilization and Christianity to expand, they depended on commercial success. The most powerful force "in perpetuating peace and good will among men, and elevating national character…is Christianity," DeBow wrote in 1849, but "commerce is the parent of civilization." "The heralds of the cross, with all their noble and inspiring theme," he wrote, "have not penetrated further into the depths of savage wilderness or among the fiercest islands of the ocean…than have these men of bales and merchandises, in their search after trade." He continued, "They have gone hand in hand with the missionary, where they have not acted as his pioneer."[28] The civilization that DeBow described was made possible, another contributor to *DeBow's Review* stated five years later, by the "systematic culture by African labor, governed by the energy and intelligence of the white man." "This," the author proudly announced, "is the true progress of civilization. And it is thus that Providence ever works upon the destines of men."[29] Through the efficiency of enslaved African American laborers, McGehee and other planter-capitalists of the lower Mississippi Valley dreamed of diversifying their commercial interests, increasing their profits, and spreading that

[27] *The Woodville Republican, and Wilkinson Advertiser*, February 22, 1853.
[28] J.D.B. DeBow, "The Commercial Age," *DeBow's Review* 7 (September 1849): 237-238.
[29] "Destiny of the Slave States," *DeBow's Review* 17 (September 1854): 282.

revenue to Christian enterprises throughout the region to expand the reach of their pro-slavery civilization. Just as much as the churches and schools McGehee built, his railroad and textile factory were symbols of Christian progress that testified to the providence of slave-based capitalism.

<u>Cooper's Well: Visions of Enterprise</u>

The relationship between Christian providence and profits, commonly seen throughout the lower Mississippi Valley, has a strange analog in the story of Cooper's Well, a relatively obscure well in Hinds County that supposedly had healing properties and developed into a major Mississippi resort. Although the story of Cooper's Well may be exceptional, it demonstrates the ties that bound faith to capitalism. Even as the resort became more secular and scientific in later years, the lure of faith and the supernatural remained a powerful force that drove demand for its business.

The story of Cooper's Well begins with Reverend Preston Cooper, an itinerant Methodist minister in the Mississippi Conference. Before joining the church at all, Cooper left Tennessee for Marengo County, Alabama "to be the future architect of his own fortune and fame," according to his later colleague John G. Jones. While in Alabama in 1827, Cooper underwent a dramatic conversion experience at the hands of Jones himself.[30] The very next year, Cooper was admitted on trial as an itinerant minister, and from 1828 until 1837, he preached on circuits throughout the Mississippi Conference, including southeastern Mississippi, Madison County, and parts of Louisiana. By the 1830s, Cooper had risen to minor prominence in the Mississippi Methodist ranks, being elected an elder and twice appointed a presiding elder in Louisiana.

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[30] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 2:208-211.

During this time as well Cooper began to acquire a modest enslaved labor force of two enslaved men and six enslaved women.[31]

At the 1837 Conference, however, he temporarily suspended his itinerancy to become a local preacher in Hinds County while he recovered from an illness with his family. There he made an unusual discovery on his newly-purchased 320 acres. He began to experience a recurring dream of "a figure as of a man with a familiar face," prompting him to dig a well on his property, that "much depends upon it."[32] Cooper left open to others the identity of the familiar man, allowing Mississippians to speculate on their own whether it was Jesus who the minister recognized or a different spectral figure. Evangelical audiences would have recognized that Cooper's direct communication with God about a well seemed similar to the Biblical Isaac obeying God's commands and digging wells for his growing family's prosperity.

After Cooper's dream recurred numerous times, he hired numerous men to dig a well, all of whom failed to reach the groundwater. But in 1841, one of those hired hands finally did so one hundred feet beneath the surface of the ground. When he found the water, he yelled up at Cooper that the water "stinketh mightily, so that you can never use it."[33] The stench revealed that Cooper had found sulfur water, and when Cooper shared his water with neighbors, they soon decided that it had healing properties. They reported to others that the water healed them of whatever sickness ailed them, and nearby doctors began sending patients with chronic diarrhea to be treated by the waters of Cooper's Well.[34] Although Cooper never attempted to explain why

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[31] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1829-1839, Volume II* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 16, 53, 113, 136, 183-184, 239, 304, 400, 436, 516, 604-604; Frank Cannon and Margaret Cannon, *The Cooper's Well Saga: And the Men Who Lived It* (D'Iberville, Miss.: Sorg Printing, 2001), 7.
[32] *History of Cooper's Well, Cooper's Dream, Analysis of the Water, the Infamous Suit in Relation to the Well, &c.* (Jackson: Mississippian Power Press, 1851), 10.
[33] Ibid., 12-13.
[34] Hubert Spengler, *History of Cooper's Well* (Jackson, Miss.: Tucker Printing House, 1923), 16.

the water seemed to cure illnesses, he was convinced that "Heaven had ordered that the hidden treasure, this *elixir* of health, should no longer remain concealed from human ken."[35] A providential God had ordained that Cooper would discover this treasure through the medium of a dream and spread its healing contents for the benefit of nearby Mississippians.

While Cooper was sharing his well water with neighbors in the 1840s, his more enterprising brother-in-law, Inman Williams, saw an opportunity to increase the number of people healed while turning a nice profit. In 1848, Williams convinced Cooper to sell him half of the property and allow him to manage the incoming people.[36] With prosperity beginning to return to Mississippi after the bleak years of the early 1840s, Williams hatched a plan to capitalize on that prosperity by turning the well into a resort. Williams began by constructing a large hotel and pavilion that could easily accommodate four hundred to five hundred people. Writers for *DeBow's Review* visited this new resort in 1850, and reported that while "rude," the "commodious" hotel featured "billiard rooms, pin alleys, bars, ball rooms, and such like amusements."[37] Williams and Cooper charged visitors thirty dollars per month, ten dollars per week, or two dollars per day, while "servants and sick negroes" were just half price. Williams bragged that the miraculous waters of Cooper's Well had brought in revenue of between fifteen thousand and twenty thousand dollars per year.[38]

In 1851, Williams further ramped up the investment and business. He and Cooper sold their combined 320 acres for fifty thousand dollars and formed the Cooper's Well Company to be owned by eight shareholders, including Williams, from Madison, Hinds, and Warren

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[35] *History of Cooper's Well, Cooper's Dream, Analysis of the Water*, 11.
[36] *History of Cooper's Well, Cooper's Dream, Analysis of the Water*, 23; Spengler, *History of Cooper's Well*, 17.
[37] "Summer Ramblins," *DeBow's Review* 3 (September 1850): 350.
[38] Frank Cannon and Margaret Cannon, *The Cooper's Well Saga*, 42-44; "Cooper's Well Erect," *Raymond Gazette*, December 7, 1849.

