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“Revolutions Have Become the Bloody Toy of the Multitude”

European Revolutions, the South, and the Crisis of 1850

TIMOTHY M. ROBERTS

During the mid-nineteenth century the transatlantic world was in turmoil. Popular disturbances—in some places full-blown revolutions—rocked Europe from Ireland to the western boundaries of Russia. In America promoters of slavery were considering separating from a country increasingly resistant to the institution’s aggrandizement. This time of global political realignment, separatist violence, and exacerbating racial identification sheds light on two intriguing concepts: the American response to foreign revolutions and “southern exceptionalism.”

David Brion Davis’s *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* is the most recent assessment of the first concept. Davis focused on American reactions to the French Revolution, asking how and why a nation created by revolution “should become in time the world’s leading adversary of popular revolutions.” Davis emphasized the conservative influence of slavery on antebellum Americans’ attitudes to foreign revolutions: “America’s role in a revolutionary world was always complicated by what James Madison repeatedly called ‘the blot’ or ‘the stain’ of racial slavery.” Slavery, Davis argued, was a problem for a republic based upon the consent of the governed, rendering American policymakers skeptical of nations that pursued dreams of a

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more egalitarian world more than ordered liberty. Davis and others emphasized the persistence of this conservatism into the twentieth century.¹

On the concept of “southern exceptionalism,” John Shelton Reed’s *The Enduring South* suggests that the antebellum South’s ethnic and cultural patterns were so entrenched that the modern South drifted even further away from the rest of the country. Edward Pessen uncovered many characteristics shared by the South and North, and Carl Degler suggested national values either established or modified by the South. But the thrust of scholarship—including the works of Eugene Genovese, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, James McPherson, and Kermit Hall, focusing on issues including the Old South’s economy, politics, culture, and legal system—has emphasized the region’s peculiarities.²

Although questions about the impact of foreign revolutions on the

1. David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 31, 74. Earlier works included John Gazley, *American Opinion of German Unification, 1848–1871* (New York, 1926); Lloyd Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution 1913–1923* (New York, 1984); Charles Carroll Griffin, *The United States and the Disruption of the Spanish Empire, 1810–1822* (1937; rep., New York, 1968); Alfred Hunt, *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1988); Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT, 1987); Howard Marraro, *American Opinion on the Unification of Italy, 1846–1861* (New York, 1932); Arthur James May, *Contemporary American Opinion on the Mid-Century Revolutions in Central Europe* (Philadelphia, PA, 1927); and William Appleman Williams, *America Confronts a Revolutionary World, 1776–1976* (New York, 1976). Another recent assessment is Michael Morrison, “American Reaction to European Revolutions, 1848–1852: Sectionalism, Memory, and the Revolutionary Heritage,” *Civil War History*, 49 (2003), 111–32.

2. John Shelton Reed, *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society* (Lexington, MA, 1972); Carl Degler, “Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis: The South, the North and the Nation,” *Journal of Southern History*, 53 (1987), 3–18; Edward Pessen, “How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?” *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), 1119–49; Eugene Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York, 1986); Kermit Hall and James Ely, Jr., *Uncertain Tradition: Constitutionalism and the History of the South* (Athens, GA, 1989); and James McPherson, “Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question,” in *Drawn With the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War*, ed. James McPherson (New York, 1997), 3–23.

United States and about southern exceptionalism are enduring, the relationship between them can be explored by revisiting the sectional crisis of 1850–1851 and viewing it in a transatlantic context. Advocates of secession at mid-century were stymied not only by the passage of the Compromise of 1850, but also by news from Europe about the setbacks to the 1848 revolutions. The disruption of the Union in 1850 was not avoided because of European events, yet the arguments and rhetoric from both sides of the secession issue suggest that foreign events influenced domestic political developments. Moreover, this transatlantic perspective on the crisis of 1850–1851 helps track the development of American revolutionary consciousness.

Southern exceptionalism, meanwhile, had limits. Certainly, of any American group, southerners with ties to slavery were most likely to become uneasy over news of the European upheavals. Whether “revolution” meant greater liberty or greater license, the concept suggested a destruction or change to the existing order. This change did not bode well for southern society, whose slavery orientation created a conservative outlook that assumed the maintenance of an inherited order. In 1850, perhaps gazing at Europe, the South Carolina lawyer William Henry Trescot asked, “What is the position of the South . . . as a slaveholding people?” Ultimately, however, the South’s position was the Union position. While slavery’s influence could be felt in southern responses to turbulent events in Europe, overall the southern reaction, though perhaps consolidated more quickly, reflected the reaction of the nation at large.³

Many southerners joined their fellow Americans in initially celebrating news of the European upheavals. Not only did citizens in northern cities and towns from New York City to Madison conduct torchlight processions, so did inhabitants of Richmond, Baltimore, Louisville, Charleston, St. Louis, and New Orleans. Just as towns in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania renamed themselves “Lamartine,” after the romantic poet who emerged as the mouthpiece of the new French government, so did a town in Arkansas. Boston residents organized several “Indignation Banquets” to raise funds for the European revolutionaries. The banquets

3. For discussion of “conservatism” see Samuel Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” *American Political Science Review*, 51 (1957), 454–73; William Henry Trescot, *The Position and Course of the South* (Charleston, SC, 1850), 6.

were modeled, albeit remotely, on the protests that launched the Paris uprising in February 1848. People of New Orleans, calling their meals “Reform Banquets,” provided a southern corollary.⁴

The European upheavals also found brief favor among religious and secular intellectuals, northern and southern. The Congregational minister Horace Bushnell declared, “dynasties subverted . . . enlarged liberty of conscience, everything beneficent in European affairs is produced by institutions of the United States.” The poet James Russell Lowell was moved to compose an “Ode to France”:

And down the happy future runs a flood
Of prophesying light;
It shows an earth no longer stained with blood,
Blossom and fruit where now we see the bud
Of brotherhood and Right.

