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The Charleston South Carolina press and Abraham Lincoln, 1860

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THE CHARLESTON SOUTH CAROLINA PRESS AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1860

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
and the
Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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June 1965
Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

The idea for this thesis was conceived out of the question that if history judges a man to be truly great, could the essential lines and nature of that greatness be seen through a thoroughly hostile opposition press. The man is Abraham Lincoln. The press consists of The Charleston Mercury and The Charleston Daily Courier, both active South Carolina daily newspapers during the Presidential campaign of 1860. When it was learned that these newspapers represented opposite and rather polarized extremes within the socio-political attitude loosely described as "Southern Democrat," the purpose of this paper expanded into an editorial comparison of their descriptions and judgements of Lincoln from his nomination as the Republican Presidential candidate on May 13, 1860, until the secession of South Carolina on December 20, 1860.

It was originally intended that the scope of the thesis be restricted to editorial comment on Lincoln, "the man"; to paint, as it were, an editorial portrait of him using what the Mercury and Courier said of his life and personal politics, with as little reference to the sectional issues of the period as was necessary to complete the portrait. As a result, however, of Lincoln's obscurity, his campaign silence, Southern censorship, South Carolinians' localism and their near complete absorption in the issues of slavery and secession, it quickly became apparent that a greater reference to the campaign issues through which Lincoln was invariably seen would have to be made. These same factors which reduced the amount of editorial
comment on Lincoln in the Charleston press, however, have made it possible
to include in the following pages over 90% of the articles in which his
name was mentioned. Therefore, despite an actual paucity of detail on
Lincoln, the picture of him contained herein is a comprehensive one.

In a free society the manner by which issues become focused and
gain the momentum required to translate them into action is by arousing
public opinion. Tactlessness, idealism, moralism, zealousness as well as
distortions, half-truths, and fanaticism are not uncommon journalistic
weapons when it comes to fomenting public opinion and swinging it behind
a cause. American Presidential campaigns and the propaganda accompanying
our wars are clear examples; the Charleston press in 1860 is another.
The temptation to "correct" the half-truths, false statements, and errors
regarding Lincoln as the thesis took form was rejected for a number of
reasons which may be relevant to state. In the first place, it seemed
that the task at hand concerned what Charlestonians 105 years ago thought
Lincoln was, not what he actually was. Second, only by following the
winding trail of distortions on top of half-truths on top of errors, etc.,
can one appreciate the newspapers' conclusions and summations about Lin­
coln, his party, and his politics, which led the State to secede. Third,
the pulse and tone of those intensely exciting times could not be trans­
mitted to paper with anything approaching their original "flavor" if the
writer's task was to penetrate the smoke screen of biased journalism in
search of the actual historical Lincoln. As a result, the portrait of
Lincoln herein is not only comprehensive but, to use a phrase, unexpurgated.

The research for this thesis was accomplished in its entirety at
the Charleston Library Society at 164 King Street in downtown Charleston,
South Carolina, a subscription library with excellent depth in both South Carolina history and periodicals. It is the only research facility in the Nation, State, or City with files of both the Mercury and the Courier for 1860.

Finally, the writer gratefully acknowledges the long-distance efforts of his thesis advisor, Professor Roy M. Robbins through whose counsel and direction the subject has remained in focus; the warm cooperation and research assistance of the librarians at the Charleston Library Society, and the invaluable assistance in proofing and typing of his wife, Helen.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By the circumstance of his death the seal of immortality was stamped on Lincoln's fame. That "he died to make men free," is a terse epigrammatic statement such as Lincoln himself was wont to use with such telling and memorable effectiveness. Yet is is none the less true. He was a tall, awkward, rugged, homely, self-made American who stepped out of the obscurity of his frontier origins into the thin ranks of those whose greatness is neither bounded by time nor place. We think of Lincoln today as one whose humility, simplicity, honesty, and straightforwardness endowed him with a penetrating insight and power of invective; as one who would seize upon great and prominent facts and argue them to plain conclusions rather than build up elegant and fragile theories upon questionable grounds; as one more earnest and commanding than passionate and persuasive, and as the incomparable author of such poignant, prophetic prose, as: "I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free";¹ "that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain,"² and, "with malice


²Ibid., p. 377. From Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.
towards none; with charity for all . . . let us bind up the Nation's wounds."

Yet Lincoln's election was the event which triggered the secession of the Lower South and, as President, he stood as the leader of one section of the country which waged deadly and costly war against another section comprising eleven states and nine million people. One cannot expect that the South looked upon Lincoln as anything but the chosen leader of a hostile section which first threatened a cherished way of life (for so it seemed), and then brought about its armed defeat through tragic civil war. With a certain mental flexibility and an appreciation for the unfathomable depth of feeling involved in such a painful conflict, one might even maintain within a proper perspective such a latter day evaluation of Lincoln as:

As Lucifer, lover of light fell, even so fell—Lincoln. . . . He brought a war, he almost lost a war. He rent the Constitution of his country. He failed to unify his people. He feebly lasted through his blunders, until his policy of destruction, proclaimed by the fires of homes, towns, and cities; and the almost incredible multitude of his soldiers, recruited from slaves, and nations afar, had completely desolated the country behind the armies of his foe. . . . Lincoln was mad! Not with the madness of violence, or that of hallucination, but one that none the less dulled his conscience, and clouded his brain, and passed him from mood to mood, turned him over to the Fates, and shut him up to doubts of even Heaven and his God."

This statement appeared as late as 1931 in order, according to the author, Robert Woodward Barnwell, "to do something to keep the South from being drawn into the whirlpool of Lincoln-worship."

The judgements of Lincoln to be found in this thesis, though not

3Ibid., p. 496. From Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address.


5Ibid., p. 4. Barnwell was the grandnephew of Robert Woodward Barnwell, the wealthy conservative South Carolina politician, who served his State as United States Representative and Senator, and then during the Civil War as Confederate Senator.
always as bitter as Barnwell's, are usually as condemnatory. It is essential, therefore, to a comprehension of the portrait of Lincoln which emerges, that one understand, if not appreciate, the particular origins of the depth of feeling behind such judgements. These origins are to be found in the extraordinary psychological makeup of the ante-bellum Southerner and in the aristocracy of the old South.

The motive of white domination which U. B. Phillips observed to be the "central theme" of Southern history grew out of the whole complex of social relationships and biracial adjustments which arose from the presence of vast numbers of Negroes, who, as Phillips noted, had to be not merely employed at labor but controlled, "in the interest of orderly government and the maintenance of Caucasian civilization." Out of the effort to control so many Negro slaves grew the requirements for a rigid social order with well defined classes, where "common people" knew their place, where "quality" took their dominance as a matter of course and where slaves were expected to be happy with their lot. The privileged class, as in every nation with an aristocratic ruling class, had its social position, pride of ancestry, sense of responsibility, and creed of "noblesse oblige," and their birthright seemed to endow them with a high-minded and chivalric code of behavior. It was an aristocracy with an Anglo-Saxon, yeoman background of which Arthur M. Schlesinger wrote, "more nearly approached its counterpart in England than anything else to be found in America."
The institution of slavery in the South instilled in the master class a fierce and quixotic pride which extended to the nonslaveholder and even to those slaves with the more prestigious positions, such as personal maids, butlers and coachmen. It mattered less that the aristocratic tradition in the South lacked an ancient heraldic background than that it played a major part in the mental makeup of Southern men and women. It mattered less that there were more log cabins, frame houses and nonslaveholders in the South than there were mansions, plantations and slaveholders for as one Southern historian has noted, the entire South was devoted to that class-conscious way of life which "developed perhaps the most uncompromising sense of localism in America." Ante-bellum Southerners were a high-strung people in whom the habit of command acquired from the ownership of slaves and the refining effect of well-employed leisure introduced a deferential gallantry towards women and a particularly strong sense of honor and dignity. Slavery had accustomed them to expect implicit obedience and it was their nature that they often performed better in statecraft than politics where the artful angling for votes among Democratic constituents involved the acquisition of less dignified talents than they had been bred to possess, or felt called upon to demonstrate.

To describe the Southern aristocracy is one thing, to feel it another. Out of the experience of immersing oneself in six months of newspapers from the ante-bellum period one can develop such a "feel" for that aristocracy where duels were frequent but only amongst gentlemen, for though one could and would gladly die for honor, that honor was unassail-

able from those of a lower class. It came as a revealing surprise to the writer to discover that during the Presidential campaign of 1860, perhaps the most traumatic political period in the history of the South, the Charleston Mercury devoted more space in its columns to the history, manners and customs of foreign royalty and the comparative merits and demerits of their aristocracies and systems of servitude, than to any other single subject excepting slavery and secession. It published lengthy histories of the four Georges of England and when the Prince of Wales visited the country in September and October it followed his movements with lengthy and flattering daily accounts. It compared the South's "peculiar institution" with serfdom in Russia, the use of Chinese coolies in the West and the indentured labor system in England, to name a few, and in every case found their "rule" more benevolent and the Negro slave better cared for.