Counties. Cooper was conspicuously not one of the investors.[39] Williams also began an advertising campaign to attract interested customers. The story of Cooper's Well, published as an anonymous pamphlet in 1851, began circulating around media sources in the region. Williams then convinced scientists to test the properties of their water and advertise their findings in published studies. Dr. J. Lawrence Smith, professor of chemistry at the University of Louisiana and David Stewart of Baltimore, Maryland analyzed the physical composition of the water, its minerals, and its "medical virtues." These experts claimed that the properties of this water were "eminently useful" in treating "various forms of Dyspepsy, Inflammation of the Bladder," and "the great scourge of the South"—chronic diarrhea. Smith's and Stewart's studies appealed to the potential customers who may have been skeptical of ghostly dreams and providential guidance, but even these scientists at various times admitted "the hand of Providence in [the well's] existence," and that most visitors knew of this famous well's healing properties due to "some curious dreams of the remarkable individual whose name it bears."[40] Scientific explanations, then, combined with providential stories of the well, publicized by Williams as a "modern Fountain of rejuvenescence."[41]

The marketing of the Cooper's Well Company based on its miraculous and providential origins proved to be successful. Cooper's Well became a major destination in the 1850s for the wealthiest planters in Mississippi and Louisiana who arrived with family members and their slaves to drink at the saloon, attend some of the famous balls, and discuss cotton futures and politics.[42] In 1854, the demand to stay at the resort prompted investors to form a separate

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[39] Frank Cannon and Margaret Cannon, *The Cooper's Well Saga*, 42-44.
[40] B.L.C. Wailes Papers, Journal or Notes in the Field, Number 3, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter MDAH); *History of Cooper's Well, Cooper's Dream, Analysis of the Water*, 6-8.
[41] "Sulphurous Effervescence," *Raymond Fencible*, August 22, 1849.
[42] Spengler, *History of Cooper's Well*, 36-41.

Raymond and Cooper's Well Plank Road Company, charged with constructing a toll road between Cooper's Well and Raymond.[43] What began as a providential leap of faith—the belief that God had ordained Cooper to dig a well of healing water—had led Cooper, Williams, and Mississippi capitalists to construct a fancy resort and road to attract the wealthiest customers of a newly-booming cotton kingdom.

Although the spiritual origins of Cooper's Well were exceptional, other mineral water resorts were common throughout Mississippi, and southerners commonly saw these wells as providential sources of health and wealth. In the years before Cooper's discovery, numerous resorts advertised in the state as having healing waters. Culley's Well, otherwise known as the "Saratoga of the South," Brandon Springs, Pass Christian, and Mississippi Springs advertised themselves as the preeminent places of rest and relaxation. Mississippi Springs even led the way in establishing a bank and railroad company until the bank crashed in 1840.[44] In 1854, John F.H. Claiborne, the prominent planter, politician, and historian, wrote articles for the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* under the pseudonym John Bunyan that discussed the providential wealth of Ocean Springs. Two years before in 1852, Ocean Springs on the Mississippi Gulf Coast was apparently "a solitary settlement," but by 1854 it had become a "temple of health" with "daily steamers," a "palace-like hotel," "splendid private mansions and beautiful residences." This wealth was due to "the hands of men who combine capital and credit; enterprise and liberality." Yet the remainder to "establish its prosperity and stimulate its progress" was to be done "without the intervention of man, [but] by the almost miraculous waters which here bubble up from the

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[43] *Laws of the State of Mississippi…from 2nd of January to 2nd of March, 1854* (Jackson, Mississippi: Barksdale and Jones, 1854), 314-316.

[44] "Watering Places in Mississippi," *Raymond Times*, July 5, 1839; *The Raymond Gazette*, July 13, 1848; *Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at a Regular Biennial Session of the Legislature, Held at Jackson, in January and February, A.D. 1836* (Jackson, Mississippi: G.R. & J.S. Fall, 1836), 292-296; "The Mississippi Springs Company," *Raymond Times*, June 21, 1839; "Mississippi Springs," *Raymond Times*, July 19, 1839.

bosom of the earth," and healed people of all sorts of diseases with its "curative powers." A wealthy Mississippian like Claiborne knew that without the investment of prominent capitalists, Ocean Springs as a center for healing would never occur, yet still the healings and prosperity that occurred at Ocean Springs was the result of God's divine providence.[45]

The transformation of Cooper's Well reveals the continuity between faith, religious institutions, and capital investment in the lower Mississippi Valley. Cooper had begun as a middling Methodist minister, but his fated discovery of sulfur water on his property could both heal sick neighbors and bring him prosperity. Although he did not participate in the continued development of Cooper's Well, Cooper came away with a fine profit, receiving $27,000 for his share of the land that he had originally bought for just $1,680.[46] His profits, paid by the slaveholding planters of the region, could then be pumped back into evangelical institutions that saw it as God's will to expand their particular proslavery Christianity across the country. Cooper's story of a dream and a familiar face was also the origin for the investment and infrastructure that would strengthen the commercial position of Hinds County. Like McGehee and other southerners who connected southern commercial development to God's providence, the shareholders in the Cooper's Well Company relied on the pervasive belief in Cooper's dream to fund their economic development projects. For these southern capitalists, a story of faith preceded commercial development.

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[45] John Bunyan [pseud.], "Coast Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 13, 1854, May 20, 1854. For identity of John Bunyan as J.F.H. Claiborne, see William Winans to J.F.H. Claiborne, January 9, 1855, Box 18, Folder 14, William Winans Papers, Cain Archives.

[46] Frank Cannon and Margaret Cannon, *The Cooper's Well Saga*, 20-21.