George Bancroft thought that Continental events might trigger the downfall of the British monarchy, and he spent Easter of 1848 in Paris, trying to educate leaders of the Second Republic on the framework and merits of an American-style bicameral legislature.⁵

Southern intellectuals joined their northern brethren. The *Baptist Banner*, published in Louisville, Kentucky, offered an eschatological derivation of the number 666, the “number of the beast” indicated in Revelation, by assigning numerical values to the Latin translations of two Catholic authorities, Louis Philippe and Pope Pius IX. The *Banner* even noted the prophetic significance of news that Pope Pius IX had been struck with apoplexy on July the Fourth. Meanwhile, Francis Lieber, a

4. *Richmond Enquirer*, Apr. 28, 1848; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, Apr. 12, 1848; Gazley, *American Opinion of German Unification*, 21; *Alphabetical List of Towns and Counties* [taken from the 1880 *United States Census*] (Alamo, CA, 1970); Henry Gannett, *American Names* (Washington, DC, 1947); *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, Apr. 2, 1848; Robert Clarke, Jr., “German Liberals in New Orleans (1840–1860),” *Louisiana History Quarterly*, 20 (1936), 142.

5. John Bodo, *Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812–1848* (Princeton, NJ, 1954), 237; James Russell Lowell, “Ode to France: February 1848,” in *Poetical Works*, ed. James Russell Lowell (4 vols., Boston, 1890), 1: 258; Bancroft to William H. Prescott, July 28, 1848, *William H. Prescott Papers* (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston); Henry Blumenthal, *A Reappraisal of Franco-American Relations 1830–1871* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1959), 12.

Prussian immigrant, became too excited to hold his classes at South Carolina College over news that “Germany too is rising.” William Gilmore Simms, the most popular southern writer of his day, joined Edward Duyckinck, the New York literary leader of the “Young America” movement, in urging indigenous, nationalistic literature, cleaving from European themes. In the spring of 1848, however, Simms rejoiced over European developments, which he saw linked to the presidential campaign of Zachary Taylor, a man uncorrupted by ties to either the Democratic or Whig parties (though ultimately he led the Whigs to the White House in 1848). Simms interpreted the European revolutions of 1848 and Taylor’s candidacy as twin crests of a favorable democratic tide that would sweep away the creaking monarchies of Europe and the morally bankrupt American second-party system.⁶

This enthusiasm for revolutionary Europe, however, soon waned. In the spring of 1848 the French Second Republic attempted to extend the revolution from political change to social overhaul, instituting guarantees of work, shorter workdays, and public relief projects, the *ateliers nationaux*. But then the government suddenly ended its public welfare, decreeing that workers would be evacuated for public works in the provinces or drafted into the army. Furious workers rose in June, barricading Paris’s narrow streets. General Eugene Cavaignac ruthlessly cleared the city; the notorious “June Days” left nearly 5,000 soldiers and workers dead and confidence in the government fatally wounded.

Such activist government and its apparent consequences caused a backlash in American opinion. Charles Sumner observed, “the rich and the commercial classes [of America] feel that property is rendered insecure,” while the *New York Herald* applauded how the “*ouviere* of Paris . . . were shot down in the streets by the thousands, as they deserved.” It warned “if government can interfere to promote or retard the interest of . . . the laborer, it can interfere with mechanic, the tailor . . . the lawyers . . . the clergymen. . . . It can be easily seen to what a state of things this would lead.” New York workers expressed shock at the French workers’ erection of barricades, and the *North American Review*

6. Louisville *Baptist Banner*, May 3, 31, Aug. 23, 1848; Thomas Sergeant Perry, ed., *Life and Letters of Francis Lieber* (Boston, MA, 1882), 213–14; Edward Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (New York, 1999); William Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (1961; rep., Cambridge, MA, 1979), 275.

compared European pauperism and misery to an epidemic disease: “the government and the laws are hardly . . . responsible for their existence.” “We cannot believe,” the *Review* observed, “that republican institutions are to blame for this lamentable state of things.”⁷

Although northerners worried about a socialist government and society emerging in France, southerners especially feared that prospect. Such a prospect of socialism made it easier for southerners to identify events in Europe with the disdained northern “isms.” “We must go crazy with sympathy because the Parisian mob . . . have undertaken to establish . . . a pure democracy[,] which I regard as impracticable,” lamented David Outlaw, a North Carolina Whig congressman. Presbyterian scholar James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina College shuddered at the division of civilization into “Atheists, Socialists, Communists, Red Republicans, [and] Jacobins on the one side, and friends of order and regulated freedom on the other.” Given his references to European radicals, Thornwell appeared to be indicting the usual foreign suspects of American conservatives, but actually, he was describing American abolitionists. Likewise, William Trescot criticized the “hasty welcome” given by the U.S. Senate in 1848 to the “socialist” government in Paris, seeing it as a sign of the northern states’ enthusiasm for “revolutionary restlessness.” The news from Europe exacerbated southern suspicions of the North.⁸

The emancipation of slaves in the French West Indian colonies by the Second Republic confirmed to many southerners the evil attending the European revolutions. The *Savannah Republican* regarded slave eman-

7. Merle Curti, “Impact of the Revolutions of 1848 on American Thought,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 93 (1949), 211; *New York Herald*, July 20, 1848; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984), 358; “French Ideas of Democracy and a Community of Goods,” *North American Review*, 69 (1849), 314, 279.

8. David Outlaw to Emily Outlaw, Mar. 29, 1848, in David Outlaw Papers, Southern Historical Collection (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill); B. M. Palmer, *Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond, VA, 1875), 303; Anne Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1980), 97, 127, 259; Trescot, *Position and Course of the South*, 13. For an assessment of the Congress’s skepticism about the French Second Republic, see Richard Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 14 (1994), 359–77.

ipation as a “cruel absurdity.” The anonymous “J.,” writing in the *Southern Quarterly Review*, predicted that the West Indian emancipation would precipitate another “St. Domingo,” recalling the violence accompanying the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804. Together with signs of budding socialism, emancipation confirmed that fanatics were running the young French republic.⁹

Fanaticism seemed to be moving closer to home, moreover, in the form of immigrant labor sympathetic to the northern Free Soil movement. Before the late 1840s the proslavery regime took comfort in the way that slavery served to “exclu[de] a populace made up of the dregs of Europe”; in 1850 only one in twenty free southerners was not native-born.¹⁰