As the nineteenth century opened, Southern aristocratic sectionalism on the one hand, and the decline of aristocratic tendencies in the rest of the country on the other hand, began to proceed on ever widening divergent lines. For example, in the North and Northwest as Presidential succession, which for six administrations had fallen to the patrician "Virginia Dynasty," gave way to Jeffersonian Republicanism (1801-1828), the attitude of cynical contempt for the innate capacity of the people to govern themselves began to crumble. Yet, in the same period the semi-feudal order in the South, built around the broad base of African slavery, received new dignity and importance from the vast expansion of cotton culture which reinforced the plantation system, extended it to the Gulf Coastal Plain and brought new slave States into the Union. As the pendu-
lum of manhood suffrage moved away from aristocratic qualifications towards the ideal of equal political rights in the rest of the country, Schlesinger noted that the Southerners openly declared the failure of democratic government and seemed to be at one with the renowned Chancellor Harper of South Carolina in repudiating and scorning the glittering generalities of the Declaration of Independence. The elevation of the backwoodsman Andrew Jackson to the Presidency in 1829 was a dramatic symbol to the Southerners of the disintegrating forces of the time. For the next twenty years, as the taint of aristocracy became a political liability in the North and Northwest, Southernism reached out for its final and most aristocratic definition yet, leading Schlesinger to note that "the Civil War dealt a body blow to the most exclusive aristocracy our country has ever known."

Southern Nationalism in the 1850's and 1860's was shaped and formed—but not created—by the divisive wedges of separation from 1830 to 1860. These wedges, which historians have described thoroughly were, briefly, the American expansionism in the 1810's which agitated the slavery issue as never before and brought in its train the very real threat that the Northern majority already existing in the House would extend to the Senate condemning the South to unfriendly legislation on tariff, money, land, internal improvements, and ultimately slavery itself; economic sectionalism pitting an agrarian South against a growing industrial complex in the North built around factory growth, capitalistic enterprise, European migrations, the building of cities, railroad systems, and the de-

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9 Schlesinger, op. cit., pp. 91.
10 Ibid., p. 93.
velopment of the Northwest and Far West; and, the rapid rise of abolitionism as a moral and political force.

As "Americanism" and Southernism began to develop separate identities Southern attitudes underwent subtle changes. Their original apologist sentiment towards slavery which had undergone a subtle moral change from a "temporary makeshift" in earliest colonial times to a "permanent though unfortunate necessity" by the revolutionary period, was replaced by a growing belief that slavery was not only a positive good but necessary to the South's very survival. Their political philosophy changed as well. Previously the South, particularly Virginia and South Carolina, had been significantly nationalistic advocating an expansion of Federal power and broad construction of the new government. Under the pressure of the events between 1830 and 1860 they began to view nationalism and broad construction with concern, and shifted to state rights as articulated by Senator Calhoun and strict Constitutional interpretation as the means of protecting their rights and interests.

By 1860, Southernism with its economic, social, cultural and anthropological overtones was thoroughly displaced from the main stream of American thought and feeling. Historians have recognized this fact and call its material manifestations, sectionalism. Out of the voluminous, and often conflicting works on Civil War causation the sources of sectional conflict have been analyzed in agonizing and exhaustive detail, but the force which binds all of the sources of sectional conflict into "that consciousness of common culture and common grievance" which Randall described as the essence of Southern Nationalism\(^{11}\) was the institution of

\(^{11}\)Randall, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
slavery and the attitude it generated; an attitude which by 1860, was foreign to most Americans outside the South, and, which since then, few historians have articulated with insight, despite their generally sympathetic search for Southern feelings. That attitude was an aristocratic outlook which Schlesinger described as, "an outlook on life that infuses its peculiar spirit of exclusiveness and superiority, of self-pride and special privilege, into all phases of human relationship." Anti-slavery opposition was originally viewed as "precipitate and ignorant zeal which would overturn the fundamental institution of society, uproar its peace and endanger its security, in pursuit of a distant and shadowy good." Aristocratic Southerners watched with deep misgivings the restless stirrings and recurrent upheavals of the "nether strata of society." The changes which had been taking place and which it seemed Abolitionists sought to have take place, were seen not as the working-out of a beneficent destiny nor even as the harbinger of serious material loss, but as the degradation of all that seemed good and stable in the world. "In their eyes," Schlesinger wrote, "each new victory won by the masses . . . signified the yielding of aristocracy to the combined forces of ignorance, avarice and mobocracy."  

That same gentleman of honor referred to above who did not feel it necessary to defend his honor before an insult from one of a lower class might still be forced to do so. When there was no recourse and he could not withdraw into the privacy of his society he would usually under-

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12 Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 72.
13 Ibid., p. 93.
14 Ibid., p. 72.
take his defense against the lower class with a feeling of utter dis-
taste; his courtliness and graciousness would give way to the imperious
disdain which marked his class and defined his code. Even worse than an
insult against his personal honor, was a calculated attack against his
order. The utter distaste and imperious disdain might still be present
but the motivation to act would probably stem from an unavoidable sense
of duty rather than a distasteful punitive reprimand. Herein lies the
only satisfactory explanation for the origins of the scathing condes-
cension with which The Charleston Mercury wrote of Stephen A. Douglas' low
tastes, vulgar manner and the undignity of his stumping tour during
the campaign of 1860; and, of the lofty scorn directed at the humble
origins of the simple backwoodsman, Abraham Lincoln. Herein, also, lies
the full meaning of such an evaluation of the pulse and tone of Lincoln's
Illinois by The Charleston Daily Courier's Chicago correspondent:

In the Northwest, primarily we find no history; the acts of those
who have gone before us have reared no living monuments of the past,
and whatever of historic interest does exist is traced only in a few
traditionary recollections, and relates chiefly to a race who de-
veloped a crude and empiric civilization, which never progressed,
and who, with their manners, customs, religion and hopes have long
since faded away before the brighter dawn of art and refinement,
while their descendants are perceptibly retreating to the more
distant West.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15}The Charleston Daily Courier, May 22, 1860, cited hereafter as
\textit{Courier}.  

CHAPTER II

THE MERCURY AND THE COURIER: RADICALISM VS. CONSERVATISM

There were three daily newspapers active in Charleston during the period of this thesis: The Charleston Mercury, The Charleston Daily Courier and The Evening News. The News, a journal devoted more to literary matters than political was suspended in the spring of 1861 when its editor left to participate in the defense of Charleston. The Mercury and Courier, thoroughly political in nature, were prominent newspapers throughout the State and, in the case of the Mercury, throughout the whole South. Charles E. Cauthen, the principal editor of the James Sprunt study in history and political science entitled South Carolina Goes To War 1860-1865, described these papers as, "great dailies of more than local importance." 1 Throughout the 1850's, the Mercury was the most successful vehicle of secessionist propaganda in the State. It represented the tidewater parishes where the population was over 75% Negro and was thoroughly oriented towards an extreme view of state rights, disunionism and separate state action. The Courier represented the predominantly white back country districts, the merchants and the old leadership of the State. Cauthen felt that the Courier "was probably the most conservative paper in the State." 2 The Mercury and the Courier were commer-

1 Charles E. Cauthen, South Carolina Goes To War 1860-1865 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1950), p. 32.

2 Ibid., p. 33.
cial and political competitors in the city of Charleston, South Carolina for over forty years. Despite the fact they were both Southern Democratic newspapers they stood at opposite ends of the political spectrum embraced by that phrase. Through their political differences one could almost see the outlines of the entire political struggle in the South in 1860.

The Mercury was established in 1822 as a literary journal by Edmond Moreford. When, however, it was purchased in June of 1823 by Henry Laurens Pinckney, a native South Carolinian, it quickly grew into the most prominent free trade and State Rights Party representative in the State. In October, 1832, John A. Stuart left the editorship of the State Rights and Free Trade Evening Post in Charleston and became the editor of the Mercury. Stuart was the loyal and devoted brother-in-law of Robert Barnwell Rhett, influential and radical Senator from South Carolina, often called "The Father of Secession." Under Stuart the Mercury began its fruitful years as Rhett's organ, which according to Rhett's biographer, Laura A. White, was a factor of great importance in Rhett's career. In 1845 Stuart withdrew from the Mercury owing to illness and J. M. Clapp, his junior editor, became the sole editor until February 1, 1847, when Colonel John E. Carew became editor and proprietor. In 1849, John Heart, previously the head of The Spectator and Young Hickory, the organs of Calhoun democracy in Washington, became a joint proprietor with Carew. Finally, in 1852, upon Carew's retirement, William R. Taber, Jr., R. B. Rhett's nephew, became joint proprietor with Heart.