The Business of Religion

The success of evangelicals in diversifying their business ventures into railroads, manufacturing, and resorts coincided with their desire to run the church on business principles. Churches had always needed money to operate effectively, but donations and fund-raising were often seen as necessary evils for evangelicals. Money was needed to pay for missionaries or evangelical projects, but in the 1840s the lower Mississippi Valley's evangelicals, and Methodists in particular, underwent a transformation in which they saw the principles of economy and efficiency as good and perhaps divine aspects of their religious work. The end goal was always the progress of evangelization and the sanctification of society, but to achieve that goal, evangelicals throughout the country created large-scale denominational institutions. Those in the cotton kingdom, however, evangelized not only the Gospel but the spread of slavery as an institution ordained by God.[47]

A description of the proceedings of the 1853 Mississippi Methodist Conference's annual meeting exemplifies the shift among southern evangelicals from ambivalence to support for a business-like church. Attendees heard addresses by agents and representatives on the financial states of the book depository, the book publishers in Louisville, Kentucky, Centenary College, Sharon Female College, and the various Methodist newspapers patronized by the conference. Retrospectively writing about the conference, John G. Jones commented, "No body of ministers does more business in the time, and does it better than a Conference of itinerant Methodist preachers." Jones singled out Methodists in particular for their economic literacy and attention to

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[47] On evangelicalism and the turn toward respectability and print culture, see Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

the financial health of each arm of the denomination. As a metaphor for their business activity, he remarked, "They touch every spring and adjust every wheel, so as to keep the whole of our Church machinery in active and successful operation."[48]

Jones's metaphor of the inner mechanics of a clock for their work was telling. The institutions of the denomination kept time for all of their operations to act in concert. Like railroads on a schedule, each aspect of the denomination required careful coordination from a central institution. William Winans's obsession with time—"Time flies," "All exert! In effort all!" and "Time destroy'd/ Is suicide,"—that were written at the beginning of his journals found a fitting incarnation in the image of the minister as clockmaker.[49] Each spring—a newspaper—and wheel—a college—needed to be fine-tuned by the master craftsmen of the vast evangelical machine that carried forward God's message.

Methodists in the lower Mississippi Valley were not unusual in their insistence that they apply the principles of business to religious denominations. Evangelicals around the country had undergone a similar transformation in the nineteenth century. Throughout the century, evangelicals shifted from manufacturing tracts and Bibles for free donations in the 1820s to selling religious tracts as part of a general business plan in the 1840s. Funds from the sales were never the *raison d'être* for evangelicals; rather the profits gained from sales were to be reinvested to spread the Gospel further.[50] Writing about evangelical book publishing, David Paul Nord has argued that these evangelicals saw the market revolution as a source of sin in America,

[48] John G. Jones, *Complete History of Methodism…Volumes III and IV* (Jackson, Miss.: Commission on Archives and History, Mississippi Conference, United Methodist Church, 2015), 205-206.
[49] See Winans Journal, Cain Archives.
[50] David Paul Nord, "Benevolent Capital: Financing Evangelical Book Publishing in Early Nineteenth-Century America," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 148. Candy Gunther Brown also cautions against seeing evangelical participation in print capitalism as part of a process towards secularization; rather, marketing and profits were valuable tools for the perpetuation of the evangelical word. See Brown, *Word in the World*, 18-20.

but that they "made themselves practical businessmen, savvy marketeers, large-scale manufacturers, and grasping capitalists in order to save the country from the market revolution."[51] Such a formulation, however, assumes that evangelicals saw economic transformation as an evil in society, a point on which not all evangelicals agreed, whether northern or southern.[52] For many, the expanding power of the market was a divine tool that could be used to expand God's kingdom. The difference between northern and southern evangelicals in this regard was their disagreement about the place of slavery in this growing economic system. Whereas most northern evangelicals believed slavery was inimical to a godly and commercially-progressive society, southern evangelicals claimed slavery was the cornerstone of American prosperity, creating the profits that enabled evangelicals to spread the Gospel yet further.

The writing, publication, and marketing of a biography of a beloved Methodist minister provides an illustrative example of the business side of evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley. Benjamin Drake's *A Sketch of the Life of Rev. Elijah Steele*, published in 1843, memorialized the death of a young minister who had apparently converted many and affected others with his powerful preaching. Elijah Steele was only twenty-one years old when he was licensed to preach in the Mississippi Conference, and he took various itinerant positions in Madison County and the Natchez District.[53] At one major camp meeting in 1840, Drake wrote, Steele apparently was overwhelmed with the "Divine presence and glory, that he seemed ready to leave the body."[54] Beyond his activity as a revivalist, Drake also remembered Steele for his commitment to spreading Christianity as a form of civilization—Steele had said in a speech to

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[51] Ibid., 165.
[52] For a more comprehensive analysis of Christian views on the market revolution, see Stewart Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon: Northern Christians and Market Capitalism, 1815-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 8-9, in which Davenport categorizes northern Christians as either "clerical economists," "contrarians," or "pastoral moralists."
[53] B.M. Drake, *A Sketch of the Life of Rev. Elijah Steele* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1843), 8-98.
[54] Ibid., 113.

the state's missionary society, "Religion is the most efficient instrument of civilization."[55] Throughout the whole book, Drake portrayed Steele as a humble evangelist, who refused to leave New Orleans, even as a yellow fever epidemic swept the city in 1841. That epidemic led to his death at just twenty-six, for which Drake and other Methodists remembered him as a martyr who helped spread the Gospel with his unswerving faith.[56]

Using Steele's life and death as an evangelical trope of Christian simplicity, Benjamin Drake's memorialization of Steele was thoroughly modern and market-oriented. Within a month of Steele's death in New Orleans, Drake had already notified the New Orleans cotton factor and commission merchant William Curtiss that he planned to write a biography to be sold throughout the region. Curtiss was immediately on board, guessing that 1,000 to 1,500 copies "would probably be a judicious number of copies to publish." "Any of our Booksellers would dispose of the work on commission," he added.[57] Over the next two years, the constant refrain between Drake and Curtiss was about numbers of copies published, distributed, and sold—when they weren't writing about cotton, that is. Drake wrote Curtiss that he had three thousand copies of the book published, and he was selling it in three different forms: plain editions for fifty cents, and two different version of calf bindings either made with or without gilt leaves, for $1.25 or $1.99. These prices were "suggested by the agents," Drake wrote, and they also had organized the percentages that commission book sellers would receive.[58]

With Curtiss as an agent and distributor, Drake's *Life of Steele* reaped significant profits. Curtiss distributed copies of the book to other book sellers in New Orleans as well as ministers in the conference who might order copies to sell to their church members. With these connections,

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[55] Ibid., 84.
[56] Ibid., 202.
[57] William Curtiss to Benjamin Drake, October 27, 1841, Box 3, Folder 20, Benjamin Drake Papers, MDAH.
[58] Curtiss to Drake, June 22, 1843, Box 3, Folder 21, Benjamin Drake Papers, MDAH.

