



## Who Were the Southern Whigs?

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STUDENTS of the Old South have spent much of their time in recent years dispelling myths about that fabled land of moonlight and magnolias. Our understanding of the social, intellectual, and economic life of the ante-bellum South has been considerably revised and immeasurably widened by the work of a large number of able scholars.

Political history, however, has been unfashionable, and one of the results has been the survival of a series of myths about the political life of the South in the 1830's and 1840's. The key myth may be called the myth of a monolithic South: a section unified as early as the 1820's in its devotion to state rights doctrines and its hostility to the nationalistic, antislavery, capitalistic North. The result of approaching ante-bellum history by way of Fort Sumter and Appomattox, this point of view found its classic statements in the apologias of Jefferson Davis<sup>1</sup> and Alexander H. Stephens,<sup>2</sup> but it was made respectable in the first generation of professional scholarship by such historians as Herman Von Holst<sup>3</sup> and John W. Burgess.<sup>4</sup> It colored such early monographs as U. B. Phillips' "Georgia and State Rights"<sup>5</sup> and H. M. Wagstaff's *States Rights and Political Parties in North Carolina, 1776-1861*,<sup>6</sup> and is to be seen in most of the more recent works on the pre-Civil War South.<sup>7</sup> It has also given rise to the corollary myths that Calhoun was the

<sup>1</sup> *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, 2 vols. (New York, 1881).

<sup>2</sup> *A Constitutional View of the Late War between the States*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1868-70).

<sup>3</sup> *The Constitutional and Political History of the United States*, 8 vols. (Chicago, 1876-92).

<sup>4</sup> *The Middle Period, 1817-1858* (New York, 1905).

<sup>5</sup> *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1901, II, 1-224.

<sup>6</sup> Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series XXIV (1906), Nos. 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> See particularly Jesse T. Carpenter, *The South as a Conscious Minority, 1784-1861* (New York, 1930); Robert S. Cotterill, *The Old South* (Glendale, Calif., 1939); and Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, 1944-51). Charles S. Sydnor, in what is, in many respects, the finest work on the ante-bellum South, presents a persuasive restatement of the traditional sectional-state rights interpretation. His chapter headings on politics from the Panic of 1819 to nullification describe a developing sectionalism: "From Economic Nationalism to Political Sectionalism," "End of the Virginia Dynasty," "The Lower South Adopts State Rights," and "Bold Acts and Bolder Thoughts." The 1830's and 1840's, however, present a paradox. Professor Sydnor finds a growing "Regionalism in Mind and Spirit," but a "decline of sectionalism in politics." This he explains as a result of the fact that "major Southern hopes and fears found no champion in either party," so that "party conflict south of the Potomac . . . had the hollow sound of a stage duel with tin swords." "The agrarian South felt little interest," writes Professor Sydnor, in that conflict between the "wealthier and more conservative segments of society" and the liberal, democratic elements "which formed a major issue between the Democratic and Whig parties" in the nation as a whole. *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848* (Baton

representative spokesman and political leader of the South after about 1830, and that the Whig party in the South mainly reflected the state rights proclivities of the great planters.

These myths have been strengthened by Frederick Jackson Turner's sectional analysis of our early national history. Turner's approach has been extremely fruitful, but its sweeping application has tended to exaggerate differing sectional tendencies into absolute sectional differences. The application of geographic sectionalism to individual states, moreover, has fostered the further myth that political strife within the Old South was confined largely to struggles over intrastate sectional issues between upcountry and low country, hill country and "black belt."<sup>8</sup>

All of these myths have some basis in fact. They are, however, the product of a misplaced emphasis which has permeated nearly all the studies of pre-Civil War southern politics. Sectionalism and state rights have been made the central themes of southern political history for almost the entire ante-bellum period. Southern opposition to nationalistic legislation by Congress has been overemphasized. And the social, economic, and ideological lines of political cleavage within the slave states have been obscured. The early history of the Whig party below Mason and Dixon's line shows the character of these distortions.