Despite the fact that from 1845 to 1852 none of Rhett's relatives were associated with the editorship of the Mercury, its editorial opin-

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ions still loyally reflected his politics. When Rhett wrote to the future President, James Buchanan, on October 20, 1845, that he no longer had a pecuniary interest in the paper and that Clapp had too much independence and ability to be controlled in his editorial opinions by him or any other man, his biographer nevertheless noted that when Carew became sole proprietor and editor in 1847 the advertisement regarding the settling of accounts was signed by Rhett's oldest brother Benjamin in his capacity as Trustee. White seems to have no doubt of Carew's allegiance to Rhett despite Carew's statement that the paper was no longer a "Rhett Organ," for he makes note of a statement from W. G. Simms to James H. Hammond, both prominent men in South Carolina politics, that Rhett had too prevailing an influence on the Mercury for them to secure its support in their attack upon the bank in 1847-1848.

Taber was killed in a duel on September 29, 1856, and in March, 1857, R. B. Rhett, Jr. purchased his kinsman's interest in the Mercury. In July of 1858, he purchased Heart's interests also, and thereafter until the paper's demise in 1868, Rhett Jr. was the sole proprietor. The Mercury was now more than ever identified with R. B. Rhett Sr., for throughout his life, according to White, the son promulgated the father's ideas with "striking loyalty and great ability."

The policies of the Mercury from 1832 through its demise were the politics of R. B. Rhett and his politics were radical. Rhett's biographer described the man himself as follows:

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1Ibid., p. 89.
2Ibid., p. 99.
3Ibid., p. 140.
Distrusted and disliked by other political leaders as rash and presumptuous and offensively self-confident, he was for long the enfant terrible of South Carolina politics. His colleagues, who would guide the state slowly and cautiously amidst the storms of those tempestuous years, had repeatedly to reckon with the insubordination of this independent who could never be ignored and who, because of his devoted following, could be disciplined only with great difficulty and embarrassment.  

The Mercury had begun its career as a Calhoun organ dedicated to free trade and state rights. Later as South Carolinians began to attribute the source of their economic ills to the protective tariff, the individualistic Rhett and the Mercury came out against the tariff, but they based their opposition on economic grounds and in nationalistic terms so that they could reconcile their position with Calhoun's well-known advocacy to the tariff in 1816. As the anti-tariff excitement increased in the late 1820's, disunion was first seriously suggested by the more radical as a remedy for the State's grievance. Dr. Thomas Cooper's famous statement in 1827 that it was "time to calculate the value of the Union" startled the State, and later the Mercury created a sensation when it abandoned its lingering nationalism and came out in support of Cooper. Contemporary observers remarked, "the age of miracles has not ceased," and, "the Charleston Mercury, the mouthpiece of the Calhoun school, has become ultraradical."  

The passage by Congress of the tariff of 1828 launched Rhett upon his career as crusader, revolutionist and secessionist. The severe economic depression which intensified the opposition to the protective tariff, the deepening consciousness of slavery as "a peculiar institution"  

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7Ibid., p. 10.  
8Ibid., p. 12.
caused by the Missouri struggle, the unspeakable fears roused by the slave insurrection of 1822, the nervous sensitiveness to the widespread controversies over its aftermath, the Negro Seaman's Act, the colonization movement—all contributed to a movement weakening Unionism and, as the South Carolina Unionist James L. Petigru phrased it, "preparing the minds of men for a separation of the States." Rhett led the radical disunion movement along with William G. Preston, Thomas Cooper, S. D. Miller and others. As early as 1828 he stated through the Mercury, "the day of open opposition to the pretended powers of the Constitution cannot be far off; and it is that it may not go down in blood that we now call upon you to resist." In the language of revolutionary patriotism Rhett continued:

If you love life better than honor,—prefer ease to perilous liberty and glory, awake not! stir not!—impotent resistance will add vengeance to your ruin. Live in smiling peace with your insatiable oppressors, and die with the noble consolation, that your submissive patience will survive triumphant your beggary and despair.

Rhett was one of the original and loudest proponents of nullification in the 1830's and emerged from that controversy as the leader of a group working for secession as a thing desirable in itself. Elected in 1836 to Congress from the districts of Beaufort and Colleton, he jumped to the fore of South Carolina politics in 1837 when he and the Mercury sided with Calhoun over support for a national bank in original opposition to Whig policies. Regarding this prominence, White wrote that, "he suddenly found himself, at the very outset of his Congressional career, advanced to the forefront of the Calhoun party, and to the

9Cuthen, op. cit., p. 2.
10The Charleston Mercury, June 18, 1828, cited hereafter as Mercury.
special favor of the great leader and the most intimate and personal re-
lations with him.\textsuperscript{11} In 1838, when a Representative from Vermont intro-
duced a motion to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, Rhett
offered two amendments to the motion as follows:

And the Constitution of the United States having proved inade-
quate to protect the Southern States in the peaceable enjoyment of
their rights and property, it is expedient that the said Constitu-
tion should be amended or the Union of the States be dissolved.

Resolved, that a committee of two members from each State in the
Union be appointed, to report upon the expediency and practicability
of amending the Constitution or the best means of dissolving the
Union.\textsuperscript{12}

Rhett achieved national notoriety in 1838 when in a continuance of that
matter he went to the Southern people over the heads of Southern Con-
gressmen and called for a Southern convention to demand an amendment to
the Constitution protecting slavery as the only alternative to disso-
lution of the Union.

In 1844, Rhett launched through the \textit{Mercury} the so called "Bluff-
ton movement" for a state convention and "separate state action" on the
tariff. Stung by such titles as "Revolutionary," Rhett argued in the
course of the Bluffton movement that while separate state action meant
nullification or secession, including the risks of disunion and war, the
object of resistance was reform of the Union to safeguard Southern inter-
est, to "rescue liberty, the Constitution and the Union."\textsuperscript{13} Following

\textsuperscript{11}White, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Mercury}, August 1, 1860. In reporting to his constituents in
the Beaufort and Colleton Districts on these amendments on January 30,
1838, Rhett stated, "I expected them to share the fate, which inevitably
awaited the original motion, \ldots to be laid upon the table. My design
in presenting them was to place before Congress and the people, what in
my opinion was the true issue upon this great and vital question; and to
point out the course of policy by which it should be met by the Southern
States." \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Mercury}, August 12, 1844.
the Nashville Convention in June of 1850, however, Rhett openly and without reservation proclaimed himself a disunionist and foretold "the beginning of a Revolution" in a speech published as a Senate campaign document.\textsuperscript{14} White wrote that Rhett's disunion speech invoked a strong response throughout the country, that the Washington Union led the Nation's press in vehement and bitter attacks against Rhett, and that "Mr. Rhett's Treason became a by-word."\textsuperscript{15} Rhett was elected to the Senate from South Carolina on a wave of disunionist sentiment and took his seat on January 6, 1851.

South Carolina now became intensely embroiled in the so-called secession versus cooperation movement. Rhett, his secessionist associates, and the radical Mercury were so thoroughly committed to secession that their prestige was at stake as it had never been before. A division in the State legislature between the separate state actionists led by Rhett, and the cooperationists led by such distinguished South Carolinians as C. G. Memminger, Langdon Chevis, James Orr, A. P. Butler and Rhett's cousin, Robert Woodward Barnwell, resulted in a deadlock and a compromise bill calling for both a State convention and a Southern Congress. The elections for delegates to the former in February, 1851, went overwhelmingly in favor of separate state actionists, and the radicals moved to consolidate their control at the Southern Rights Convention in Charleston in May. By the end of July, 1851, both parties were engaged in bitter and noisy conflict for control of South Carolina. Even though both parties agreed a Southern Congress would never meet, the election in

\textsuperscript{14} White, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 109.
October of delegates to that Congress was accepted as the test of strength. "Throughout the summer," according to Laura White, Rhett, glorying in his titles of 'high Priest of secession' and 'Carolina traitor' waged the fiercest battle of his life.16

The cooperationists won by a sectional vote, of which more will be mentioned, and the secessionists were utterly shattered. Rhett was bitterly attacked by both the North and the South. Repudiated by his own party at the State convention which assembled in April, 1852, he resigned from the Senate on the honorable but unusual grounds that he was no longer a proper representative of the State. South Carolinians were politically exhausted by the five year struggle, and the people of the State sank into a marked period of political apathy from which it seemed no appeal could arouse them. The Mercury, sulky and irreconcilable, was completely discredited as the "organ of the State," and Rhett and the Mercury capitulated to the Unionists by repudiating both extremism and disunion. They professed to accept in good faith the finality of the decision of 1851, and agreed that separate state action was no longer to be considered a possibility. Neither Rhett nor the Mercury, however, concealed that their purpose was to find some platform on which South Carolinians could unite to save the State from the "menace of National Democracy," and in retrospect it is certain that their capitulation to the cooperationists was simply a case of calculated opportunism. Laura White stated the case as follows:

It seems easy now to read the motives and purposes of the Rhett's. They had not changed a single opinion. They were determined that, if no earlier opportunity arose, the issue of secession must be

16Ibid., p. 120.
forced in 1860 as the last chance for the salvation of the South, and the Southern mind must be pointed toward that end. South Carolina especially must be aroused. The Mercury's previous methods had failed. It would now try a different one. Instead of scolding the State for her apathy, railing at the National Democrats, arguing on the slave trade, it would assume the unity of the State and resolutely ignore or suppress any issue on which men might divide. On this policy Rhett and Yancey had clearly reached agreement at Montgomery, and Yancey had paved the way in a letter published in the Mercury, June 9, 1858. Yet it is not surprising that for a time some secessionists suspected that the Mercury, like other Carolina newspapers, was shifting its course, veering in the direction of Nationalism, and masking the change by talking of Southern Unity. 17

The fidelity with which the Mercury represented the views and politics of R. B. Rhett, and that in Laura A. White, Rhett had a thorough and scholarly biographer, make the task of identifying and articulating the editorial positions of the Mercury relatively easy when compared with those of the Courier. Moreover, a radical view is generally easier to define than a moderate view, in that it lends itself to a slogan-making type of simplification, while the moderate view is usually more subtle and generally contains more complicated overtones. The Courier was a moderate and conservative newspaper, neither as flamboyant as the Mercury, nor wedded with such singlemindedness of purpose to a single concept, such as the independence of the South. As a result, throughout the period of this thesis it was more difficult to identify the editorial positions of the Courier, and to detect departures from those positions.