Curtiss assumed that the "pecuniary advantages" to Drake would "be very sensibly felt" in "the next 3 or 4 years."[59] Drake, in turn, placed the work of marketing the book on the shoulders of Curtiss. "By advertising them," he wrote Curtiss, "some individuals who otherwise would never think of making the purchase might possibly buy." "I leave this to your discretion," he finished.[60] Early the next month, William Winans quoted the fellow minister William Nicholson as writing, "Bro. Steele's Life has arrived—execution is very neat—quite interesting." Winans went on to comment, "That blessed young man, Steele! How useful in *life*! How still more useful in his *death*!"[61] As southerners read about the selfless actions of a young minister who gave his life for the faith, they contributed money to Drake and the Methodist Church. Those profits could then be reinvested in the "church machinery" to continue the evangelical business process—accumulating converts to raise money to create more converts.

Beyond just Drake's publication of his *Life of Elijah Steele*, the Methodist book depository in New Orleans operated as a business designed to sell religious literature. Each year the conference appointed a reputable agent for the depository, with Curtiss at its head for much of the 1830s and 1840s. The denomination would not sustain a dying business, however, and whenever the book depository lost money, the denomination eliminated it, only to revive the business later with a different plan. After the split between northern and southern Methodists, the Mississippi Conference appointed Rev. John Early to lead a new book depository in New Orleans that would be free to publish the particularly southern, proslavery evangelical message.[62] Early was a good fit for the job because, according to Jones, he showed great "financial skill not

[59] Curtiss to Drake, June 26, 1843, Box 3, Folder 21, Benjamin Drake Papers, MDAH.
[60] Drake to Curtiss, October 6, 1843, Box 3, Folder 36, Benjamin Drake Papers, Cain Archives.
[61] William Winans to Drake, July 7, 1843, Box 3, Folder 21, Benjamin Drake Papers, MDAH.
[62] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 2:348-349; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism…Volumes III and IV*, 32-33.

only in his domestic affairs, but with various public trusts that were committed to his management."[63] Like other businesses, the book depository needed to react to consumer demand, especially by updating its collection of books and discounting older books to save shelf space.[64]

By the late 1850s, the conference had perfected their book depository agency and began reaping tens of thousands of dollars in reward. Henderson H. Montgomery, agent for the Mississippi Book and Tract Society, collected $11,072 in subscriptions and donations for the year 1859. Subscribers paid for part-ownership in the society, to make a return of ten dollars for every sixty dollars subscribed. If ministers were more diligent in trying to sell books, Montgomery clamored, there "would have been at least $30,000 if not $40,000 worth of books and tracts put into circulation." The wonderful thing about the book business, however, was that the initial sales of books did not slow down business with a glut in the market; instead, they propelled consumers to buy more. "Every good book we sell and have read," Montgomery wrote, "makes way for another so that the trade does not diminish by putting the article into market." Although Montgomery's intended end result was "great good to the Churches," agents attempted to achieve their goals through marketing their products and attracting stockholders.[65]

Methodists were not the only ones selling religious literature in the area. James Robinson Graves, Baptist publisher of the *Tennessee Baptist* made a name for himself in the antebellum Southwest by spreading his newspaper throughout the region. Despite the ratio of five Methodists for every one Baptist in Nashville, Graves pushed to equate Baptist membership with subscription to the *Tennessee Baptist*. His pitch was practical and sectarian; he published a "large paper, a cheap paper, and a Baptist—*decidedly* a Baptist paper." Although one historian has

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[63] Jones, *Complete History of Methodism…Volumes III and IV*, 225.
[64] Ibid., 301.
[65] *Minutes of the Forty-Fourth Session of the Mississippi Annual Conference, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Vicksburg, Mississippi: The Daily Whig, 1860), 18-20.

argued that Graves's scathing attacks and savvy marketing were exceptional for the South, when placed against his rival newspapers, the *Nashville Christian Advocate* and the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, the resemblance is plain. Like these Methodist newspapers, Graves sent agents throughout Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi to obtain more subscribers. Methodists, however, were at a natural advantage due to their denominational structure that facilitated more centralized institutions. Yet the fierce competition Graves gave the Methodist publishers in Nashville and New Orleans upped the ante of the evangelical publishing business.[66]

The business of religion also included religious colleges. Evangelicals in the region had already created academies for girls, but for boys to go to college in the 1820 and 1830s, they would at least have to travel to Alabama to attend Lagrange College. By 1832, Mississippi Methodists began discussing the prospects for their own college in the area. They selected Brandon, Mississippi for their campus, and soon professors were assigned and agents canvassed the landscape asking for funds to create an endowment. In 1845, when the college seemed to be dying due to its remote location away from its most likely wealthy patrons, the college's board of trustees—McGehee, Winans, Burruss, and other prominent regional planters—made major changes. Winans was appointed the new travelling salesman for the school, the campus was moved to a more central location in Jackson, Louisiana, and the president of the college was replaced. John Lane, meanwhile, was appointed to use his experience in business to sort out the school's debts at its old location. With Winans as the chief agent for raising money from the region's wealthiest planters and a new location, the school thrived.[67]

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[66] Scott Stephan, "A Sectarian's Success in the Evangelical South: J.R. Graves and the *Tennessee Baptist*, 1846-1860," *Journal of Southern Religion* 17 (2015): http://jsreligion.org/issues/vol17/stephan.html.
[67] Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism*, 2:286-287, 533-535; Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism…Volumes III and IV*, 35; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1839-1845, Volume III* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 425.

The new, prosperous college was a sign of the reciprocal relationship between shrewd financial decisions and God's providence, something described by Rev. Charles Kimball Marshall in an 1856 speech at Centenary College. As the college was laying the cornerstone for a new building, Marshall marked the occasion with a speech praising the "divine philanthropy" of the region's patrons. Centenary College was "the child of Christian Philanthropy," Marshall said. "The inspirations of Philanthropy," capitalized like its own divine force, "moulded [the college] into an incarnate form, and ordained it to fill a mission worthy of the age." The force of "Christian Philanthropy," synonymous in the speech with "Enlightened Philanthropy," demanded new ways of shaping the material world to bring about God's kingdom. Marshall's vision for the lower Mississippi Valley, or "Enlightened Philanthropy" incarnate, was in "the success of inventions, the triumphs of labor-saving machinery, improved methods of ocean navigation, and the augmentation of grain-growing facilities." Marshall saw God acting through Christian institutions to improve the mundane reality of economic and agricultural life, but the ordinary lives of farmers, planters, and merchants were all directed to a heavenly end. For Marshall, the material goods of life made possible the reception of the Gospel. "The bread of life is a lost loaf," he argued, "to him who has not the bread that perishes." The manifestation and expansion of God's kingdom on earth was possible, but it first required "the development of trade, agriculture, the arts, and refinement of civilization." The man who improves these aspects of the world as part of a "vital scheme" would gain the ear of others as a "prophet voice."[68]

The institutional arms of Methodists in particular were designed to operate on sound business principles, and that outlook was successful in aiding the expansion of the denomination in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1840, 27,170 members made up the Mississippi and Memphis

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[68] C.K. Marshall, *The Claims of Philanthropy: An Address* (Vicksburg, Mississippi: American Times Book and Job Printing Office, 1856), 4-7, 19.