It is too often forgotten that in the ante-bellum period the South had a vigorous two-party system, an asset it has never since enjoyed. Until at least the later 1840's, the voting southerner was much more interested in the success of his own party and its policies than in banding together with southerners of the opposite party to defend the Constitution and southern rights against invasion by the North. The parties were evenly matched, and elections were bitterly contested. It was rare for any southern state to be regarded as absolutely safe for either party. Of the 425,629 votes cast in the slave states at the election of 1836, the Whigs had a majority of only 243 popular votes. In this and the three succeeding presidential elections, a total of 2,745,171 votes were cast, but the over-all margin, again in favor of the Whigs, was only 66,295, or 2.4 per cent of the total votes. In these four elections the Whigs carried a total of twenty-seven southern states and the Democrats twenty-six.<sup>9</sup>

Rouge, 1948), especially p. 316. Notable for their freedom from overemphasis on sectionalism are Thomas P. Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (Chapel Hill, 1932); and Roger W. Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana* (University, La., 1939).

<sup>8</sup> See especially William A. Schaper, "Sectionalism and Representation in South Carolina," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1900, I, 237-463; and Charles H. Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* (Chicago, 1910).

<sup>9</sup> Edward Stanwood, *A History of the Presidency* (Boston, 1898), pp. 185-88, 203-204, 223, 243. Cf. Fletcher M. Green, "Democracy in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History*, XII (1946), 20-21.

An equally close rivalry is evident in congressional representation. In the five congressional elections between 1832 and 1842, southern Democrats won an aggregate total of 234 seats, while their opponents captured 263. Whigs predominated among southern representatives in three of these five Congresses, and Democrats in two. In three of them the margin between the southern wings of the parties was five or less.<sup>10</sup> We have then a picture of keen political competition, with a vigorous Whig party maintaining a slight ascendancy.

What did this Whig party stand for? The pioneer account of the southern Whigs was the essay by U. B. Phillips which, significantly, appeared in the *Festschrift* to Frederick Jackson Turner.<sup>11</sup> This study shows Phillips' characteristic tendency to generalize about the entire South on the basis of conditions in his native Georgia. "The great central body of southern Whigs," he declares, "were the cotton producers, who were first state-rights men pure and simple and joined the Whigs from a sense of outrage at Jackson's threat of coercing South Carolina."<sup>12</sup>

Two years after Phillips' essay appeared, Arthur C. Cole published his exhaustive monograph on *The Whig Party in the South*.<sup>13</sup> Less than a third of the Cole volume is concerned with the period before 1844, when Whiggery was of greatest importance in the South, and he generally follows the Phillips interpretation of its origins. His account of the birth of the party devotes three pages to early National Republicanism in the South, twenty to the anti-Jackson sentiment aroused during the nullification crisis, and only four and a half to the fight over the national bank and financial policy.<sup>14</sup> "Various

<sup>10</sup> Party affiliations of members of Congress have been determined largely from election returns in *Niles' Register* up to 1837, and from the *Whig Almanac* for the subsequent years. These sources have been supplemented by information from: *A Biographical Congressional Directory* (Washington, 1913); Charles H. Ambler, "Virginia and the Presidential Succession, 1840-1844," in *Essays in American History Dedicated to Frederick Jackson Turner* (New York, 1910), pp. 165-202; Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*; Henry H. Simms, *The Rise of the Whigs in Virginia, 1824-1840* (Richmond, 1929); J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina, 1835-1860*, James Sprunt Historical Publications, XV (1916); Clifford C. Norton, *The Democratic Party in Ante-Bellum North Carolina, 1835-1861*, James Sprunt Historical Studies, XXI (1930); Phillips, "Georgia and State Rights," *loc. cit.*; Paul Murray, "The Whig Party in Georgia, 1825-1853," James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science, XXIX (1948); Theodore H. Jack, *Sectionalism and Party Politics in Alabama, 1819-1842* (Menasha, Wis., 1919); Cleo Hearon, "Nullification in Mississippi," *Mississippi Historical Society Publications*, XII (1912), 37-71; James E. Winston, "The Mississippi Whigs and the Tariff, 1834-1844," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXII (1937), 505-24; James B. Ranck, *Alfred Gallatin Brown: Radical Southern Nationalist* (New York, 1937); Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Louisiana and the Tariff, 1816-1846," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXV (1942), 24-148; and Wendell H. Stephenson, *Alexander Porter: Whig Planter of Old Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1934).

<sup>11</sup> "The Southern Whigs, 1834-1854," *Essays in American History Dedicated to Frederick Jackson Turner*, pp. 203-29.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> Washington, 1913.