The Courier was first issued in 1803 as the Charleston Daily Courier and is still active in 1965 as the Charleston News and Courier. Though the paper was originally established as a political journal, A. S. Willington, one of the original proprietors, upon assuming the sole proprietorship in 1813, endeavored to make the paper a commercial and business

17Ibid., pp. 112-46
journal and a medium of general intelligence rather than a political organ. In 1833, William S. King, (the father of the author of the work cited below), and Richard Yeadon became part owners of the Courier and co-partners and editors with Willington. Yeadon soon took full charge of the editorial department, and the Courier gradually left the commercial course it had followed for twenty years and again became involved in politics, this time in defense of the Union against nullification. The paper was staunchly Unionist during the nullification crisis and thoroughly opposed Rhett's organ, the Mercury. William L. King, the son of William S. King, and the author of a chronological and biographical history of the Charleston press up to 1870, quoted with obvious pleasure The Courier and Enquirer of New York when he recorded their estimation of the editorial efforts of Yeadon and his father:

Nothing in the nature of newspaper controversy could be more pointed, or more pungent, than the weapons of warfare wielded by The Charleston Courier, in doing battle with the CALHOUN cohorts in South Carolina. It is almost painful to stand by, and see the execution done by the grape and cannister, which the Courier throws into the nullification ranks. Its shots tell, with fearful effect, upon the Mercury in particular.18

Yeadon relinquished his editorial duties in 1844 to his partner William S. King, who remained editor until his death in 1852. Just as the Courier had been one of the leading Union organs in the State during the nullification crisis, upholding the Union cause against what it regarded an unconstitutional resistance to the laws of the Union, so in the secession crisis of 1851-1852 it upheld the cause of the Union and threw its influence in favor of cooperation against separate state action,

though, in W. L. King's words, it was, "as a choice of evils."\(^{19}\) From King's death in 1852 until the secession of South Carolina in December of 1860 the editorial chair changed rapidly. Alexander Carroll, an Englishman associated with the London Press before coming to South Carolina in 1819, was editor from King's death until his own death in August, 1856. Henry M. Cushman, from New Haven, Connecticut and previously editor of The Daily Times of Boston, was editor from December, 1856, until his death five months later in April 1857. Finally, William Buchanan Carlisle, about whom little is known, became editor-in-chief until his death in 1863. It is interesting to note that in the history of the Courier up to 1860, few of the editors were native South Carolinians or Southerners.

The elections in South Carolina in October, 1851, for delegates to the proposed Southern Congress, in which the cooperationists won the victory reported above, revealed in general the type of people who claimed the moderate, conservative or cooperationist attitude for whom the Courier spoke, and further, suggested an economic or sectional basis for the editorial differences between the two newspapers. The cooperationists won 20,045 to 17,710, carrying all but three back country districts, while the secessionists carried all but three of the tidewater parishes. Every district where the majority of the population was white, voted overwhelmingly for cooperation, while the parishes in which Negroes composed 74-94% of the population, all but two carried for secession with large majorities.\(^ {20}\) One cannot avoid the conclusion that the Courier's

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 132.

\(^{20}\) White, op. cit., p. 123.
Union and cooperationist attitudes and the Mercury's secessionist and separate state action attitudes were both dictated to some degree, perhaps to a great degree, by economic and sectional considerations closely related to the extent to which their lives were influenced and affected by the institution of slavery. The merchants in the predominantly white county districts together with the old leadership of the State stood to suffer the greatest pecuniary loss and the least social readjustment by the reduction in commerce incident to secession, particularly separate state action. On the other hand, those who made their living from the use of Negro slaves in the tidewater parishes stood to suffer the greatest pecuniary loss and greatest social readjustment by anti-slavery legislation. Thus, not only did the Mercury and Courier represent different political philosophies but their support came from different sections of the City and State.

Turning to the explosive events leading up to the Presidential nominations in the summer of 1860, what can be said of John Brown's raid that has not already been said? "Nothing more potent could have happened to strengthen the hands of the Secessionists in South Carolina," wrote one historian;21 "it drove many conservatives into the camp of the ultras," noted another;22 and in the introduction to his book on the Presidential campaign of 1860, E. D. Fite stated that, "the resulting popular reaction against slavery far exceeded any ever known before."23 Still another historian summarized:

21Ibid., p. 157.

22Gauthen, op. cit., p. 11.

The John Brown raid threw the Southern people off balance emotionally and gave them a sense of crisis. Instead of assessing the raid as the isolated act of a little band of fanatics, they attributed it to a conspiracy of the Northern Abolitionists to instigate servile insurrections in various places in the South. The sympathy for John Brown which was widely manifested in the North made Southerners feel that Northerners hated their section. Out of this jittery state of mind, or popular hysteria, arose numerous vigilance committees to ferret out the emissaries of servile insurrection. As a result, Northern travelers, school-teachers, peddlers, and workmen in the South were in constant danger of being brought before vigilance committees, flogged, and expelled from the country on the basis of unfounded suspicions.24

Concluding an entire chapter on John Brown, Fite stated, "John Brown must, therefore, bear the immediate responsibility for the extremes of the Presidential campaign of 1860."25

On December 5, 1859, three days after John Brown was executed, Hinton Rowan Helper's book, The Impending Crisis In The South, How To Meet It, was raised to national prominence when Congressman Clark of Missouri introduced an amendment incident to the election of the Speaker of the House that, as the doctrines and sentiments of the book were insurrectionary, no member of the House who had endorsed and recommended it was fit to be Speaker. Thus the Speakership contest developed into an emotional, even hysterical slavery—antislavery contest. Assessing the effect of this incident upon the Presidential campaign Fite wrote:

The effect on the country of this long contest was intense. Every phase of the two months battle, every excoriation of Helperism, every bit of Southern bluster, every Northern argument and expostulation, every physical clash was eagerly read about the next morning by hundreds of thousands. . . . Northern book-stores and newsstands sold one hundred and fifty thousand copies of the incendiary Crisis, the popularity of which recalled Uncle

24Eaton, op. cit., p. 2.

25Fite, op. cit., p. 32.
Tom's Cabin. In the South the dreaded book was suppressed and supporters of it persecuted after the fashion of John Brown's sympathizers.26

The incredible excitement generated by these events focused the nation's attentions on the slavery issue as never before. In the House and Senate, though they discussed the tariff, polygamy, the Pacific Railroad, the Homestead Act and other issues, Fite noted, "the one unfailing topic, to which all others inevitably led, was the sectional question of slavery." The popular discussion of slavery and judgements thereof dictated the party platforms, and practically determined the issues of the campaign itself; "Slavery or no slavery," "Union or secession."27 The dominant motive behind increasing secession sentiment in the South became the growing conviction that Republican rule would destroy white supremacy and the cherished way of life it depended upon for its perpetuation.

As the national conventions approached and secession sentiment gripped the whole State, the personal stock of both R. B. Rhett, and the Mercury began to rise, while the Courier began to tread more softly, as the Mercury had done for the last nine years. A preponderance of evidence, however, indicates their basic purposes remained unchanged. While the Courier talked of cooperation, it was frankly working for the preservation of the Union, as it always had, through the tenants of National Democracy.28 "The Mercury's unmistakable

26Ibid., pp. 45-46.

27Ibid., p. x.

28An interesting apology in this regard was made by the son of the editor in 1852. He wrote: "In 1860, during the secession era, it [Courier] held the election of a sectional President, on grounds of
purpose and real though unavowed policy," remained, wrote White, "to rouse the people again to the resistance spirit of 1850, but to suppress or evade any definite proposals, any discussion of method on which opinions would divide, until it was too late to draw back." 29

The Democratic Convention met in Charleston on April 23, 1860. There, the radicals led by Rhett who clearly desired the disruption of the convention, 30 presented that body with such a sectional Southern platform that it amounted to an ultimatum. When it was rejected, thirteen of sixteen South Carolina delegates walked out, accompanied by the delegates from Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. The seceders met again in Richmond, Virginia, on June 11, 1860. The remaining delegates adjourned without nominating candidates and met again in Baltimore, Maryland, on June 13, 1860 where another irreconcilable quarrel over the contesting Southern delegations occurred, the result of which was that two slates were nominated: Senator Douglas from Illinois for President and Senator Fitzpatrick of Alabama for Vice-President on a ticket approved by National Democrats, and Vice-president Breckinridge of Kentucky for President and Senator Lane of

29White, op. cit., p. 150.