But now Free Soilers were not content to harangue defenders of slavery from a distance. “The free soil movement is extending and barnburners are to be found . . . in Maryland and Virginia,” David Outlaw observed. Southern leaders saw a southern corollary to the northern Free Soil movement, potentially hostile to slavery, developing among foreign-born workingmen in the South. After the revolution of 1848, German refugees brought radical ideas to the South, organizing Free German Societies (known as the *Turnverein*) in many southern cities. As radical refugees of an Old World dominated by a landlord class, the so-called Turners opposed tyranny of all sorts. Some Turner ideas, such as the abolition of the presidency, were far-fetched, but others, including calls for restriction of slavery, were more realistic and dangerous. In 1849 John C. Calhoun received word that immigrant laborers in various Deep South cities were agitating against proslavery authorities. “The issue of Free Labour against Slave Labour will soon be made in the South,”

9. Eugene Curtis, “American Opinion of the French Nineteenth-Century Revolutions,” *American Historical Review*, 29 (1924), 258; J., “The National Anniversary,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, 2 (1850), 181. For the impact of Haiti see Lester Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750–1850* (New Haven, CT, 1996), 87–144, and Hunt, *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America*.

10. Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery*, 231–32; Ira Berlin and Herbert Gutman, “Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South,” *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983), 1175–76, 1197.

noted Calhoun's correspondent. By the end of the 1840s the threat to southern society appeared close at hand.¹¹

To slavery advocates, Free Soilers were seeking to strangle the South by violating fundamental American principles of protection of property—the right to possess slaves and to carry them into the West. Southern liberty was at risk no less than it had been in 1776, said an Alabama congressman: “the power to dictate what sort of property the State may allow a citizen to own and work—whether oxen, horses, or Negroes . . . is . . . tyrannical.” Domestic and international forces, both considered alien, threatened southern property rights.¹²

To defend against this perceived alliance of northern Free Soilers and foreign radicals, southern ideologues joined Americans elsewhere in espousing a peculiar American revolutionary heritage that established ideological distance between antebellum America and its enemies. They distinguished the United States from Europe by emphasizing the American Revolution's minimal social upheaval and violence, the material prosperity enjoyed by Americans both before and after the conflict, the safeguarding of Christian values, and the American Revolution's success compared to the Europeans' apparent inability to achieve similar results. Each of these factors set the American revolutionary identity apart from the European experience.

Various examples illustrate this tendency. The Washington *National Intelligencer* declared in the autumn of 1848 that the United States was a revolutionary model because it had abandoned violence since gaining independence. Comparing domestic authority in the United States and Europe, the *Intelligencer* deemed the former supreme on account of “its wise unwillingness to yield to force, for only fools and cowards commit that blunder.” The *Intelligencer* noted that disturbances like Shays's Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, Nullification, and the Rhode Island Dorr Rebellion were resolved through peaceable compromise. Such a morality tale was misleading: in each case actual or threatened deployment of

11. David Outlaw to Emily Outlaw, July 28, 1848, David Outlaw Papers; Bruce Levine, *Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana, IL, 1992), 91–95; Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South* (1940; rep., New York, 1964), 340–41; Berlin and Gutman, “Natives and Immigrants,” 1198.

12. J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1978), 213.

military force was necessary to maintain the political and social order. However, in the *Intelligencer's* cameo history of antirevolution in the United States, it was the national organic makeup that corrected acts of revolutionary mischief, not recourse to superior might.¹³

Students and scholars helped articulate this revolutionary tradition. The Hungarian revolutionary Lajos Kossuth, having fled the clutches of Austria and Russia, toured the United States in 1852 in support of Hungarian independence. In Philadelphia he was feted by students who had composed essays that reflected a pedagogical emphasis on the proprietary nature of the American revolutionary inheritance. Master Samuel Scott, for example, directed Kossuth to

behold . . . France[,] possessor [of] a liberty unsuited to its wants; Italy again subjected to the cruel yoke; and . . . Hungary trodden down upon by the Austrian conqueror. . . . Let our Union's example induce others to show the same fraternal affection, and let liberty arise triumphant as the sun in noonday splendor.

George Bancroft reflected upon the European revolutions implicitly in his description of the American Revolution, which appeared in 1852:

For Europe, the crisis foreboded the struggles of generations. . . . In the impending chaos of states, the ancient forms of society, after convulsive agonies, were doomed to be broken in pieces. . . . In America, the influences of time were molded by the creative force of reason, sentiment and nature. Its political edifice rose in lovely proportions, as if to melodies of the lyre. Peacefully and without crime . . . the American Revolution . . . was most radical in its character, yet achieved with such benign tranquility, that even conservatism hesitated to censure.¹⁴

Southerners also offered paeans to American revolutionary exceptionalism. The jurist Beverly Tucker distinguished between old (Anglo-

13. [Washington] *National Intelligencer*, Sept. 20, 1848, May 16, 21, 1842; Richard Ellis, *Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights, and the Nullification Crisis* (New York, 1987), 91–93, 160–65; William Ames, *History of the National Intelligencer* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972), 206–207.

14. Donald Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848–1852* (Columbia, MO, 1977), and Morrison, “American Reaction to European Revolutions”; *Welcome of Louis Kossuth, Governor of Hungary, to Philadelphia, by the Youth* (Philadelphia, PA, 1852), 122; George Bancroft, *History of the United States*, quoted in *The Ambiguity of the American Revolution*, ed. Jack Greene (New York, 1968), 49, 50, 54.

Saxon) revolutions, including the American independence movement, which sought “to vindicate the rights of property,” and new (Continental) ones, which “assail[ed]” such rights. The French people were “slow to understand” that the only justifiable upheavals were those ensuring that the government protected existing rights. Tucker affirmed the South as the grand sanctifier of property—and, therefore, the most resolute protector of an inviolable American revolutionary way. Likewise, spurred by the specter of a new international revolution against slavery and social order, southern writers revised the story of American independence, showing the South as the originator and inheritor of the distinct American revolutionary principles. William Gilmore Simms published a partisan account, “South Carolina in the Revolution,” to encourage the South to “reassert her history” and to “furnish an argument, much needed, to our [southern] politicians.” Simms’s narratives of the American Revolution have been rightly seen as a veiled reaction to abolitionist tracts. But Simms was also part of a national coterie of historians and novelists who rendered the American revolutionary past as a guideline for resisting innovation.¹⁵