<sup>14</sup> Cole, pp. 2-30.

interests," he says, "linked in political alliance with the few southerners whose interests and inclinations led to the support of latitudinarian principles, a still larger faction made up of those who supported constitutional doctrines on the opposite extreme and whose logical interests seemed to point against such an affiliation."<sup>15</sup>

An analysis, however, of the record of the Twenty-second Congress (1831-1833) leads to somewhat different conclusions. It was this Congress which dealt with the tariff, nullification, and national bank questions, and it was during this Congress that the groundwork for the Whig party was laid. Of the ninety southerners in the House of Representatives, sixty-nine had been elected as supporters of Andrew Jackson, while twenty-one, nearly a fourth, were National Republicans. Of the sixty-nine Democrats, twenty-five were subsequently active in the Whig party. Eighteen of the latter were state rights Whigs, while seven were not identified with the state rights wing of the opposition. These twenty-five men then, together with the twenty-one National Republicans, may be regarded as representative of the groups which formed the Whig party in the South.<sup>16</sup>

These incipient Whigs voted twenty-four to twenty-one in favor of the tariff of 1832, a measure denounced by state rights men and nullified by South Carolina.<sup>17</sup> They also voted twenty-four to nineteen for the Force Bill, which was designed to throttle the nullifiers.<sup>18</sup> This backing of administration measures was hardly a portent of an opposition state rights party. The real harbinger of Whiggery was the vote on the national bank bill, which this group supported twenty-seven to seventeen.<sup>19</sup>

The Whig party actually took shape during the Twenty-third Congress (1833-1835), in which it gained the allegiance of fifty-two of the ninety-nine southern members of the House. They voted twenty-nine to sixteen in favor of rechartering the national bank<sup>20</sup> and unanimously in favor of restoring the government deposits to Biddle's institution.<sup>21</sup> By a closer vote of twenty-two to twenty they supported repairing and extending the Cumberland Road.<sup>22</sup> In the Twenty-fourth Congress (1835-1837) the forty-eight Whig

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. E. Malcolm Carroll, in his scholarly *Origins of the Whig Party* (Durham, N. C., 1925), pays almost no attention to the southern states and follows Cole where southern developments have to be mentioned. In his one general statement about the southern Whigs, he takes the position that they were men of property, who turned instinctively to an association with northerners of similarly conservative interests. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>16</sup> See note 10 above.

<sup>17</sup> *House Journal*, 22 Congress, 1 session, pp. 1023-24.

<sup>18</sup> *House Journal*, 22 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 453-54.

<sup>19</sup> *Register of Debates*, 22 Cong., 1 sess., p. 3852.

<sup>20</sup> *House Journal*, 23 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 483-85.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 485-86.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 758-59.

Representatives from the South divided thirty-eight to three in favor of Clay's bill to distribute the proceeds from sales of public lands to the states.<sup>23</sup> Other votes showing similar tendencies might be cited, but enough has been said to suggest that, even in the beginning, a majority of southern anti-Jackson men were far from being state rights doctrinaires.

In the light of this record it is not so surprising that only a handful of southern Whigs followed Calhoun when he marched his supporters back into the Democratic household during Van Buren's administration.<sup>24</sup> The record also prepares one for the increasing manifestations of nationalism among southern Whigs which Phillips and Cole found so difficult to explain.<sup>25</sup> The southern wing of the party backed Clay almost unanimously for the Presidential nomination in 1840.<sup>26</sup> Tyler's nomination for Vice President was more a sop to the disappointed Clay men, of whom Tyler was one, than a concession to the state rights proclivities of southern Whiggery, the reason usually given for his choice.<sup>27</sup>

The nature of southern Whiggery had its real test when Tyler challenged

<sup>23</sup> *House Journal*, 24 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 1023-24.

<sup>24</sup> Senator William C. Preston and Representative Waddy Thompson of South Carolina refused to leave the Whig party with Calhoun, and three other Representatives from the state took the Conservative, or anti-Subtreasury, position. Outside his own state Calhoun carried with him only seven members of Congress: Dixon H. Lewis of Alabama; Edward J. Black, Walter T. Colquitt, and Mark A. Cooper, of Georgia (in 1839-40); Samuel T. Sawyer and Charles Shepard of North Carolina; and Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia (in 1839-41). The Georgia apostates were defeated for the next Congress by the regular Whigs, who made a clean sweep of the congressional elections under the general ticket system. In North Carolina Sawyer was displaced by a loyal Whig at the next election, and Shepard met the same fate two years later. In the Presidential election of 1840 the southern Whigs, far from being weakened, had a majority of 58,675, as compared with 243 four years earlier. See Murray, *Whig Party in Georgia*, pp. 90-95; Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina*, pp. 55, 79; Stanwood, *History of the Presidency*, pp. 165-203.