Oregon for Vice-president on a ticket approved by "Constitutional Democrats." The number of Presidential candidates increased again when the former "American" or Know-nothing Party under a new name of "Constitutional Unionists" elected John Bell of Tennessee and Edward Everett of Massachusetts as their conservative standard bearers.

The editorial columns of the Mercury and Courier throughout April, May, and June of 1860 dealt almost exclusively with the Democratic Conventions and the disruptive issues involved: the repudiation of Senator Douglas and his popular sovereignty; a platform acceptable to the South; and, articulating the growing sentiment for secession rather than submission to Republican rule. The Republican Convention was held in Chicago on May 16, 1860 in between the various Democratic conventions. Even had the times been quieter the affairs of the Republicans would not likely have received much editorial notice in thoroughly Democratic Charleston. As it was, Charlestonians were too absorbed with Democratic problems and seemed to be quite disinterested in the affairs of the "Black Republican" Abolitionist party. Southerners who thought about it assumed, as did the rest of the Nation, that Senator William H. Seward would secure the nomination of the Republican Party since he was his party's intellectual genius, its boldest and most aggressive leader, greatest orator, and popular idol.

The first mention of Abraham Lincoln in either newspaper occurred on May 17, 1860, when the Courier, characteristically more sensitive to national affairs, listed Lincoln as one of the six most prominent Republican candidates, and observed that, "the Seward stock is on the decline." 31 On May 19, the day the balloting ended, the

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31 Courier, May 17, 1860.
Courier ran an item from its Chicago correspondent dated May 17, to the effect that the contest appeared to be between Lincoln and Seward and that one of them would be the nominee. Also on May 19, the Mercury first acknowledged Mr. Lincoln, leaping right to the attack by writing that his early education was limited and that he was still a rough uncultivated lawyer. "Though not an out and out Abolitionist," the Mercury added, "he denies the right of the South in the territories, advocates the Wilmot Proviso, and is, in every way, hostile to the best interests of his native section, and in favor of circumscribing the 'peculiar institution' within the narrowest possible limit."

The Courier was apparently more interested in the outcome of the Republican Convention than the Mercury for it sent a correspondent to Chicago. He reported on May 19, that if confidence in the success of candidates was any criterion of the result of an election, then Lincoln and Hamlin would be elected, for in the Midwest the Republicans regarded as inevitable the defeat of what they popularly styled "sham Democracy." Every crowd one entered, the correspondent wrote, "Honest Old Abe the Mauler," as he said they familiarly styled him, was "the rage."

The Courier's official announcement of Lincoln's nomination on May 21, reflected their consistent editorial desire for unity amongst Democrats and Democratic victory at the polls in November:

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32 Ibid., May 19, 1860.
33 Mercury, May 19, 1860.
34 Courier, May 19, 1860.
The telegraph has just announced the nomination of Mr. Lincoln. . . . This is somewhat expected, and must be a bitter pill to Mr. Seward and his friends. Mr. Lincoln is a Republican out and out, less prominent and talented than Mr. Seward. He is, perhaps, more moderate and conservative, but ultra in his political notions of higher law fanaticism. As Mr. Douglas is the only man supposed to be able to carry Illinois against Republicanism, and Lincoln being strong in his own state, the circumstances may give additional strength to Mr. Douglas at the Baltimore Convention. . . . Though Seward is defeated, still the "irrepressible conflict" is rank and formidable as ever. Let the South then, and conservative men everywhere, crush its hydra head or die in the attempt.35

Southerners hated Seward and his "irrepressible conflict" politics; in fact, he seemed to them to be the arch fiend of political anti-slavery. Yet, Seward was a prominent, wealthy, patrician New Yorker who inspired in the South a certain respect not inconsistent with their thorough dislike of his views. It was as if the Southerner knew where he stood with Seward. For those like Lincoln, however, who leap suddenly out of obscurity, a not unusual initial reaction is one of suspicious belligerency. Add to that a contemptuous scorn for his humble origins, the roots of which were described earlier, and the basis of the Mercury's initial attitudes towards Lincoln may be seen. On May 23, it wrote:

The New York Republicans, with the exception of a handful under the immediate control of Horace Greeley and David Dudley Field, are utterly enraged over the nomination of the green backwoodsman of Illinois. They know that Seward has given all the brains and backbone to the party; that, in fact, the monster is a thing of his own exclusive paternity; and, therefore, they regard the action of the Chicago Convention very much as a fond father would the conduct of a child who should kick the doting parent out of his house and home the moment the young rascal got big enough to do it. . . . "Anybody but Seward" was the motto of these men—though the candidate they have secured at least seems to be so little of anybody, that, in these tolerable enlightened regions, he is set down for nobody. And that is precisely the reason that he was nominated.

The campaign on the part of the Republicans is to be one of measureless cant and humbug, based upon the fact that the American people know nothing of the candidate. The Tribune strikes the key-note this morning in an article headed with the abominable gammoning phrase: "Honest Old Abe."\[36\]

The Courier poked fun at the Republican nominee with less scorn and contempt and with a greater effort at puns and humor at this stage. Noting that the Savannah Republican announced, "the nomination of Levi Lincoln of Illinois to lead the future crusade of Northern fanaticism against the domestic institutions of the South," the Courier remarked that, "a great error of memory or haste has been committed, for the Republican cannot be ignorant of 'Abe Lincoln the great apostle of rail splitting' who has been selected to split the Union. Abe is the man not Levi."\[37\] A day later the Courier suggested the reason Seward's friends were "sore" was because they had lost bets on the nomination.\[38\]

The depth of feeling involved in the particular brand of contemptuous scorn heaped upon Lincoln above and in succeeding pages, is more than can be adequately explained by either his relative obscurity or that he was the anti-slavery, Black Republican candidate. The roots of the explanation lie deep in the aristocratic, ante-bellum view of the well born towards those members of the "third estate," destitute of traditions or culture, who went West to escape the refining influence of civilization, and out of their frontier squalor had the audacity to usurp the leadership of the privileged class. The image of the self-made frontier politician was a disgusting illustration to aristocratic Charleston-

\[36\] *Mercury*, May 23, 1860.

\[37\] *Courier*, May 21, 1860.

\[38\] Ibid., May 22, 1860.
ians of the aspiring group destined to be those who would supplant the Southern Aristocracy. Thus, the Mercury reported that Lincoln's life was so devoid of telling incidents that even other Republicans found it impossible to get up steam for their speeches. "They can only reiterate, parrot-like, 'Honest Old Abe' and offer a feeble joke about 'splitting rails and mauling Democrats.' These are the only party war cries which a careful examination can deduce from the meagre biography of the awkward Illinoisian." The Mercury felt that such low flung catch-words as "rail-splitter" and "flatboatman" were to be relied upon to seduce the lower classes into Abraham's bosom. On May 28, the Mercury summed up this kind of feeling:

The campaign is already beginning to assume an intensely disgusting phase. All the muscular and mechanical antecedents of "Honest Old Abe" are being revived from that Cimmerian obscurity in which they were involved before his nomination at Chicago, and exalted into apparatus for the campaign. A company of ranting Republicans has already been organized in this city under the name of the "Rail Splitter's Battalion". . . . It is intended, in fact, to "ride" old Lincoln into the Presidential office "on a rail". . . . The "flatboat" is another clap-trap appliance of the campaign, and will do the same work of fascination upon the stupid masses that the "log cabin" of 1840 did. Several flatboat associations are now forming in this city, whose business it will be, like that of the "Rail Splitter's Battalion" to turn out in processions and at public meetings, with a flatboat on wheels, and manned by stalwart Republicans clad in romantic boatman's dress, plying busy oars, in imaginary water, and singing "Dance! Boatman, Dance!" and other popular songs of the Southwest parodied with some abominable cant about "Honest Old Abe."