Actually, in their attitude toward revolutions, southerners resembled the Catholic Church. Of course, sometimes apologists for Catholicism and for slavery were the same voice. Bishop Francis Gartland of Savannah, for example, when writing to Ireland to recruit priests, warned a Dublin seminary not to send clerics “manifesting more wisdom than their Church, by their intemperate and untimely zeal for the freedom of the slave population. All that we have to do is mite their souls [so that] whether bond or free they may be saved.” Archbishop John Hughes in New York City, although not a defender of slavery per se, shared Bishop Gartland’s conservatism. To Hughes, European revolutionaries exhibited an “intemperate and untimely zeal for freedom.” This was different from Americans’ experience because their independence did not “turn upon the spontaneous whim of the people to overthrow one form of government in order to substitute another.” Instead, the American Revolution had effected political change by vindicating the deliberations of “a

15. [Beverly Tucker,] “Present State of Europe,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, 16 (1850), 286, 298; Simms quoted in Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840–1860* (Baltimore, MD, 1977), 75; Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (Ithaca, NY, 1988), 51–54, 155–56.

fair majority of the reasoning part of the community.” Europeans’ snatching after liberty, rather than cultivating it, had left them even less freedom after their uprisings in 1848. Hughes emphasized the irony that “the reason for the revolution in France [in 1848], was that French citizens were not permitted to assemble at banquets. . . . Now, under a popular government, created by a successful revolution . . . they are denied even the miserable privilege of complaint.” On account of its alleged gentleness, however, the American Revolution “[bore] but few grounds of comparison” with the revolutions in Europe. Hughes envisioned revolutions as gradual and logical affairs—and the European versions failed these tests.¹⁶

Twin emphases on what might be called a “gradual majority” linked these Americans’ defense of slavery and defense of the Catholic Church during the European upheavals. Archbishop Hughes’s deliberative “fair majority,” though not exactly the same concept, resembled the “concurrent majority” envisioned by John C. Calhoun in *Disquisition on Government*, completed shortly before his death in 1849. The *Disquisition* shows a southern mindset grappling with a tumultuous transatlantic world, with Calhoun envisioning an increasingly sectionalized America represented ultimately by two presidents, North and South, each with a constitutional veto. The concurrence of all interest groups regarding vital public matters, not simply a popular majority much less a revolutionary uprising, would thus be necessary to change the status quo. Southern ideologues like Calhoun joined Catholic authorities up and down the Atlantic seaboard in defining a “good” revolution by its gradualism and its preservation of private property. These criteria set impossible standards for the upheavals in Europe.

Southerners added another characteristic of the American revolutionary experience: the resilient supremacy of local government. Developments in France in 1848 revealed how the French had mistakenly allowed their national government to become too sophisticated, eroding the provinces’ authority. In an analysis of French democracy, the *Southern Quarterly Review* noted the absence of states’ rights from the French system. States’ rights were “the grand conservative feature in our system,” the article stated, “the one most important of all advantages” of

16. David Gleeson, *Irish in the South, 1815–1877* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), 139; John Hughes, *The Church and the World. A Lecture* (New York, 1850), 26.

American republicanism. Even the location of the national government in Paris jeopardized the French political system. "France's safety," wrote William Gilmore Simms, "will depend . . . upon a removal from Paris of the seat of government." Paris was "the centre of European attraction, and the seat of sciences, fashion and pleasure," opined the *Southern Quarterly Review*. Such attributes detracted from good government, fostering vanity among Parisians, whose concern for provincial interests would dwindle, presumably, in the midst of such decadence. Central government would be better set in a crude and, therefore, functional place like Washington, DC.¹⁷

Sensitivity to the weakening of provincial power by central authority was, however, shared by Americans North and South. One New York journal described France as "above all other countries of the globe a centralization, . . . its heart and head . . . Paris." Another decried the country's "sad system," where "forty thousand communes" were "chained by the commune of Paris." A third alleged that "Centralization has always been the stumbling block for freedom in France." Contrasting American stability with French tumult, this journal ironically pointed to U.S. origins in "a number of colonies, and wide extent of country, creating sectional interests and consequently sectional feelings." Many northerners thus shared southerners' embrace of local authority at mid-century as an important aspect of American revolutionary tradition.¹⁸

While southern observers focused on revolutionary France, they did distinguish between the events of Paris and revolutionary developments elsewhere in Europe. Southerners sympathized especially with the struggles of Hungarians and held rallies in New Orleans and Atlanta, and each citizen in Little Rock resolved in 1849 to contribute ten cents a month to the achievement of European liberty. Towns not only in Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, but also Mississippi, were renamed "Kosuth," in honor of the Hungarian revolutionary. Southern newspapers

17. "Guizot's Democracy in France," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 15 (1849), 164; William Gilmore Simms to James Henry Hammond, May 20, 1848, in *Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. Mary Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves (6 vols., Columbia, SC, 1952-1982), 2: 411; "Constitutions of France," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 16 (1850), 504.

18. "Absolutism Versus Republicanism. The State of Europe," *United States Democratic Review*, 31 (1852), 598; "Foreign Correspondence," *The Living Age*, May 6, 1848, 283; "Miscellany," *American Whig Review*, 11 (1850), 657.

were as likely as their northern counterparts to compare Kossuth to Washington and to acclaim the Hungarians as the “Americans of Europe.” Mississippi Senator Henry Foote sponsored legislation to grant federal lands to Hungarian refugees on condition of their permanent settlement and naturalization as citizens. Foote declared that those who believed that the South “would react with cold indifference toward the establishment of free institutions in Hungary . . . know very little of the lofty characteristics which belong to the slave-holding population of the Union.” If French revolution-making drew scorn on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, Hungary’s cause provoked national sympathy.¹⁹

In praising Hungary, however, southern literati could sometimes not muffle the domestic tensions in the background of all Americans’ views of Europe at mid-century. In 1849 the Hungarian revolution against the Hapsburg Empire spilled over into an ethnic conflict of Croats and Serbs living within Hungary. But the *Southern Literary Messenger* showed a sense of fraternity with the Magyars—even at one point using the vocabulary of the simmering American dispute over slavery to characterize overseas conditions. The *Messenger* opined that “the [Hungarians are] fully aware of their dangerous position . . . hated by the Slaves, isolated among the nations of the earth, they were left alone . . . to resist this conspiracy against them.” The spelling in the *Messenger* of the modern word “Slav” as “Slave” was consistent with other American periodicals’ grammar of the day. But with its tone and contextual language the southern journal’s sympathy for the Hungarians’ plight sounded like a bleak southern self-assessment.²⁰