<sup>25</sup> Phillips, "The Southern Whigs," *loc. cit.*, pp. 216-17; Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, pp. 65-89.

<sup>26</sup> Cole, pp. 53-54.

<sup>27</sup> George R. Poage, *Henry Clay and the Whig Party* (Chapel Hill, 1936), pp. 13, 34-35. Tyler's most recent biographer, Oliver P. Chitwood, maintains that "Tyler was given the second place on the ticket mainly because he was from the South and had been a strong advocate of States' rights," or, in another passage, that "he was put up partly to placate the Clay faction but mainly to satisfy the States' right element of the Whig party." Chitwood bases this position on the ground that it "is the explanation usually given." *John Tyler, Champion of the Old South* (New York, 1939), pp. 172, 194. In taking this position, Chitwood has to discount completely Henry A. Wise's story of an arrangement with Clay leaders in 1839, whereby Tyler was to withdraw as a competitor with W. C. Rives for the Senate but was to receive the Vice Presidential nomination. Chitwood is probably correct in denying that Tyler himself had any part in such an understanding, but he fails to explain why Tyler was expected to be Clay's running mate before the convention met and why the Clay men were so confident of their ability to control Tyler just after he succeeded Harrison. *Ibid.*, pp. 172-73, 210, 215. Chitwood also finds it necessary to try to disprove persistent reports that Tyler intimated during the campaign that he was friendly to a national bank. It cannot be denied that his campaign statements were highly equivocal. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-94, 171-77. On one occasion Tyler endorsed Harrison's contention that "There is not in the Constitution any express grant of power for such purpose [a national bank], and it could never be constitutional to exercise the power, save in the event the power granted to Congress could not be carried into effect without resorting to such an institution." *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Clay for leadership of the party. Of the fifty-five southern Whigs in the lower house of the Twenty-seventh Congress (1841-1843), only three stuck by the Virginia President and his state rights principles, whereas Mangum of North Carolina presided over the caucus which read Tyler out of the party, and southern Whig editors joined in castigating him unmercifully.<sup>28</sup> Southern Whigs supported Clay's legislative program—repeal of the Sub-treasury, a national bank, distribution, and tariff—by large majorities.<sup>29</sup> Even the Georgians, Berrien, Toombs, and Stephens, defended the protective features of the tariff of 1842.<sup>30</sup>

Having said so much to the point that the Whig party in the South did not begin as and did not become a state rights party, it is necessary to add that neither was it consciously nationalistic. State rights versus nationalism simply was not the main issue in southern politics in this period. It is readily apparent from the newspapers and correspondence of the time that, except for Calhoun and his single-minded little band, politicians in the South were fighting over the same questions that were agitating the North—mainly questions of banking and financial policy.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of the banking question. State and federal governments, by their policy in this sphere, could cause inflation or deflation, make capital easy or difficult to obtain, and facilitate or hinder the marketing of staple crops and commercial activity generally. And by chartering or refusing to charter banks, they could afford or deny to the capitalists of the day the most profitable field of activity the economy offered.

The banking issue is the key to an understanding of southern as well as northern Whiggery. Merchants and bankers were most directly concerned in financial policy, but their community of interest generally included the other business and professional men of the towns, especially the lawyers, who got most of their fees from merchants, and the newspaper editors, who were dependent on the merchants for advertising revenues. The crucial point for southern politics, however, is that the large staple producers were also closely identified economically with the urban commercial groups.<sup>31</sup> These were the principal elements which went into the Whig party.

<sup>28</sup> Cole, pp. 92-93.