The Mercury often reprinted critical editorials of Lincoln from Northern newspapers and whenever it could, associated him with known abolitionists. For example, it quoted from the Washington Constitution

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39Mercury, May 28, 1860.
40Ibid., May 30, 1860.
41Ibid., May 31, 1860.
that, "A. Lincoln appears to be a man after Joshua R. Gidding's own heart—vile and brutal abolitionist as he is. The old fanatic has made a speech at Oberlin warmly commending Lincoln to the support of the Abolitionists of that neighborhood and has also written a letter to the nominee expressing his pleasure at the nomination."\(^{12}\) The first statement of any strength against Lincoln to be found in the *Courier* appeared on May 24, 1860, to the effect that, "The Chicago nomination is regarded as weak and mean, and meaner than it is weak. Perhaps its strength, with the Black Republicans, consists in the fact that it ignores all the intellect and decency of their party."\(^{13}\)

On May 30, the *Mercury*, for the first time, assessed the Republican nominee in a calm and rational tone. Its Northern correspondent wrote from Philadelphia that:

The Chicago ticket is not an enthusiastic one, as yet. It will be, and we believe it is a better selection for the Abolitionists than if Seward had been nominated. . . . While Mr. Lincoln has not much public experience, yet his canvas with Mr. Douglas was notable, and not very unsatisfactory to his party. He did not carry the legislature, but he carried the popular vote, and won consideration by the able manner in which he met the "Small Giant." He can hardly be termed a "man of straw," for the impressions he made in that campaign carried the nomination fairly over the great leader, Mr. Seward. The Black Republicans have been so well pleased with the nature of the debate between Messrs. Lincoln and Douglas that they have distributed both their speeches together to advance their cause. . . . Wherever we have been, we find no disposition to complain of their candidates, but the idea prevails that they have acted wisely, especially for the Northwest, and that Seward's friends will all come in.\(^{14}\)

As June opened, both newspapers seemed to take Lincoln's nomination a bit more seriously, though one still must search those papers

\(^{13}\) *Courier*, May 24, 1860.  
\(^{14}\) *Mercury*, May 30, 1860.
carefully to find mention of Lincoln at all. The Courier, summarizing the general political situation, and obviously looking ahead to the Baltimore Convention, characteristically argued for peace within the Democratic Party and a united front as the only means of resisting, "that fanaticism encouraged by, and embodied in, the political party of which Messrs. Lincoln and Hamlin are head and front." At that time the Courier felt that the greatest hope for such a united front would be found under the banner of Bell and Everett of the Union Party. The Mercury on June 1, printed a long letter from C. C. Clay in support of the action of the Charleston delegates in April, in which Lincoln's politics were mentioned. Clay wrote:

Mr. Lincoln and his supporters maintain that the extension of slavery into the territories is contrary to the principles of the Federal Constitution and the purpose of its framers; and, therefore, that we have no right to carry and hold slaves in them, and that Congress has the power, and is bound by the Constitution, to prohibit the use and enjoyment of such property in them... The Black Republicans would countenance the destruction of our property everywhere outside of the States where it is sustained by law; the Douglasites would countenance its destruction in the common territories if they had control of the Federal Government. And yet we are told that if we do not support Douglas we must take Lincoln! The South will hurl contempt upon the miserable alternative.

On June 22, the Mercury finally quoted from Lincoln's House Divided speech: "I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free"; and again, "I have always hated slavery, I think, as much as ANY ABOLITIONIST." On the same date in another section of the paper was a statement from Horace Greeley's New York

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45 Courier, June 1, 1860.
46 Mercury, June 1, 1860.
47 Ibid., June 2, 1860.
The doctrine of Mr. Lincoln is hostility to the perpetuation and nationalization of slavery, and the restriction of that pernicious institution within its present limits. This would place it in the way of ultimate extinction by the operation of natural causes, and in the peaceful legislation of the people of the United States where it exists. Such is the orderly and conservative policy of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party.\(^{18}\)

Both papers continued to comment on Seward's defeat and the astonishment it caused. On June 2, the Courier noted that "his woe-begone face told that the 'Defender of the Rights of Man' was sacrificed on the altar of expediency—sacrificed for Abraham Lincoln, a barroom politician, who, compared with Gov. Seward, is as 'Satyr to a hypercon.'\(^{49}\) The Mercury described the quarrel between the New York journalists over the nomination, and added, "the feeling of rage is so general throughout the State that the chances are now ten to one against Lincoln carrying it.\(^{50}\) The article continued to intimate the beginnings of a premeditated disunity campaign within Republican ranks that would give Seward the nomination in 1864.

After a short, reasonably serious note in the Courier identifying Lincoln's politics with an anti-slavery resolution he had helped to prepare for the first Illinois Republican Convention, both newspapers again began to refer to Lincoln and his candidacy with contemptuous scorn striking out at everything they knew of him—which still did not appear to be much. On June 2, the Courier's New York correspondent reported that he had heard a speaker at a Houston meeting in Union Square refer to Lincoln

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Courier, June 2, 1860.

\(^{50}\) Mercury, June 4, 1860.
as, "a man who was never heard of until he and Douglas mutually black-guarded each other." Also on June 2, the Courier made its own contribution to the growing number of "lives" of Lincoln:

Enterprising booksellers are puzzling their brains to find ingenious literatures with prolific imaginations, to manufacture lives of Abram Lincoln. These lives are announced for publication as soon as they can be written—that is, as soon as a few incidents can be sufficiently amplified by the glowing fancy of the bohemians, who invent lives for unknown great men, to constitute a life of respectable paper dimensions. We dislike to spoil the book trade by anticipating the issue of these valuable publications—but in order to allay the intense curiosity of the public, we are compelled to lay before our readers the following, full, comprehensive and accurate

LIFE OF ABRAM LINCOLN

CHAP. I.
"He had a Father"

CHAP. II.
DO. Mother

CHAP. III.
He split rails

CHAP. IV.
He mauled Democrats

CHAP. V.
He went to Congress

CHAP. VI.
DO. Legislature

CHAP. VII.
He was defeated by Douglas

CHAP. VIII. (IN FUTURO)
DO.

FINES

The Mercury, whose tone was always more vituperative than the Courier's towards Lincoln, intimated Lincoln was a coward by relating a...
snide anecdote about an encounter with a Methodist preacher, the Rev. Dr. Cartwright. It seemed Cartwright overheard Lincoln slandering him during the course of Lincoln's first, and unsuccessful, campaign for State Representative from Sangamon County, saying at one point, "I can whip any Methodist preacher the Lord ever made." The article reported in some detail that when Cartwright gave him a chance to do so he declined. Upon studying Lincoln's picture in a copy of Harper's Weekly, the Mercury informed its readers:

A horrid looking wretch he is, sooty and scoundrelly in aspect, a cross between the nutmeg dealer, the horse swapper, and the night man, a creature "fit evidently for petty treason, small stratagems and all sorts of spoils." He is a lank-sided Yankee of the uncomliest visage, and of the dirtiest complexion. Faugh! After him what decent white man would be President.

The same issue gave Hannibal Hamlin, the Republican Vice-Presidential nominee, similar treatment and concluded on them both: "Very ugly creatures, both—the one being evidently endowed with the soul of a tarantula—the other of a terrapin."

Lincoln's rail splitting feats as a back woodsman were a favorite target for editorial thrusts in both newspapers throughout the campaign. The Mercury ran a few small articles establishing that cutting 3000 rails in one year, as Lincoln was supposed to have done, was not too great a feat when compared to many South Carolina Negroes who could cut 250 rails in a day. The Courier cited from the Milwaukee News a letter from one George Dart of Dartford, Wisconsin, "Gents: Please forward my name to the Baltimore Convention as a candidate for President. I split rails in this state twenty years ago; also wore leather breeches. I am

53 Mercury, June 5, 1860.
54 Ibid., June 7, 1860.
sound on the goose question." Of this letter the Courier remarked that, "judged by Republican standards, it must be acknowledged the gentleman's claims for the nomination are good."  

Leaving Lincoln's rail splitting accomplishments for a while the Courier and Mercury shifted to his politics and obscurity again. The Courier, in a rare defense of Douglas as the only one who could unite the Democratic party wrote:

The only event that can prevent the ultimate success of Senator Douglas, will be the assumption of his principles by his present opponents. To overcome him they must borrow his thunder . . . . to reap where another sows. Lincoln sails into port with the favoring gales that Seward's incantations had invoked. The Illinois man has become the genuine leader—the true author of the irrepressible conflict.  

The Mercury reported that Wendell Phillips had given his opinion of Mr. Lincoln as candidate for the Presidency at a meeting in Boston where he denounced Mr. Lincoln, "as a country court lawyer, whose only recommendation was that, out of the emptiness of his past, lying newspapers could make him any character they pleased."  

The earthiness of the nickname "Old Abe" continued to rankle the aristocratic Southerners and the Mercury next used a book review on Major General Israel Putnam of Boston Revolutionary fame to strike again at his frontier heritage:

Among the humbugs of the North, one of the most eminent in the days of the Revolution was General Israel Putnam. "Old Put," was what they called him, with the spirit of vulgar slang whangery which distinguishes the Black Republicans of today, when they speak of ABRAHAM LINCOLN—OLD ABE! OLD PUT and OLD ABE are of

55 Courier, June 19, 1860.
56 Ibid., June 6, 1860.
57 Mercury, June 11, 1860.
like kidney—birds of a feather—both intolerable humbugs\(^{58}\)

The only complimentary words about Lincoln which appeared in the *Mercury* from the time his name was first mentioned on May 19, 1860, through the end of the Democratic nominations are taken from a letter of support for Lincoln by Judge Bates of Missouri:

He says he has known Mr. Lincoln for more than twenty years, and that he has earned a high reputation for truth, candor, morals and amiability; that he has talents, and will use them to the best advantage. He is the peer of the first men of the nation, and well able to sustain himself, and advance the cause against any adversary, and in any field where mind and knowledge are the weapons used; that, in brief, he considers him a sound, safe, rational man, who could not be sectional if he tried.