Northerners’ expressions of sympathy for the Hungarians resembled those of the southerners in their friendly comparisons of the American and Hungarian revolutionary capacities, denigration of Hungary’s enemies, and, indeed, in their references to American slavery. Sympathy demonstrations, such as one headed by “citizen” Abraham Lincoln, resolved, “Recognition of the independence of Hungary by our government is due from American freemen to their struggling brethren, to the

19. *The Liberator* (Boston), Dec. 7, 1849; Robert Gale, *Cultural Encyclopedia of the 1850s in America* (Portsmouth, NH, 1993), 222; *Alphabetical List of Towns and Counties*; Gannett, *American Names*; May, *Contemporary American Opinion*, 33–48; *Congressional Globe*, 31st Congress, 1 Session, 293; *Ibid.*, Appendix, 47.

20. “Glimpses at Europe in 1848, Part I: Magyar and Croat,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, 15 (1849), 8.

general cause of Republican liberty.” At a Philadelphia meeting speaker John Forney, editor of the *Pennsylvanian* newspaper, went to astonishing lengths to indicate the similarities between present European and former American military leaders. The Hungarian general Arthur Görgey was a latter-day Francis Marion; Polish Generals Jozef Bem and Henryk Dembinski, who were assisting the Hungarians, resembled Anthony Wayne and Nathaniel Greene of the Continental Army; and Lajos Kossuth was the reincarnation not only of George Washington but also Patrick Henry, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Fisher Ames. Moreover, as British forces had sought alliances with “the fierce savages of our own wilderness” against the colonists, now Austria “has excited among the rude Serbians and Croatians a most bloody rebellion [against Hungary].” Forney’s demonization of Serbians and Croatians by comparison to American Indians not only hearkened to the Declaration of Independence, where Jefferson alleged the British monarchy had stirred the “merciless Indian savages” against the colonists. It also echoed southern opinion, which likewise denigrated Hungary’s enemies as savages.²¹

Northern antislavery advocates also used the Hungarian uprising to press the issue of American slavery. Frederick Douglass directed his newspaper’s readers to “help the American Kossuths,” and the *North Star* and other abolitionist presses labeled the hunting of fugitive slaves “Austrianism.” Black abolitionists in Ohio summoned “the Russian serf, the Hungarian peasant, [the] American slave and all other oppressed people [to] unite against tyrants.” Senator John Hale of New Hampshire, meanwhile, attempted to amend Henry Foote’s resolution on behalf of the Hungarian refugees, adding language broadening the legislation to criticize American slavery. By dwelling not on slaves’ black identity but on their status as refugees hounded by draconian authorities, abolitionists sought to divert northerners from support for or compliance with the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. American partisans, North and South, portrayed the slavery controversy in terms made more congenial by European events: the right simply to be left alone by the government.²²

Why did southerners join northerners in supporting Hungarian liber-

21. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy Basler (9 vols., New Brunswick, NJ, 1953–1955), 2: 62; *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Aug. 21, 1849.

22. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, 69, 73–75; *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840–1865*, ed. Philip Foner and George Walker (2 vols., Philadelphia, PA, 1979), 1: 276–77.

ation, while doubting the French upheaval? Hungarians were not promoting socialist utopias, nor did they maintain West Indian plantations, where slave emancipation was looming. Moreover, unlike France, Hungary did not appear to be trying to extend its revolution to areas near or within American borders. Southerners shared northerners' revulsion over France's pathological revolutionary past. Hungary, in contrast, had no preexisting revolutionary identity gone sour. Like the American patriots of old, contemporary Hungarian freedom fighters existed at a distance from antebellum America and lacked the stain of revolutionary failure.

In March 1849 the Frankfurt Assembly, after meeting for nearly a year to create an all-German constitutional republic, abandoned its plans and asked Frederick William, the King of Prussia, to rule a liberal German empire. But Frederick refused the invitation, embarrassing the assembly and thwarting nascent German democracy. Under threat of arrest the assembly relocated from Frankfurt to Stuttgart, where the delegates suffered the indignity of being locked out of their arranged meeting place. John C. Calhoun had earlier instructed the Prussian minister in Washington on how to implement republican and federal political philosophy: "If the [German states] do not attempt too much," he wrote, "[their] old institutions" could "do much to strengthen them." Ironically, the Frankfurt Assembly acted as if it were following Calhoun's advice too well: accomplishing little by May 1849, its delegates dispersed for good.²³

But radical political conventions were taking place on both sides of the Atlantic at the time. In response to what they understood as an emerging threat to slavery, southern extremists met in 1850 to openly consider secession from the Union. Like the members of the beleaguered Frankfurt Assembly, secessionists hoped to frame a movement to create a distinct nation.

Proslavery southerners' worries grew dramatically as the presidency of Zachary Taylor unfolded. Despite his slaveholding and southern roots,

23. *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1899, Vol. II: Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (Washington, DC, 1900), 748–50; Merle Curti, "John C. Calhoun and the Unification of Germany," *American Historical Review*, 40 (1935), 476–78; Frank Eyck, *Frankfurt Parliament 1848–1849* (London, 1968); Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848–1849* (Princeton, NJ, 1991).