<sup>29</sup> Southern Whigs in the House voted forty-four to four in favor of Clay's original bank bill. *House Journal*, 27 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 409-10. They supported the tariff of 1842 by a vote of twenty-nine to eleven. *House Journal*, 27 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 1440-41.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, *Whig Party in Georgia*, p. 109; Rudolph Von Abele, *Alexander H. Stephens* (New York, 1946), pp. 86-87.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph C. H. Catterall, *The Second Bank of the United States* (Chicago, 1903), pp. 140-44; Thomas P. Abernethy, "The Early Development of Commerce and Banking in Tennessee," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XIV (1927), 316-19; Thomas P. Govan, "Banking and the Credit System in Georgia, 1810-1860," *Journal of Southern History*, IV (1938), 164, 178-84.



The Whigs generally defended the national bank until its doom was sealed, then advocated a liberal chartering of commercial banks by the states, and finally, after the Panic of 1837, demanded a new national bank. The Democrats fought Biddle's institution and either favored state-operated banks to provide small loans for farmers, as distinguished from commercial banks, or tried to regulate banking strictly or abolish it altogether.<sup>32</sup>

Much of the misunderstanding about the Whig party in the South may be traced to the technique of plotting election returns on maps. Such maps tell us much, but they may also mislead. They show, for example, that the "black belts" of the lower South were the great centers of Whig strength. This has led scholars to reason: (1) that the Whig party was a planters' party *par excellence*, (2) that planters were necessarily rigid state rights men, and (3) that the Whig party was, therefore, a state rights party. *Q. E. D.!*

What the maps do not illustrate, however, is the dynamics of the political situation—the elements of leadership, impetus, financing, and propaganda, which are the real sinews of a political organization. In the case of the Whig party, these elements were furnished mainly by the commercial groups of the cities and towns, with their allied lawyers and editors. Lawyers were the practicing politicians for both parties, but the greater incidence of lawyers among the Whigs is an indication of the commercial affiliations of the party. Seventy-four per cent of the southern Whigs who sat in Congress from 1833 to 1843 are identified as practicing attorneys, as compared with fifty-five per cent of the Democrats.<sup>33</sup> In the lower house of the Tennessee legislature of 1839, farmers predominated, but a fourth of the Whigs were lawyers, as compared with only a tenth of the Democratic membership.<sup>34</sup>

The size and importance of the urban middle class in the Old South has yet to be fully appreciated. As early as 1831, Nashville, for example, contained twenty-two wholesale houses and seventy-seven retail stores, not to

<sup>32</sup> Charles H. Ambler, *Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics* (Richmond, 1913), pp. 176-78; Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, pp. 237-39; George T. Starnes, *Sixty Years of Branch Banking in Virginia* (New York, 1931), pp. 71-103; William K. Boyd, *The Federal Period, 1783-1860*, Vol. II of *History of North Carolina* (Chicago, 1919), pp. 274-75; Norton, *Democratic Party in North Carolina*, pp. 54-59, 188-92; Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina*, pp. 80, 88; Govan, "Banking in Georgia," *loc. cit.*, pp. 164-84; Jack, *Sectionalism in Alabama*, pp. 61-63; William O. Scroggs, "Pioneer Banking in Alabama," in *Facts and Factors in Economic History: Articles by Former Students of Edwin Francis Gay* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), pp. 421-23; Abernethy, "Banking in Tennessee," *loc. cit.*, 321-24; Eugene I. McCormac, *James K. Polk: A Political Biography* (Berkeley, 1922), pp. 88, 169-70, 190; Shugg, *Class Struggle in Louisiana*, pp. 134-38.

<sup>33</sup> Based on vocational identification in *Biographical Congressional Directory*.

<sup>34</sup> Vocational identification from "List of Members of the House of Representatives of the Tennessee Legislature," broadside (Nashville, 1839). Party affiliations from a memorandum by James K. Polk in the Polk Papers (Library of Congress), First Series, placed at end of November, 1839.

mention numerous other businesses, such as the sixty taverns and tipping houses.<sup>35</sup> Even the little county seat town of Gallatin, Tennessee, boasted in 1840 ten mercantile firms, a grocer, a merchant tailor, three hotels, five lawyers, five doctors, a paper and grist mill, and eighteen artisans' establishments of one kind or another.<sup>36</sup>

Businessmen dominated the towns socially, economically, and politically, and the towns dominated the countryside.<sup>37</sup> This was particularly true of the "black belts" of the lower South, since the great cotton capitalists of this region were especially dependent on commercial and credit facilities for financing and carrying on their extensive planting operations.<sup>38</sup> In recognition of the urban influence on politics, congressional districts were commonly known by the names of the principal towns in each—as, for example, the Huntsville, Florence, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, and Mobile districts in Alabama.