Conferences of the Methodist Church, a total area stretching south from West Tennessee to encompass the whole states of Mississippi and Louisiana. The Memphis Conference included most of North Mississippi as well as West Tennessee along the Mississippi River. Just seven years later in 1847, the Mississippi Conference had grown enough in Louisiana to warrant the creation of a separate Louisiana Conference. The total membership grew to 56,420 for all three conferences combined, with over 16,000 of those being enslaved people. Instead of 348 local preachers in the region in 1840, there were 610 in 1847. The church swept across the Mississippi and Tennessee countryside, and then began expanding across Louisiana. With new members came new patrons, and donations to the missionary societies and publishing societies began reaching a few thousand dollars every year from each conference.[69] In 1847, for instance, even the smallest of the three, the Louisiana Conference, raised $3,307 in addition to "4 bales Cotton, and one hogshead Sugar unsold" for missions and evangelization enterprises.[70] More money for evangelization fed back into the businesses, and more converts were produced. By 1858, the three conferences of Memphis, Mississippi, and Louisiana counted 72,183 total members with 711 local preachers and 350 preachers assigned to stations around the region. Every corner was covered with a circuit rider, reaching farther up the Red River Valley through the Shreveport District, deeper into the southern Louisiana swamps, and across the new plantations in the Mississippi Delta.[71]

As business prospered in the 1850s, so too did the church. The price of cotton was high, hovering between eight and twelve cents per pound in New Orleans, and leaning more towards

[69] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1839-1845, Volume III*, 111-112, 116-118; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the Years 1846-1847* (Richmond: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1847), 125-141.
[70] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the Years 1846-1847*, 139.
[71] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the Year 1858* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing, 1859), 31-41.

twelve cents by the latter part of the decade. In 1850, enslaved people in Mississippi planted, picked, and ginned 484,292 bales of cotton. With prices increasing throughout the decade, that almost tripled by 1860 to over 1.2 million bales in addition to 777,000 bales produced in Louisiana.[72] A new level of investment, innovation, pushing, and prosperity emerged, and with it came evangelical denominations with greater reach across the region. Marshall's vision was coming true; innovations in agriculture and technology, combined with the constant pushing of enslaved people, created the conditions for the expansion of evangelical Christianity on earth.

Commercial, Religious, and Educational Independence

The economic prosperity of the 1850s and the continued growth of evangelicalism in the lower Mississippi Valley culminated in the efforts of southern evangelical businessmen to cement their alliance between southern evangelicals and commercial progress based on slavery. Religious and commercial periodicals discussed the same themes of commerce, progress, and the guiding hand of God in civilization. Southern economic leaders gathered at the Southern Commercial Convention in the 1850s with a vision of the South at the center of God's plan for global civilization. By the mid-to-late 1850s, white southern evangelicals were increasingly preaching independence in all things—economic, religious, and intellectual—to enhance and expand the power of a southern evangelical way of life.

Although with ostensibly different audiences, *DeBow's Review* and the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* echoed each other in their joining of southern evangelicalism to the commercial power of southern planters and merchants. In 1847, a southern judge James Hall

[72] *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), 458; Joseph C.G. Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 67, 85.

wrote about the necessity of commerce as the driving engine of progress, which included "the spread of civilization and Christianity." Hall understood the morality of the capitalist as "inflexible as the rules of arithmetic: his honesty is as invariable as the result of a correct balance-sheet."[73] Two years later, James DeBow wrote about "the Commercial Age" in *DeBow's Review*, exalting the missionary and the enterprising businessman as dual agents of an advancing civilization.[74]

For its part, the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* continued its usual attention to overseas markets and cotton production at home. In 1854, writers added a special note of optimism in the progress that seemed to characterize their era in the 1850s—that "the wonderful discoveries of science within the last quarter of a century suggested that there should be a corresponding improvement in religion, in morals, and in government."[75]

In 1859, another contributor to *DeBow's Review* argued for the interdependence of commerce and Christianity. The author asserted that Christianity needed commerce for "funds for its enterprises," while commerce without Christianity would be based on "fraud" and "violence," and "will end its days in luxury and corruption." Using the slave trade as an example, the author argued that God had a way of "sending out civilized men on mercantile errands," and transforming their selfish intentions into the opening of a "way for his Gospel." He asks for nothing in return from capitalists except "the building of churches, the forwarding of missionaries, and the printing of Bibles, as the cost of his license to enrich himself by trade."[76]

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[73] James Hall, "The Dignity and Importance of Commerce," *DeBow's Review* 4 (September 1847): 20, 29.
[74] J.D.B. DeBow, "The Commercial Age," *DeBow's Review* 7 (September 1849): 225-239.
[75] "Progress," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 4, 1854.
[76] Rev. Mr. Denison, "Relation of Commerce to Christianity," *DeBow's Review* 26 (March 1859): 257, 261-262, 266.

Discussions on the mutual relationship between commerce, civilization, and Christianity was also a prominent part of the Southern Commercial Conventions of the late 1840s and 1850s. Although the majority of the conventions were about southern economic prosperity and independence, evangelicals played a major role at these conventions. The Presbyterian merchant Charles C. Lathrop was secretary of the convention in 1855, and Charles Kimball Marshall, the wealthy Mississippi minister and supporter of Centenary College, attended multiple times in the 1850s as well.[77] Marshall spoke in 1853 on the need to study the Mississippi River using hydrometers to improve agricultural development in the areas along the river—something he saw as part of "the spread of civilization, christianity, commerce, and agriculture."[78]

As the 1850s progressed, Marshall's mission began to center on southern intellectual independence. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, many southerners had been emphasizing the need to develop separate educational institutions and literature to educate the next generation in the proslavery ideology. In 1852, a writer in *DeBow's Review* railed against the state of the school-book market in which southern booksellers were "in a state of 'peonage' to the 'barons of Cliff-street.'" "Southern life, habits, thoughts and aims, are so essentially different from the North" as to require a separate and independent southern publishing business.[79] In 1854, Marshall wrote privately to the Christian physician and racial theorist Samuel Cartwright about his interest in southern publishing and education. "At present all the Slave States are flooded with Yankee school books and teachers," he wrote, "for no publishing House in the South has capital and character sufficient to publish a book and sell it on such terms." Thus, southern schools were commonly assigning Francis Wayland's Moral Science, "with its rank hostility to

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[77] *Southern Commercial Convention…January, 1855* (New Orleans: The Crescent, 1855), 13-14.
[78] *Proceedings of the Southern Commercial Convention, at Memphis, Tennessee, in June, 1853* (Memphis: Moseley and Finnie, 1854), 30.
[79] "Southern School Books," *DeBow's Review* 13 (September 1852): 259-260.