Taylor displayed national, not sectional, allegiance, declaring in late 1849 that if legislation to prohibit territorial slavery passed the Congress he would not stop it from becoming federal law. The territories of New Mexico and California began preparations to enter the Union with state constitutions that prohibited slavery. Antislavery delegates to the constitutional convention of California went so far as to proclaim that “the eyes of all Europe are now directed toward California.” Horace Mann, an educational reformer and U.S. senator from Massachusetts, bluntly told southern congressmen that the civilized world was against the South.²⁴

Dismayed southerners reacted angrily to domestic and international threats to the established order, a dramatic reversal from their attitude during the “springtime of the peoples” in 1848. Then, for example, the *Richmond Enquirer* had envisioned the American Revolution being extended in Europe, celebrating how “American principles are triumphant” in the Old World. Two years later the *Enquirer* was again espousing an American revolutionary consciousness, but one needing sectional protection, not one conducive to national export. Now the *Enquirer* asserted that the South was called to protect what the “Union of the old thirteen states” had achieved: the right to an “undisturbed enjoyment of slave property.”²⁵

Mississippi state leaders convened to endorse state sovereignty, condemn congressional restrictions on territorial slavery, and call all slaveholding states to a great convention to devise resistance to northern aggressions. The convention, set for Nashville in June 1850, would be the first time that southern political leaders would meet explicitly to consider a sectional separation. The Tennessean Cave Johnson noted among those headed for Nashville “a settled determination with the extreme men . . . to dissolve the Union.” The situation seemed critical, even to international observers. The American minister in Naples reported that Italian newspapers were taking bets on the imminent dissolution of the United States.²⁶

24. Christian Fritz, “Popular Sovereignty, Vigilantism, and the Constitutional Right of Revolution,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 63 (1994), 50; Avery Craven, *Growth of Southern Nationalism 1848–1861* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1953), 78.

25. *Richmond Enquirer*, Apr. 14, 1848, Oct. 16, Dec. 25, 1849, Jan. 10, 1850.

26. St. George Sioussat, “Tennessee, The Compromise of 1850, and the Nashville Convention,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 2 (1915), 318–19; Howard Marraro, ed., *Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and the Kingdom*

Meanwhile in early 1850 Congress tried to diffuse the mounting crisis. Senator Henry Clay introduced a series of resolutions proposing offsetting concessions to the antislavery and proslavery forces, which resulted in the Compromise of 1850. The compromise abolished the slave trade in Washington, DC, admitted California to the Union as a free state, passed a strict federal law to ease the capture and return of runaway slaves, and resolved a boundary dispute between New Mexico and Texas. Several factors led to the passage of the compromise after nine months of debate: the eloquence of Clay and Daniel Webster prodded Congress to move toward conciliation; the death of President Taylor in the summer of 1850 removed a dogmatic voice; the death of Calhoun during the debate provided southern advocates more flexibility; and the parliamentary skills of Stephen Douglas pushed the compromise toward its passage after Clay gave up.²⁷

The specter of bloody revolution also haunted the Senate's attempts to prevent sectional conflict. Those who favored compromise measures used the prospect of violent interstate conflict as an argument in support of Clay's proposals. Calhoun warned that soon only military force would remain to hold the country together, should agitation on the slavery issue continue. Clay averred that if northerners interfered with slavery where it existed, "my voice would be for war." The prospect of sectional conflict, a war "in which all mankind would be against us; in which our own history itself would be against us," prodded legislators to search for ways to avoid the violence of a sectional civil uprising, the specter of the United States replicating scenes of European revolution and reaction. While domestic factors exerted the greatest influence on American statesmen to work out their positions on the compromise, international events also played a role.²⁸

Various congressional speakers on both sides of the slavery question invoked the revolutions of 1848 and the counterrevolutions of 1850 to bolster their case. Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi warned the North

of the Two Sicilies: Instructions and Despatches 1816-1861 (2 vols., New York, 1951), 2: 12-16.

27. David Potter, *Impending Crisis 1848-1861* (New York, 1976), 100-116; Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (Lexington, KY, 1964); Mark Stegmaier, *Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute and Sectional Crisis* (Kent, OH, 1996).

28. *Congressional Globe*, 31st Congress, 1 Session, Appendix, 117.

to respect southern rights or risk the troubles of the imperial powers in Europe: "Picture to yourselves Hungary, resisting the powers of Austria and Russia; and if Hungary, which had never tasted liberty, could make such stout resistance, what may you not anticipate from eight millions of southrons made desperate by your aggression?" Brown portrayed southerners and Hungarian insurgents as defensive patriots, not radicals.²⁹

By contrast, northern senators opposed to a southern independence movement emphasized the differences between American and European circumstances. William Seward predicted that slavery's days were numbered because it violated "the tide of social progress." Slavery and European aristocracy were natural allies; this alliance had arrested revolutions in Europe and now threatened "progress" in the United States. "Emancipation," said Seward, on the other hand, "is a democratic revolution."³⁰

Seward, moreover, scoffed at southerners' threats that such a violent upheaval might happen in America. He cited the separation of powers inherent in government as a buffer against revolution. "The constituent members of this democracy . . . are not the citizens of a metropolis like Paris, or of a region subjected to the influences of a metropolis like France; but they are husbandmen, dispersed over this broad land." Thus Seward echoed the above-noted American critiques of the cosmopolitan influence of European capitals as an inducement to revolution. The protagonists in the slavery debate took inspiration and evidence from revolutionary Europe. Sometimes they likened domestic scenes to transatlantic corollaries. Other times they reasserted exceptional American conditions arising from the nation's revolutionary founding. Their sense of transatlantic community at the mid-nineteenth century was selective and complicated.³¹

The great northern advocate of the Compromise of 1850, Daniel Webster, took threats of southern belligerence more seriously than did Seward. Webster saw violence over the slavery issue as a real possibility and endorsed Henry Clay's proposed strengthening of the fugitive slave laws, facilitating eventual passage of the compromise. "I hear with pain and anguish the word secession," said Webster. "There can be no such

29. *Ibid.*, 259.

30. *Ibid.*, Appendix, 268.