Other evidence points in the same direction. A large majority of the stockholders in Virginia banks in 1837 lived in the areas of heaviest Whig voting. The principal commercial towns of the state—Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk—gave unbroken Whig majorities throughout the period 1834–1840.<sup>39</sup> In North Carolina twenty of the twenty-one directors of the two principal banks in 1840 were Whigs.<sup>40</sup> The first Whig governor of North Carolina was a railroad president; the second was a lawyer, cotton manufacturer, and railroad president; and the third was one of the wealthiest lawyers in the state.<sup>41</sup>

Similar party leadership obtained elsewhere. In Virginia, younger men of the type of John Minor Botts of Richmond and Alexander H. H. Stuart of Staunton actually directed the party of which Tyler and Tazewell were nominal leaders. Senators George A. Waggaman and Judah P. Benjamin were typical of the New Orleans lawyers who guided Louisiana Whiggery. Poindexter and Prentiss in Mississippi were intimately associated both per-

<sup>35</sup> Nashville *Republican and State Gazette*, Oct. 20, 1831.

<sup>36</sup> Gallatin *Republican Sentinel*, Jan. 28, 1840.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis E. Atherton, *The Southern Country Store, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1949), especially pp. 191–92. This study is of great significance in indicating the importance of commercial interests and of even the smaller interior merchant in the life of the ante-bellum South. Atherton does not deal with the political activities of merchants in this volume, but in a similar study for Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, he found the merchants active in politics. Seventy per cent of a sample for whom political affiliation could be determined were Whigs. *The Pioneer Merchant in Middle America*, University of Missouri Studies, XIV (1939), No. 2, pp. 23–26.

<sup>38</sup> Clanton W. Williams, "Early Ante-Bellum Montgomery: A Black-Belt Constituency," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (1941), 510–11, 515; Shugg, *Class Struggle in Louisiana*, p. 138; Stephenson, *Alexander Porter*, pp. 33–35; J. Carlyle Sitterson, "Financing and Marketing the Sugar Crop of the Old South," *Journal of Southern History*, X (1944), 188–99.

<sup>39</sup> Simms, *Whigs in Virginia*, pp. 13, 167–92.

<sup>40</sup> Boyd, *Federal Period*, p. 274.

<sup>41</sup> Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina*, pp. 36, 57, 92–94.



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sonally and financially with the bankers and businessmen of Natchez. The Tennessee Whigs were led by John Bell, Nashville lawyer and iron manufacturer, who had married into the state's leading mercantile and banking house; Ephraim H. Foster, bank director and Nashville's most prominent commercial lawyer; and Hugh Lawson White, Knoxville lawyer, judge, and bank president.<sup>42</sup>

This commercial bias of the Whig party did much to pave the way for the industrial development of the South after the Civil War. It was no accident that former Whigs provided a large part of the leadership for the business-minded Conservative-Democratic parties which "redeemed" the South from Republican rule and then proceeded to make the conquered section over in the image of the victorious North, often in the interest of northern capital.<sup>43</sup>

Commercial considerations and the banking question did not, of course, determine political alignments in the Old South by themselves. Pro-tariff sentiment made for Whiggery among the sugar planters of Louisiana, the hemp growers of Kentucky, and the salt and iron manufacturers of western Virginia and Maryland. The more liberal policy of the Whigs toward internal improvements by both the state and federal governments won them support in landlocked interior sections and along the routes of projected transportation projects. And the fact that the Democrats generally championed a broadened suffrage, apportionment of congressional and legislative seats on the basis of white population, and other measures for extending political democracy, inclined propertied and conservative men to rally to the Whig party as a bulwark against mobocracy.

These factors, however, merely reinforced the commercial nature of southern Whiggery. The business orientation of the Whigs and the relative unimportance of their state rights wing become quite apparent if the party is described as it actually developed in the various states, rather than on the basis of general assumptions about southern politics.