Appearing directly under the above statement, and as if they would get the matter back into perspective, the *Mercury* wrote that Long John Wentworth, Mayor of Chicago, said: "Lincoln knows enough for all that he has to do as a lawyer out in Springfield; but as a President he would be a damned fool."\(^{59}\)

Perhaps the most reprehensible judgement against Lincoln appearing in either newspaper through the end of the conventions—a judgement more serious considering the value placed on personal honor in the South—appeared in the *Mercury* on June 26, in which Lincoln's honor was found wanting. Under an article entitled "SPOT LINCOLN" the *Mercury* wrote:

Lincoln is known in his own state by the name of "Spot Lincoln." The way in which he earned the title is thus stated. While he was in Congress, during the Mexican War, he took issue with President Polk in regard to the President's statement that American citizens had been massacred by Mexican Soldiers upon American soil. Lincoln taking the Mexican side in the war, and desiring to embarrass his

\(^{58}\)Ibid., June 19, 1860.

\(^{59}\)Ibid., June 23, 1860.
own country as much as possible, undertook to show that the Mexicans were justified in these butcheries, and that our people were the aggressors. With this view he introduced a series of resolutions asking the President to state the precise spot in Texas where these atrocities were perpetrated. . . . From the frequent and rather peculiar use of the word "spot" in these resolutions Lincoln received the name of "Spot Lincoln," by which he is generally known at home. It was given him as a "brand of shame," for quibbling about the precise spot where American citizens had been ruthlessly butchered, and that too with a view to embarrass his own country in a just and unavoidable war, and to encourage the enemy to welcome our soldiers "with bloody hands to hospitable graves."60

Both papers seemed to anticipate a Republican victory as early as the beginning of June and seemed to feel that some action should be taken in that case. In a speech printed in full in the Mercury, John Townsend of "The 1860 Association" fame, provided the answer for the secessionists:

What then? Shall we wait until Mr. Lincoln shall be borne into Washington upon the swelling tide of a triumphant Black Republicanism. . . . Shall we put ourselves on our good behavior and wait whilst he is organizing his cabinet and distributing his offices; to see what tides-waitership he will confer on Louisiana and Georgia; and what little post office he will entrust to Alabama and Mississippi and the rest of the Southern culprits who have dared to find fault with the Government. . . . Shall we wait, and "with bated breath and whispering humbleness," permit, or aid him, in taxing us to fill his treasury—to be used, if need be, to our own subjugation—or, as it is now distributed, to foster the industry of the Abolitionized North, at the expense of the South? I answer, without any hesitation on my part, that it is neither the duty nor the interest of the South to wait in this Union a single day after it shall be ascertained that a Black Republican President has been elected; but that we should proceed forthwith to organize a government for ourselves, and withdraw from the fatal connection.61

60 Ibid., June 26, 1860, from the New Hampshire Patriot. Lincoln was defending the Whig position that the Mexican War had been unconstitutionally and unnecessarily commenced by President Polk and the intent of his resolutions was to determine where American blood was first shed and if it were on American or Mexican soil. It was Lincoln's first important speech in the House of Representatives, delivered on January 12, 1860, and earned him a considerable amount of unfavorable publicity in the Nation's Press. See Herbert Mitgang (ed.), Lincoln As They Saw Him (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 69-73, and Robert S. Harper, Lincoln And The Press (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1951), p. 9.

61 Ibid., June, 7, 1860.
Characteristically, the Courier only posed the question of what to do in the event of a Republican victory, leaving the answer to the reader. Their Washington correspondent wrote:

I met a respectable old gentleman from the Northwest. He said he had known Abe Lincoln for many years, and considered him a bona fide fanatic; and had heard him when a practicing lawyer in his room at the hotel, talk of slavery as a crime of horrible dye; that in talking on the subject he would become very excited, so much so that he could not keep his seat, but would walk up and down with great agitation. This is the key to Lincoln's nomination; he is an earnest man, and thought to have some pluck, with the additional advantage of having not a salient public record. The great question which will soon be placed before the South, is whether they will submit to the election of Abe Lincoln. . . . If we of the South are determined not to submit, then comes up how will you best prepare for resistance? This is the point to which public attention should be directed. 62

The beginnings of a basis of comparison between the editorial opinions of the Mercury and Courier towards Lincoln began to emerge almost immediately. After twenty-eight years of continuous loyal support towards the extreme state rights and secessionist policies of R. B. Rhett, and after successfully disrupting the regular Democratic Convention in Charleston it was apparent as early as June that the Mercury hoped for a veritable anti-slavery demon in the Republican candidate; a fanatic abolitionist whose election could be made the occasion, not the cause, for the secession it so fervently hoped would take place. In the emotional language of revolutionary patriotism, the Mercury launched an attack the main features of which were twofold: first, to clearly establish Lincoln's connection with Abolitionism (they would make him an Abolitionist if he were not already one), carefully spelling out in lurid detail the dangers to the South his election would initiate; and, second, to show the ill bred and uncouth character of his humble frontier origins inti-

62 Courier, June 20, 1860.
mating that in such hands the implementation of Abolitionism would be even more fanatic, more dangerous. One almost feels that Lincoln's obscurity and humble origins were unexpected gifts which the Mercury's editors gratefully accepted as an additional prop for their secession drama.

Neither possessing the secessionist fixation of the Mercury nor yet convinced that Lincoln's election would sound the death knell of the Union, the Courier approached Lincoln as a candidate for the Presidency who must be defeated. They showed their greater interest in Lincoln personally, by sending a correspondent to Illinois to evaluate the candidate and the pulse and tone of the Midwest. They obviously regarded him more seriously in light of the Democratic split and as a result treated him with less scorn and ridicule than the Mercury. It often seemed as if the scorn and abuse they did throw his way were as an afterthought.

Actually neither newspaper devoted much editorial effort to Lincoln. When one considers that well over 90% of the coverage on Lincoln in both the Mercury and the Courier from May 16 to June 31 has been cited above it is easier to appreciate that neither newspaper was particularly interested in Lincoln personally.
CHAPTER III

THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN THROUGH AUGUST 1860

The historian who could only consult the Charleston press for his account of the Presidential Campaign of 1860 would end up with an even more distorted view of that campaign than if he could at least consult representative sections of the Southern press. Little, if any, mention was made in either the Mercury or the Courier of those issues besides slavery and secession which, according to Fite, made the campaign "remarkable for its length and the unusual division of public sentiment." The charge of corruption which the Republicans successfully brought against the Buchanan administration and the ensuing mud of partisan politics was scarcely reflected in the Charleston press. The mutual charges of political aggression each party brought against the other, intending to show the other embraced entirely new principles unsanctioned by precedent in the history of their respective parties, was mentioned in the Charleston press only insofar as Southern Democrats sought to establish the unconstitutionality of the anti-slavery portions of the Republican platform and its Abolitionist wing. The policy of national expansion to which the Democrats seemed to be committing the country received a small bit of favorable attention which most historians have interpreted as originating from the Southern hope of new slave territory. In the main, however, the Charleston press

\(^1\text{Fite, op. cit., p. 132.} \)
devoted its entire editorial effort to those particular sectional issues with which it was locally and intimately concerned. During the first half of the campaign there were, primarily, two such issues.

The first, chronologically, dealt with the perplexing results of the various Democratic conventions. Both the Mercury and the Courier bitterly discussed at great length questions such as whether or not the bolters at the Charleston convention broke up that convention intentionally (Courier); justifications for breaking up that convention (Mercury); should their constituents send the bolters back to the Baltimore Convention (Courier); could any National Democratic Party adequately guarantee Southern rights (Mercury), and should the Richmond Convention delegates be sent to the Baltimore Convention, etc.

The second issue, and the foremost in point of view of importance and volume of editorial comment, dealt with secession. Though the Mercury was the mouthpiece for secession in the State, it still had to convince many readers that Lincoln's election in itself provided a satisfactory cause for separate State action. The Courier's moderate and conservative views towards secession gradually changed during the summer of 1860 as secession sentiment gripped more and more of the State. The Courier's politics included in its folds not only Unionists and cooperationists, but that group in every election who seem indifferent to the issues but afraid of the consequences of any radical change. Therefore, its clear shift towards disunion reflected the growing unanimity of feeling in the State that, as Cauthen wrote, "the election of a Republican President was an eventuality which even those who sincerely loved the Union regarded as
dangerously imperilling the safety of the South. Underneath every discussion of secession, of course, lay the defense of the institution of slavery.