Slavery into all our institutions male and female." Marshall's plan, unanimously approved at the Southern Commercial Convention, was for state legislatures to appropriate a few thousand dollars to be awarded to the best southern school books.[80]

In 1855, Marshall led the Southern Commercial Convention's Committee on Education with a similar lecture on southern publishing and education. With the financial resources at their disposal, he saw no reason for southerners to continue sending their children to hostile northern colleges, where they would imbibe abolitionist sentiment and cultivate a sense of economic dependence on northern merchants. Instead, they must open "direct communication with Europe" for "a certain prospect of a golden future." On slavery in particular, Marshall declared that "God has established it and has civilized man through this institution." If young southern leaders would only learn the righteousness of slavery, "in fifty years' time," he confidently declared, their system of race-based bondage "will occupy twice as much territory as it now does."[81]

By utilizing all the tools at their disposal—diversifying their economy through enslaved labor, attracting capital through savvy marketing, and evangelizing their own brand of proslavery Christianity, evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley believed they were on the forefront of the capitalist development of Christian civilization. With cotton prices rising once again and production soaring, they entered a new boom time in the late 1850s. God had ordained that they expand the reach of slavery if only they break free from the chains of northern anti-slavery sentiment and economic dependence. They believed that progress was coming to the continent—

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[80] Rev. C.K. Marshall to Samuel Cartwright, October 23, 1854, Box 1, Folder 3, Samuel A. Cartwright Family Papers, on microfilm at J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi.
[81] *Proceedings of the Southern Commercial Convention…January, 1855*, 13.

and perhaps beyond—and that progress looked like the enslavement of supposedly inferior races for the enrichment of “civilized man” and his continued expansion of God’s kingdom.

EPILOGUE

THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE AND GOD'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

With cotton prices near twelve cents per pound and manufacturing and infrastructure development booming in the Deep South, Mississippi's Methodist leadership met in Brandon, Mississippi for their 1857 annual conference. The most pressing issue was the economic and political direction of southern evangelicals. Alabama's Methodist leadership had recently voted to strike from the Southern Methodist Discipline the rule forbidding "the buying and selling of men, women and children, with an intention to enslave them," and that measure had spread throughout the Southern Methodist conferences. After some debate, the Mississippi Methodist Conference voted 79-7 in favor of removing the measure opposed to the African slave trade. White Mississippians lauded the momentum that was gathering around a new attempt to revive the African slave trade, calling the seven dissenters in the conference "negro worshippers" and "abolition preachers, who live and fatten upon the people of Mississippi."[1] Another contributor derided the seven dissenters "with *northern proclivities*" for being "so desperately frightened at the idea of the revival of the slave trade," whereas he believed that it would be doing "the heathen and the country, a great service." "If the seven would spread the Gospel in that

[1] "Methodist Conference—Buying and Selling Slaves," *The Mississippian*, January 19, 1858. The initial article from *The Mississippian* initially stated that the vote was 70-7 but then corrected the count to 79-7 in "Our Reply to 'One of the Seven,'" *The Mississippian*, February 26, 1858. See also John G. Jones, *Complete History of Methodism…Volumes III and IV* (Jackson, Miss.: Commission on Archives and History, Mississippi Conference, United Methodist Church, 2015), 303.

manner"—as in, enslaving Africans—"and convert the poor benighted Africans in that way, God would smile upon and bless their labors."[2]

The move by Methodists to support the re-introduction of the African slave trade was not just an affirmation of the ideology of slavery as a positive good—it was a clear joining of God's will with the commercial interests of an ambitious and expanding proslavery America.[3] In the context of the late 1850s, the reopening of the African slave trade had become one of the primary issues of debate in the South, led by a young Mississippian, Henry Hughes. Hughes began publicizing the issue at Southern Commercial Conventions and in newspaper articles in the late 1850s as the best method to improve the South's economic position vis-à-vis the nation and the world as a whole. Southerners' primary concern was the increased political power of northern states due to years of immigration from Europe in the 1840s and 1850s which supplied a surplus of laborers and increased representation in Congress. Europe "supplies with introduced labor, the capitalists of the North," he wrote, so "if Europe is brawn-feeder to the North, Africa must be to the South."[4] To bypass the Constitutional prohibition on the international slave trade, Hughes incorporated the African Labor Importation Company, whose purpose was to facilitate "the voluntary arrival of voluntary laborers" for a term of twenty-nine years, after which point they would be "elevated into slavery."[5]

The economic and political position of the South was also tied to the spreading of Christian civilization, according to Hughes. Cotton was the source of the commercial power of

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[2] "Response from 'Madison,'" *The Mississippian*, February 16, 1858.
[3] On the effort to reopen the African Slave Trade, see Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 395-420; Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 141-149.
[4] St. Henry [pseud.], "Re-Opening of the Slave Trade—Number I," Box 1, Henry Hughes Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi (hereafter MDAH).
[5] Henry Hughes, "African Labor—Immigration Company of Mississippi—Act of Incorporation," *The Mississippian*, January 12, 1858.

the South, he wrote, and "commerce is king; its kingdom is christendom, and christendom is civilization." Since a lack of sufficient slave-labor meant a lack of produced cotton, "the want of the product is less royal commerce, less christendom, less civilization." Therefore, Hughes reasoned, re-opening the African slave trade, by increasing the quantity of laborers on cotton plantations, would aid in expanding Christianity and civilization.[6] Based on this connection, it should be no surprise to see that among the names of the men incorporated into the African Labor Importation Company were William Thomas Magruder and Joseph H. Magruder, two relatives of the prominent evangelical Drake and Magruder families.[7]

Hughes's attempt to re-open the slave trade was part of a broader theory of associated labor that had become fashionable in the South by the 1850s. According to Hughes, associated labor was the combining of capital and labor into enslaved people, whereas "dissociated" labor was free labor, as practiced in the North. Since in the South, "labor is capital," a surplus of laborers in one place "is circulated in supply of a scarcity of laborers in another place." Slaves had no liberty to object to their movement to the areas in which they would be most valuable as laborers, and therefore "the coffle is an emigration-train" and "the negro-trader, an intelligence-officer," directing capital to the "place of its highest appreciation." In a system of dissociated labor, however, such as in the North, laborers tended "to crowd together and make an excess of population," which was detrimental to their living conditions as well as overall economic efficiency.[8]