<sup>42</sup> Lawyers provided much of the leadership for the Democratic party also, but they tended to be from the smaller towns rather than the big commercial centers—as, for example, James K. Polk, Cave Johnson, and Aaron V. Brown, in Tennessee. There were also a goodly number of "Democrats by trade"—men like James K. Polk's merchant-banker-mail contractor brother-in-law, James Walker—who were active in Democratic politics for personal profit. The top Whig leadership, however, contained few men of the decidedly noncommercial backgrounds of such Democrats as Andrew Johnson, the Greenville tailor; Bedford Brown, the upcountry small planter who inherited Nathaniel Macon's mantle in North Carolina; Richard M. Johnson, the ebullient Tecumseh-slayer, who continued to wait on customers in his Great Crossings inn while Vice President of the United States; David Hubbard, the self-educated carpenter who championed the poor whites of northern Alabama; Franklin E. Plummer, the picturesque loco-foco from the piney woods of eastern Mississippi; and General Solomon W. Downs, who led the "Red River Democracy" of northern Louisiana in the fights for suffrage extension and bank reform. Davy Crockett was, of course, the exception among the Whigs that proved the rule.

<sup>43</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, 1951), pp. 1-50.

A state by state analysis would indicate that, in the four border slave states and Louisiana, Whiggery was simply National Republicanism continued under a new name. The National Republicans were also strong in Virginia, but here they were joined in opposition to the Democrats by a body of state rights men alienated from Jackson by his attitude toward nullification. The National Republican and commercial wing of the party, however, was the dominant one, especially after the business-minded Conservative Democrats joined the Whigs on the Subtreasury question.<sup>44</sup> In North Carolina and Tennessee, the Whig party was formed by the secession of pro-Bank men from the Democratic party, aided in Tennessee by the local popularity of Hugh Lawson White as a Presidential candidate in 1835-1836.<sup>45</sup>

The state rights element was more conspicuous in the four remaining states of the lower South. But it was by no means the majority wing of the Whig party in all of them. Both Alabama and Mississippi had an original nucleus of pro-Clay, anti-Jackson men, and in both states the nullification episode caused a substantial defection from the Jackson ranks. In Mississippi, however, a greater defection followed the removal of government deposits from the national bank. The state rights men were clearly a minority of the opposition party, which elected an outspoken foe of nullification to the

<sup>44</sup> Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, pp. 219-50, especially p. 222; Simms, *Whigs in Virginia*, *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> Boyd, *Federal Period*, pp. 181-84; Burton A. Konkle, *John Motley Morehead* (Philadelphia, 1922), p. 127; Lawrence F. London, "George Edmund Badger in the United States Senate, 1846-1849," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XV (1938), 2-3; Powell Moore, "The Political Background of the Revolt against Jackson in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 4 (1932), 45-66; Thomas P. Abernethy, "The Origin of the Whig Party in Tennessee," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XII (1927), 504-22; Joseph H. Parks, *John Bell* (Baton Rouge, 1950), pp. 58-133. The difficulty historians have had understanding why the North Carolina planters perversely remained in the Democratic party arises from the initial error of regarding the Whig party as primarily a planter group. The basic explanation is that the Old Republican planters of North Carolina, unlike the agricultural capitalists of the lower South, were antagonistic toward the commercial-financial group, rather than identified with it. With a smaller investment in land and slaves than his Mississippi counterpart, with little chance to make large profits by further investment, and relying less on a single cash crop, the average North Carolina planter was much less dependent on the town merchant and banker. For some years before the Jackson era, the planters had been resisting demands for banks and internal improvements, while simultaneously trying to stem the tide of democratic discontent with planter rule. It was the union of these two anti-planter forces, commercial and democratic, which produced the Whig party in 1833-1835. Businessmen controlled the new party, but they retained popular support by championing constitutional reform and by progressive legislation in the fields of internal improvements and public education. There is no adequate account of the North Carolina Whigs in print. The situation in Virginia was somewhat similar, in that a majority of the planters, Phillips and Cole to the contrary notwithstanding, remained Democrats. In the period 1833-1843, the twelve congressional districts of plantation Virginia, lying east of the Blue Ridge and south of the Rappahannock, were represented thirty-eight times by Democrats and twenty-two times by Whigs or Conservatives, with nine of the Whig elections being won in the commercial Norfolk, Richmond, and Fredericksburg districts. The Democratic party of Virginia differed from that of North Carolina, however, in having a much larger popular element.

governorship in 1835 and sent the ardent Clay partisan, Seargent S. Prentiss, to Congress two years later.<sup>46</sup>