31. *Ibid.*, 267-68.

thing as peaceable secession. . . . [T]hat disruption must produce such a war as I will not describe.” Webster feared that the lessons of European revolution had not been heeded. “No monarchical throne presses these states together. . . . To break up! to break up this great Government! to dismember this great country! to astonish Europe with an act of folly . . . ! No, sir! no, sir!”³²

Perhaps Webster was describing a unity he hoped to inspire, because at that moment talk of secession was in earnest. As Webster made his plea for peace and the debate on Clay’s omnibus compromise drifted into June 1850, representatives of nine southern states arrived in Nashville to deliberate about the course of the South and to engage in “cool calculation [of] the advantages . . . of a Southern Confederacy.” The Nashville delegates, 175 at a June convention, and 59 at a subsequent meeting in November, were hardly typical southerners: they were political elites, mostly slaveowners, and some “fire-eaters,” persistent advocates of southern independence as a weapon against democratic change that seemed to take on international proportions. The conventions had a strange status: though called to contemplate disunion, most of the delegates were selected by their state legislatures and therefore had legal if not federal sanction. The views of many of the convention delegates about secession were radical only because eventually they would prove to be ahead of, not different from, most southerners’ opinion. How did these potential American revolutionaries understand “revolution” in 1850?³³

The Nashville Convention began in June with a reiteration of the grievances of the South: the region was under threat of external revolutionary forces, residing both across the Mason-Dixon Line and across the Atlantic. Judge George Goldthwaite of Alabama stated what he assumed all of the Nashville delegates already knew: “It could not be disguised that the civilized world was leagued abroad against us. Revolutionary France [has] . . . set free three hundred thousand slaves . . . and other nations of Europe [have done] the same also.” Concurrently the northern states had voted to restrict slavery to its present lim-

32. *Ibid.*, 276.

33. Sioussat, “Tennessee,” 319; Thelma Jennings, *The Nashville Convention: Southern Movement for Unity, 1848–1851* (Memphis, TN, 1980); Eric Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1992).

its. Abolitionists, “who, a few years [ago], were mobbed, now [have their] views adopted in the pulpits and in the . . . schools.” Under these desperate conditions Goldthwaite urged action. “Suppose [secession] produced not only war, but famine and destruction. Suppose the fertile fields were deluged in blood! Is that any reason why we should ignominiously submit and put off the evil day?” Goldthwaite urged secession as a matter of both expediency and principle. His was revolutionary rhetoric.³⁴

Other Nashville delegates declared for secession not as an act of honorable desperation, but for its economic promise. Several imagined the South ruining depleted northern manufacturers and forging powerful trade relations with a Europe too eager for cotton to allow northern aggression to interrupt Atlantic trade. The South Carolinian Langdon Cheves envisioned a southern republic blessed by favorable soil and climate as “one of the most splendid empires in which the sun ever shone.” Beverly Tucker of Virginia envisioned a Europe “determined to oppose . . . any war that might disturb her commerce . . . on which her very existence depends.”³⁵

Southerners outside the convention echoed these views. William Henry Trescot envisioned the South as “the guardian of the world’s commerce,” commanding a powerful exchange of cotton and manufactured goods through the Gulf of Mexico. A pamphlet of the Southern Rights Association calculated that some twelve million people’s livelihood in America and Europe depended on the “cotton raised by the slaves of the Southern States.” Surely “should there be war all the nations of Europe would desire to preserve their commercial intercourse” with this life-giving system in the South, said a South Carolina legislator, thus defying abolitionists who wished “a revolution in the affairs of the civilized world.”³⁶

Such comments reveal the complicated radical southern proslavery agenda in the early 1850s, especially with regard to Europe. Foreign revolutionaries and their northern minions who threatened to overthrow

34. “The Southern Convention,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, 18 (1850), 227–28.

35. Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 462; “The Southern Convention,” 220.

36. Trescot, *Position and Course of the South*, 13; Edward Bryan, *The Rightful Remedy* (Charleston, SC, 1850), 67; Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years’ View* (2 vols., New York, 1857), 2: 783.

southern civilization enraged secession advocates. At the same time they were keenly interested in establishing an autonomous partnership between the South and the trading and manufacturing concerns of Europe, uninterrupted by political agitation. Europe's appeal thus lay not in its revolutionary experiments with social reform but in the maintenance of its economic status quo. This commercial interest actually helped to diffuse the sectional crisis by draining interest from disruptive politics.

Developments on both sides of the Atlantic seemed to validate such conservatism. In Congress, measures to reconcile the issue of territorial slavery were sent to the full Senate in May 1850, and in September President Fillmore signed the compromise bills into federal law. Such reconciliation measures deflected many would-be secessionists' hunger for disruption. Meanwhile Louis Napoleon in France moved toward curtailing the liberal regime of the Second Republic. In direct violation of the French Constitution of 1848, Napoleon imposed a three-year residence requirement for suffrage, disenfranchising some three million voters and reserving the franchise for a minority of the French people, largely legitimists seeking to recreate the authoritarian stability of the July Monarchy.³⁷

American opinion divided over Napoleon's action, some newspapers bemoaning the rise of European "despotism" and "absolutism," others praising the return of Old World stability. Robert Walsh, the American consul in Paris, offered an official U.S. response to Napoleon's rise, describing it as "the only . . . chance of dealing with dark doings of . . . [an] immense democratic conspiracy which threatened Europe." Walsh's pejorative comment on "democracy," reported in the American press, must have heartened southern ideologues like William Trescot and James Henry Hammond, who also suspected the concept. While Trescot lamented the "strange zeal" of slaveholders "to be good democrats," thus "betray[ing] the South," Hammond indicted "Democratic republics in which universal suffrage and offices are open to all" as the "the worst of all forms of Government." "Democracy" was a controversial concept in the mid-nineteenth-century transatlantic world, perhaps like "socialism"

37. Jennings, *The Nashville Convention*, 174-75, 187-88; William Freehling, *Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854* (New York, 1990), 511-35; John Merriman, *Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1841-1851* (New Haven, CT, 1978); Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852* (Cambridge, UK, 1983).

in the twentieth century. Ironically, authoritarianism in Europe at the time helped pull the troubled American democracy from the brink of fragmentation.³⁸

Southern radicals subsequently showed a reluctance to move toward secession, once they saw the prospect of reconciliation in Congress and understood the disastrous consequences of revolutions overseas. Delegates gathered again in Nashville in November 1850 to consider their options. They plainly were less restive in light of transatlantic setbacks to democratic reform: the reassertion of authoritarian government in Europe and the passage of a harsh national fugitive slave law, which one historian has aptly deemed an “American 1848.” Delegates to the second Nashville Convention, joining the governor of Alabama, state conventions in Georgia and Mississippi, and the *Richmond Enquirer*, moved from plans to secede to philosophical justifications of the right to secede, at the same time declaring that the existing situation did not justify actual recourse to such a drastic measure. It is symbolic that Andrew Jackson Donelson, the U.S. minister in Germany at the time of the Frankfurt Assembly’s dispersal, having been recalled by the Whig administration, influenced the Nashville Convention in November toward its moderate position. Donelson could bear witness to what happened to German ideologues lingering too long over a radical agenda.³⁹

As the secession debate continued into 1851, southerners both for and against secession uniformly renounced any discussion of southern revolution, so negative had the transatlantic image of that concept become. Advocates for the right to secede, largely southern Democrats, distinguished between secession and revolution. Secession was a theoretically prescribed, peaceful remedy, thoroughly grounded in American political practice. Revolution, on the other hand, was violent, and, moreover, reminiscent of recent scenes in Europe; it was foreign to the American experience. A Louisiana newspaper described secession as the

38. Henry Casper, *American Attitudes Toward the Rise of Napoleon III* (Washington, DC, 1947), 147, 173; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 515; Manisha Sinha, *Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000) 122–23.