Hughes believed that a state-controlled system of bondage—which he called "warranteeism"—would be the most progressive and humane system of ensuring that each

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[6] St. Henry [pseud.], "Re-Opening of the Slave Trade—Number I," Box 1, Henry Hughes Paper, MDAH.
[7] Hughes, "African Labor—Immigration Company of Mississippi—Act of Incorporation," *The Mississippian*, January 12, 1858.
[8] St. Henry [pseud.], "Re-Opening of the Slave Trade—Number II," Box 1, Henry Hughes Papers, MDAH.

individual was given a proper subsistence of food and shelter for survival. As one of two southerners who first used the word "sociology" in the English language, both in a proslavery context, Hughes believed that slavery provided for the most scientific, efficient, and progressive society. Reviving the African slave trade, he argued, would support slaveholders commercially and, more importantly, spread a social system that was most advantageous to laborers and God's providential design.[9]

Although Hughes's theory of warranteeism was well outside of the mainstream in southern intellectual circles, his analysis of labor and capital was not. In 1851, a contributor to the *Southern Standard* in Columbus, Mississippi wrote that in the North, "Capital and Labor are constantly at war by necessity," whereas in the South "Capital *is* Labor." Since antiquity and God's direction of the Hebrew people, God had planted "principles of selfishness," the writer asserted, that guided slave-labor to benefit all people and avoid the perennial conflict between capital and labor, as experienced in free societies.[10] Later in his 1859 book *Duties of Christian Masters*, the Methodist minister Holland Nimmons McTyeire made a similar argument. He remarked upon the "old contest…between capital and labor," which he called the "conflict of ages." "Capital seeks its own," the minister wrote, "heartlessly grinding down the laborer to the lowest terms." "But under domestic slavery," he asserted, "capital and labor are one and the same thing." Instead of capital "driv[ing] its own hard bargains with him," "the master, by all the

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[9] See Henry Hughes, *Treatise on Sociology, Theoretical and Practical* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1854); Douglas Ambrose, *Henry Hughes and Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 70-113. For the other work on sociology, see George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, Virginia: A. Morris, 1854). Hughes and Fitzhugh both seemed to have been influenced by the French positivist Auguste Comte's theory on sociology as the science of society. See James Oscar Farmer, Jr., *The Metaphysical Confederacy: James Henley Thornwell and the Synthesis of Southern Values* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), 103; C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 150-151.
[10] "The Durability of the Union Considered," *Southern Standard*, May 17, 1851.

capital they represent and create, is pledged to care for his servants."[11] Although these principles were mostly laid out in economic terms, well-read evangelicals in the South such as McTyeire were keen to see God's hand in a commercially-efficient slavery that equated the maximization of economic output with the proliferation of the Gospel.

The discussion in the South of slavery as a superior social system compared to the inefficiencies of the northern free-labor system affected the debate about re-introducing the African slave trade in evangelical circles. When Southern Methodists met in late 1857, they had transitioned to seeing slavery in world-historical terms as an economically superior and divinely-ordained social system that should not only survive but strengthen. Instead of distancing themselves from the slave trade, as earlier proslavery paternalists had done, southern evangelicals began to embrace the slave trade as the most Christian of commercial transactions. In support of the seventy-nine Mississippi ministers who voted to revive the African slave trade, contributors to *The Mississippian* argued, to "buy bondmen and bondmaids of the heathens," as stated in Jewish law, was "a positive injunction of Scripture…in favor of the African Slave Trade." "In the economy of God," the Mississippians provocatively wrote, "the obligation is enjoined upon the white race to bring the negroes into a state of humane and Christian slavery." Like Hughes, they saw slavery as a higher social status than the enslavement to "barbarism" that Africans supposedly experienced in Africa.[12]

Not all Methodist ministers—even among those who voted in favor of striking the slave trade resolution—were as adamant about supporting the slave trade. The bishops of the Southern Methodist denomination declared that rescinding the measure by no means was meant to support

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[11] H.N. M'Tyeire, *Duties of Christian Masters* (Nashville, Tennessee: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859), 74-75.
[12] "Our Reply to 'One of the Seven,'" *The Mississippian*, February 26, 1858.

disobedience of federal law that prohibited the slave trade, but was about rendering unto Caesar what was Caesar's. Many argued that the prohibition on the slave trade might infringe on the institution of slavery itself, and so reasoned that they voted to rescind the measure simply to maintain slavery in the South.[13] Yet, among those who supported the measure prohibiting the slave trade, the meaning of the prohibition was perfectly clear—"that the rule referred exclusively to the African Slave Trade," as the delegates to the previous General Conference had reported in 1854.[14] When Southern Methodists at the General Conference discussed the same measure in 1858, 1,160 delegates voted to remove the prohibition on the slave trade while 284 voted against removal, with the vast majority of anti-removal voters coming from Missouri, Tennessee, and Kentucky.[15]

Despite any previous misgivings southern evangelicals had expressed about the African slave trade, they had begun to equate the existence and expansion of race-based slavery with that of civilization and Christianity. "Commerce, christianity, civilization," wrote one contributor in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, "are dependent for the present rapidity upon cotton, and cotton is dependent upon African slavery; slavery is a blessing to the world—one of the mightiest instruments of Providence." Repeating the refrain that the slave trade raised up the status of Africans, Methodists in the lower Mississippi Valley asserted, "Slavery is the highest state of civilization the negro has ever enjoyed in the history of the world." "Well-fed," "well-clothed," and with "religious instruction," "Capital cannot oppress him," southerners agreed.[16] By voting to revive the African slave trade, southern Methodists, led by the western delegates,

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[13] "Pastoral Address of the General Conference of the M.E. Church, South," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 17, 1858; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism…Volumes III and IV*, 303.
[14] *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 12, 1858.
[15] *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 5, 1858.
[16] "The Virus of Abolitionism," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 8, 1860.

endorsed a global vision of pro-slavery evangelicalism, one that saw the mission field across the ocean and around the world as an opportunity to spread the Gospel and slavery—to preach the good news of salvation and an end to the age-old fight between capital and labor through commodified laborers.