The state rights defection seems to have been more important in Alabama, where it was led by the able Dixon H. Lewis. The Lewis faction, however, maintained only a tenuous connection with the regular Whigs, and in 1837 Lewis and his supporters followed Calhoun back into the Democratic party. The significant fact is that in neither Alabama nor Mississippi were the Whigs greatly weakened by the departure of Calhoun's admirers.<sup>47</sup>

Only in South Carolina and Georgia did avowed state rights men make up the bulk of the anti-Jackson party. When the real nature of the new party alignments became apparent, the politicians of Calhoun's state gave proof of their sincerity (and of the Presidential aspirations of their chief) by moving back to the Democratic ranks at the first decent opportunity.

The principal Whig leader in Georgia was John M. Berrien, a Savannah lawyer and attorney for the United States Bank who had been forced out of Jackson's cabinet by the Peggy Eaton affair. At the time of the election of 1832, Jackson's Indian policy was so popular in Georgia that Berrien did not dare oppose the President openly. Instead, he went about stirring up anti-tariff and state rights sentiment, while secretly trying to prevent anti-Bank resolutions by the legislature. Immediately after Jackson's re-election, however, Berrien and his allies managed to reorganize the old Troup political faction as an openly anti-Jackson state rights party. In view of Berrien's pro-Bank attitude and his subsequent staunch support of Clay's policies, it seems probable that he was merely capitalizing on state rights sentiment to defeat Democratic measures which he opposed on other grounds. At any rate, the Georgia Whigs were soon arrayed against the Jackson financial program, and they held their lines nearly intact in the face of the desertion of state rights Whigs to the Democrats on the Subtreasury issue. By 1840 Berrien had brought his Georgia followers into close harmony with the national party.<sup>48</sup>

This summary sketch of southern Whiggery raises, of course, more ques-

<sup>46</sup> Hearon, "Nullification in Mississippi," *loc. cit.*, pp. 37-77; Winston, "Mississippi Whigs and the Tariff," *loc. cit.*, pp. 505-24; James E. Winston, "The Mississippi Whigs and the Annexation of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXIX (1926), pp. 161-80; Ranck, *Alfred G. Brown*, pp. 4-15; Dallas C. Dickey, *Seargent S. Prentiss: Whig Orator of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1945), pp. 45-266.

<sup>47</sup> Jack, *Sectionalism in Alabama*, pp. 21-85.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas P. Govan, "John M. Berrien and the Administration of Andrew Jackson," *Journal of Southern History*, V (1939), pp. 447-67; Phillips, "Georgia and State Rights," *loc. cit.*, pp. 113-50; Murray, *Whig Party in Georgia*, *passim*. Despite the defection of three congressmen to the Democrats on the Subtreasury issue, the Georgia Whigs won the subsequent congressional election and carried the Presidential election of 1840 by three times their majority in 1836.

tions than it could possibly answer definitively. It has attempted to suggest, however, that preoccupation with the origins and development of southern sectionalism has led to distortions of southern political history in the 1830's and 1840's. Specifically, it is suggested:

That only John C. Calhoun and a small group of allied southern leaders regarded state rights as the most important issue in politics in this period.

That the southern people divided politically in these years over much the same questions as northern voters, particularly questions of banking and financial policy.

That the Whig party in the South was built around a nucleus of National Republicans and state rights men, but received its greatest accession of strength from business-minded Democrats who deserted Jackson on the Bank issue.

That the Whig party in the South was controlled by urban commercial and banking interests, supported by a majority of the planters, who were economically dependent on banking and commercial facilities. And finally,

That this alliance of the propertied, far from being inherently particularistic, rapidly shook off its state rights adherents and by 1841 was almost solidly in support of the nationalistic policies of Henry Clay.

There is a great need for intensive restudy of southern politics in the 1830's and 1840's, and particularly for critical correlation of local and national developments. The story as it comes from the contemporary sources is full of the resounding clash of solid interests and opposing ideologies, hardly having "the hollow sound of a stage duel with tin swords" which one historian seems to detect.<sup>49</sup> And recent events should make the student wary of state rights banners, especially when raised by conservative men against national administrations not conspicuously devoted to the interests of the propertied.

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<sup>49</sup> Sydnor, *Development of Southern Sectionalism*, p. 316.