39. Michael Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York, 1983), 102–109; Arthur Cole, “The South and the Right of Secession in the Early Fifties,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 1 (1914), 378, 384; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 528; *Richmond Enquirer*, Nov. 28, 1850.

peaceable withdrawal of one party from a contractual partnership, once he decides that the partnership no longer benefits him. “He takes his portion of the stock, makes his bow, and retires. This is Secession.” In contrast, revolution was a much more hostile form of severance. “If [the party] should seize a musket, rush into the establishment . . . that would be Revolution.” In 1860–1861 southerners would launch an unconstitutional disunion movement, rather than back away from it, because the election of Lincoln and the “black Republicans” represented an imminent threat of unconstitutional coercion lacking a decade earlier. The idea that secession was constitutional, but revolution was not, however, emerged in secessionists’ efforts in 1850 to distinguish their undertaking from what they perceived as European fanaticism.⁴⁰

The planter Langdon Cheves developed this point in a slightly different way. He persistently warned of the threat of international forces to the South. He favored secession as a way to avoid the even bleaker prospect of a South destroyed by domestic violence. Cheves argued that while supporters of “free soil” wished for the moment only to “pen [slavery] up within restricted limits,” fanaticism “has no stopping place.” He predicted that antislavery efforts would eventually trigger a race revolution, resembling “the sufferings, the massacre and the banishment, in poverty and misery, of the white proprietors of Hayti,” which for a half century had been a nightmare for American planters. Interestingly, in Nashville Cheves raised the model of Haiti to promote preemptive secession, in effect denouncing one form of unacceptable, and un-American, revolution, that of racial upheaval, in order to promote another one, that of political exodus, more grounded in American orthodoxy.⁴¹

Opponents of southern secession, mainly Whigs, argued it was unacceptable precisely because it was revolution. Alexander Stephens of Georgia warned hotheads to “beward of revolution—refer to France. . . . The right of secession is . . . a right of revolution, and . . . no just cause for the exercise of such right exists.” A Whig newspaper in Georgia argued that the right of secession “must be . . . a revolutionary sentiment directly leading to the destruction of the government.” Whig journals in

40. New Orleans *Louisiana Statesman*, quoted in *Richmond Enquirer*, Nov. 28, 1850; William Barney, *Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Princeton, NJ, 1974), 235.

41. Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 519.

Washington, DC, and Tennessee affirmed that there was no difference between secession and revolution, and that seceding would mean bloody civil war. Although southern Democrats and Whigs differed over secession, most agreed that revolution was an unacceptably dangerous alternative to present troubled conditions.⁴²

By 1851 southerners saw the failed upheavals of Europe as examples of authoritarian triumph over virtuous but disorganized advocates of revolutionary republicanism and local government. John Townsend complained that the cooling of secession ardor elsewhere had made it suicidal to establish “The Little Nation of South Carolina,” if there was any lesson in the plight of Venice, Italy, which was “at this very moment, under the iron heel of Austrian soldiery.” The Venetian republic was established in March 1848, temporarily independent of Hapsburg control, but without collateral resistance, the Venetians capitulated after eighteen months. For this reason “Revolutions ought not to be made too easily,” declared the Southern Rights Association of South Carolina: “Witness France, where revolutions have become the bloody toy of the multitude; who fight for they know not what; spurning today the idol of yesterday, and calling for revolution as they would for a parade, or ‘un spectacle.’”⁴³

In 1851 Secretary of State Daniel Webster described Louis Napoleon’s coup as a “catastrophe which . . . may weaken the faith of mankind in . . . popular institutions.” Webster correctly assessed proslavery southerners’ response to such a “catastrophe.” The counterrevolutions in Europe impressed upon southern radicals that a popular uprising would lead not to independence but to greater submission to a repressive regime. Such an uprising, according to the New Orleans-based *De Bow’s Review*, would shove southerners down the ill-fated path just taken by European revolutionaries. *De Bow’s* asked what the South would gain should it become independent. Southerners, like the Europeans of 1848, would be “a people who revolutionize their government, [only to] depose one tyrant to become subject to another.”⁴⁴

42. Cole, “The South and the Right of Secession,” 391–92.

43. Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 530; “Separate Secession. Proceedings of Meetings of Delegates from the Southern Rights Associations of South Carolina.” *Southern Quarterly Review*, 4 (1851), 311.

44. Casper, *American Attitudes*, 176; “Southern Cotton Mills,” *De Bow’s Review*, 10 (1851), 682.

Ultimately southern secessionists at mid-century mimicked the delegates to the Frankfurt Assembly, not only in their independence convention but also in their failure to act. Pinning their hopes on a burgeoning spirit of nationalism to join together disparate local causes, they could not overcome fears of radical action and convince many others to join them. Amid the Crisis of 1850, the example of revolutionary Europe augmented domestic events and helped deter the southern impulse toward secession from the United States: specifically, the fear of anarchical upheaval presented by France was more persuasive than the prospect of popular liberation offered by Hungary. With this view, southerners decided not to undertake a disruptive action that at the time appeared un-American and foolhardy, a violation not fulfillment of the conservative tradition of the American Revolution.

Antebellum southerners shared with northerners a fear of radical republicanism. In terms of the impact of foreign revolutions, this national fear was more compelling than sectional disagreement over those revolutions' implications for the institution of slavery. Ultimately such a cautious outlook on revolution showed how proslavery partisans in the South were unexceptional, their outlook on the transatlantic world reflecting, not refuting, that of the rest of the nation.