With exuberant confidence that their slave-based civilization was forward-thinking and progressive, evangelicals began looking far beyond the United States to spread the Gospel. Southern evangelicals interpreted the United States' victory over Mexico in the Mexican American War and subsequent acquisition of California and New Mexico as signs of God unfolding the destiny of Protestant expansion.[17] Methodists in the lower Mississippi Valley in particular paid close attention to the commercial advances Americans were making in Panama, which they interpreted as openings to "be added to the domain of Protestantism." "In the last twenty years," they wrote in 1852, "more than one-fourth of the world, before closed and double locked to the Gospel, has been thrown wide open, and now spreads its population of 800,000,000 entirely ready for the preaching of Christ."[18] At the 1858 General Conference, the optimism had spread to the entire North and South American continents. The Virginian George W. Langhorne used military language to speak of "the great design of the gospel…to conquer the world." "If God opens a door in Central America, he said, "let us enter, and occupy the ground." In a broader argument about the priorities of global missions, Holland Nimmons McTyeire argued that slave missions were "good and noble," but "if you plant a mission in Central America"

[17] "Isthmus Items," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 22, 1852; "From Panama," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 3, 1853. On manifest destiny, see Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Christopher Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty: Slavery, Manifest Destiny, and the Radicalization of Southern Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
[18] "A Millennial Sign," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 15, 1852.

among a people who have “a political existence…[and] intelligence,” then they will “extend it and preach it to others.” “The progress of our Church is southward,” he proclaimed, and “Mexico, Central America, South America, and the West Indies are our peculiar fields of labor.”[19]

The shift in focus from missions among slaves and in the American West to missions in Latin America coincided with a general zeal among southerners to acquire various Latin American territories. Commercial prosperity in the American South and increased sectional tension with the North led many southerners to look south to continue expanding a slaveholding empire. Cuba was regarded as the jewel of the Caribbean, a major sugar island that many southerners feared would fall under the control of the British and end the dominion of slavery there. With support from a variety of American adventurers, especially southerners, as well as the sitting governor of Mississippi, John Quitman, a Venezuelan-born Spanish military officer, Narciso López, attempted two invasions of the island. Without the expected help from native Cubans, both military expeditions ended in failure. But that did not stop southerners from attempting to copy López. The southerner William Walker led a failed expedition to take over Sonora in Mexico, and then succeeded in a filibuster in Nicaragua in 1855. As the new president of Nicaragua, Walker attempted to make the Central American country a haven for enterprising southern slaveholders until his surrender to U.S. authorities. Failure may have marked American attempts to colonize Central American nations to the south, but the continued attempts throughout the 1850s reflect the resurgent optimism in the American South that a proslavery empire was at least possible, and might be racially inevitable.[20]

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[19] “Methodist General Conference,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 29, 1858.
[20] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 303-394.

The spirit of progress was sweeping America anew in the 1850s, and southerners saw their renewed prosperity as a divine signal of their destined place to lead the world to Christ. The 1853 report of the Alabama Methodist Missionary Society, published in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, perfectly captures that rapturous sense of endless possibilities. The non-Christian world was living in horrible conditions, the report argued, and they were "forced to conclude that Providence is slowly, but surely, working out the verification of prophecy." Their era was a "golden age" but also an "iron age," in which "we make our roads of iron, our machinery for locomotion, annihilating time and space" as the culmination of the "age of progress." It was Christians' duty to keep up with this progressive age—to "move with steam and lightning speed," and these southern evangelicals applauded that those who had the greatest control of the world—the United States and Great Britain—were Protestant nations. "There is a Providence in all this," they claimed. "It has evidently an evangelical aspect." The age of iron and progress was "not merely to improve the temporal fortunes of tens of thousands of people; but it is to bring them into contact with great spiritual redeeming agencies, such as are in operation in no other part of the world."[21] In the lower Mississippi Valley, that progress and prosperity was built on the labor of slaves, and the regional leaders—Henry Hughes, Holland N. McTyeire, and William Winans—knew that. History was unfolding, God was revealing his kingdom, and white men were to manifest that kingdom through progress on all fronts, a progress that necessitated the enslavement and Christianization of Africans and any other races they deemed inferior around the world.

By the 1850s, evangelicals in the lower Mississippi Valley were imagining a commercially-oriented, slave-based evangelical empire, an empire the early missionaries to the

[21] "Twentieth Annual Report of the Alabama Conference Missionary Society," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 1, 1853.

region in the 1820s did not envision, let alone seek to create. American Board missionaries like Cyrus Kingsbury harkened back to a Jeffersonian yeoman alternative in their mission schools. Alexander Talley and other Methodists, although more supportive of commercial development and expanding slavery than Kingsbury, did not evangelize to spread the cotton kingdom but to make more Christians. To them, there was an uneasy tension between would-be planters and speculators on one hand and genuine evangelicals on the other hand who gave up everything to spread the Gospel in the western wilderness. If anyone understood the economic direction the lower Mississippi Valley best, it was the Choctaw and Chickasaw elites who were adopting race-based slavery and shifting to the commercial production of cotton and livestock.

After the end of native sovereignty in Mississippi, however, white southerners looked to God, his providence, and evangelical ministers to guide them through the feverish rush for cotton and slaves. The loose credit and fear of counterfeiters of the 1830s was explicitly combined with the many itinerant ministers and the pervasive anxiety about their authenticity. When the economic system collapsed, evangelicals formed an instrumental role in recreating the credit networks that bound the lower Mississippi Valley together, and in so doing, they tied the renewal of commercial progress to God's will. By the 1840s and 1850s, southern slaveholders could discuss maximizing plantation productivity and profits in unabashedly economic terms while genuinely believing that their prosperity aided in the spread of the Gospel. God had willed that Africans would be enslaved and converted to Christianity, they believed, and the most efficient and industrious plantations were also the holiest in God's political economy. This vision spread into the expansion of manufacturing and infrastructure and even transformed evangelical denominations into profit-seeking businesses. Slave-based capitalism and evangelicalism were joined in a union based on evangelicals' vision of God's will manifested in the material progress

of the modern world—progress they believed depended on the enslavement of Africans. With their commercial success built on slave labor, white evangelicals could turn to the rest of the world for their benevolent domination.

Evangelicals spoke of an age of progress and an age of iron, and they also exhorted their fellow evangelicals to spread their message throughout the world. Slaveholding entrepreneurs and missionaries dreamed of leading the globe to a more progressive, scientific, and divinely-ordained society built on racial hierarchy and enslaved labor. Like others with a vision of history as a moral force inevitably reaching its appointed end, they could scarcely see that their society would crumble in just a few short years. For the time being, God was on their side, and therefore they were on the right side of history, ushering in the millennium to the uncivilized world.

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