A lesser issue, yet still one which easily captured more editorial space in both newspapers than that given to Lincoln concerned the repudiation of Stephen A. Douglas. The Mercury's opposition to Douglas was bitter and complete. If it could not have its candidate, Breckinridge, it actually preferred Lincoln. Both the Mercury and the Courier distrusted Douglas' doctrine of popular sovereignty; and abhored the low and vulgar tastes they were convinced he possessed. In July the Courier expressed a moderate version of the feelings both newspapers harbored for Douglas when it wrote that "his political bankruptcy furnishes to trading politicians a salutary warning of the certain disappointment which awaits their wild and extravagant speculations." It described his squatter sovereignty as a composition of "pretended love for the people and mock devotion to the Union." By July 16, the Courier flatly stated that he would not carry a single State in the November election.

As the smoke from the various Presidential conventions began to settle and the South prepared itself for the long campaign, the Courier sensed almost immediately that Douglas would not capitulate to Breckinridge and that the resulting split would ruin Democratic chances in November.

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2Cauthen, op. cit., p. 25.
3Courier, July 16, 1860.
4Ibid., July 11, 1860.
5Ibid., July 16, 1860. Douglas actually carried two States: Missouri and New Jersey.
It bitterly stated that their feud was as much personal as political; that in their contest with each other they seemed indifferent to the success of their common adversary, and in fact, would probably prefer the election of Lincoln to the other. It thought that if Democrats could only unite in Pennsylvania or New York they could defeat Lincoln but that the Democratic split would not permit it to be carried out. Despite the realities of the situation, the Courier optimistically predicted Breckinridge would win the election with 152 electoral votes, precisely the number required for a choice. Its prediction was based upon its hope that "with the future of the Union in balance no State will throw its vote away on Bell and Everett," and that most of Douglas' support would break up between Breckinridge and Lincoln.

When the citizens of the Charleston Congressional District met to approve and ratify the action of the South Carolina delegation at Richmond, the Courier mentioned some of the reactions to Lincoln and his party. Colonel Carew, an alternate at Richmond, stated that, "the pirate flag of the Black Republicans, inscribed with the names of Lincoln and Hamlin, has been thrown flautingly to the wind. The old Whig party, under a new cognomen . . . has hung out the old Consolidation flag, tricked out with new adornments." General W. E. Martin, a delegate at Richmond, said that he felt Breckinridge stood as good a chance as anyone for the Presidency, and referring to the election landing in the House, that, "honest old soldier Lane has as good a chance as a certain man now indi-

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6 Ibid., June 28-30, 1860.
7 Ibid., July 11, 1860.
cated from Illinois, and whose only qualifications, as far as I have been able to learn, is that he is a Black Republican, who wishes to revolutionize the South."8  Looking ahead to November, Congressman and secessionist W. Porcher Miles, felt that if Lincoln and his, "irrepressible conflict and higher law, Constitution ignoring party" were elected, South Carolina should secede.9

R. B. Rhett, also a delegate at Richmond, addressed the ratification meeting at some length. His remarks, cited in their entirety in the Courier, are particularly valuable since the July issues of the Mercury were not available to the writer and his remarks would certainly have appeared there too. Rhett's persuasive eloquence captured much of the tone and style of the Mercury's editorial columns; columns which Dwight Dumond called brilliant.10 Rhett said:

If the Black Republicans succeed in electing Lincoln and Hamlin, who openly advocate that slavery be abolished throughout the whole world, then we have to look to ourselves. Hamlin is what we call a mulatto. He has black blood in him, and let me tell you that it is his nomination that has a remarkable peculiarity. . . . They design to place over the South a man who has Negro blood in his veins. They put a renegade Southerner on one side for President, for Lincoln is a native Kentuckian, and they put a man of colored blood on the other side of the ticket.

I do not say what I may do in the event of a Black Republican being elected. You may think and enter upon resolves. The difficulty is, if you were to make up your minds to that alternative, they would not believe you—they would believe that you were merely talking. These men have no more idea that the Union is in danger than any other heresay. They have no confidence in your courage, decision and regard for Liberty. They believe that you will submit to their aggressions as ignoble slaves, and they today go on with their aggressions . . . step by step, until they finally lift the mighty wave of abolition and ruin. . . . And how will you meet it?

8Ibid.
9Ibid., July 17, 1860.
10Dumond, op. cit., p. viii.
Let us unite with the banner floating over us inscribed thereon, Equality Of The South In The Union Or Independence Out Of It. Will you allow a sectional fanatic party, whose creed is hatred to the South, the only cement of its heterogenous mass is hostility to slave holders, rule you. If so forget Fort Moultrie, forget Buxton, for their memory will be only a burning weight in your hearts, and will cause the mantle of shame to [sic] the cheek of your children.11

The persistent hope that some sort of fusion amongst the Democrats could be achieved in order to defeat Lincoln was reflected in the Courier's editorials throughout the campaign. In July it mentioned a proposal by Mayor Fernando Wood of New York City to let each Democratic candidate run singly where he had the most strength so that in a State where a Democratic majority existed that State would not split out to Lincoln. For example, Breckinridge would stay out of New York thus giving the State to Douglas, thereby denying Lincoln New York's thirty-five electoral votes. The Courier countered with a similar scheme but one which would not require Breckinridge to stay out of any State. Its idea was that only one Democratic electoral ticket be run in each of the doubtful States. Electoral candidates would go in unpledged and pledge their votes to the Democratic candidate with the largest majority.12

The Courier's contributions early in the campaign to a "personal portrait" of Lincoln seemed to be with a more scurrilous brush than that which they had used during the conventions. Under a heading, "Lincoln And Hamlin—Par Nobile Fratum," appeared the following lines:

Is there not some chosen curse—
Some hidden thunder in the stores of Heaven,
Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the wretch
Who owes his greatness to his country's ruin.13

11 Courier, July 11, 1860.
12 Ibid., July 16, 1860.
13 Ibid.
Again, in an article on South Carolina sentiment, and after noting with surprise that more South Carolinians objected to Bell from Tennessee than Everett from Massachusetts, Bell's Vice-Presidential candidate, the Courier haughtily asked:

But who is the ad captandum Abe Lincoln? Is the wreck of the Old Whig party and the unripe fruit of the Republican party, who have recently adopted this nominas umbra, still obliged to resort to the dirty trick of singing songs and calling bawdy names, for the sake of so-called expediency, and that, too, for the purpose of elevating a gentleman to the most noble of all the offices of power and trust. The word Abe is most extensively sneered at by the common-sense people of the South, and they often express themselves to the effect that a well-bred gentleman would not allow himself to be trifled with by a false cognomen. 11

The Courier's Chicago correspondent wrote that in the portion of the State through which he had traveled Lincoln was still much the rage; that, his "so-called honesty of purpose has become proverbial, and, being less known, has a greater negative popularity than Douglas. . . . Every anecdote of his life, when he was more obscure than now is heralded through the papers, and his friends claim for him the distinction of being a representative man of the Northwest." The correspondent felt that Lincoln's popularity was greatly enhanced by his devoted support of Henry Clay when he was a Whig. 15

A theme which was to crop up again and again throughout the campaign concerned whether Southerners should or would hold offices the commission for which originated from Presidential patronage. Captain B. H. Rutledge, chairman of resolutions at the Charleston ratification meeting noted above, was the first to mention this situation in the Courier. Referring to Lincoln's election as "the last insult which could be offered to a

11 Ibid., July 14, 1860.
15 Ibid., July 10, 1860.
free people," Rutledge stated, "no Southern man should consent to hold office under a commission signed by an Abolition President, and it will be for the people of the South to say whether any Northern man shall be permitted to enter the State lines with such interests." Its Baltimore correspondent wrote that Northerners felt that hundreds could be found in every Southern State to accept office under the Administration of Black Republicanism to keep the wheels of government in motion, but that he, "could not conceive of the allurements of office to be so entrancing as to cause persons entitled to honor and respect, to debase themselves." With this refusal of chivalric Southerners to serve Abolitionism, the correspondent concluded, would be born the evidences of trouble.

Towards the end of July, the Courier first mentioned Lincoln in connection with the principal issue of the campaign—the abolition of slavery. Citing from a personal letter from New York City the controversy between North and South was described, in all its practical bearings, as merely, "how is Negro slavery to be dealt with." The letter stated that the difference between the Republican and Democratic platforms, "like every political question of the times, derives all its significance from the subject of Negro slavery." The Mercury, citing from the Democratic New York Herald stated that, "the origin of the quarrel is in the social theories spread in the North to the prejudice of the South; that slavery was originally recognized and sanctioned in the North but was abolished, "not from any moral or religious scruples, but simply and solely because it did not

16 Ibid., July 11, 1860.
17 Ibid., August 1, 1860.
18 Ibid., July 24, 1860.
The writer concluded that to abolish slavery in the South was to abolish the South. 19

With a fierce singlemindedness of purpose the Mercury endeavored to connect Lincoln with Abolitionism. Under the heading of "The True Issue," the Mercury found Lincoln's House Divided speech in the Chicago Democrat as the issue to be met by the South. It cited portions of that speech as follows:

I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN 20

Then the Mercury took the article apart. First, it said it was a sneaky abolitionist trick for the Chicago Democrat to state it had no further object in view than the exclusion of slavery in the territories when the real object evidenced by Lincoln's statement was the complete overthrow of slavery. Then:

As to "advocates of slavery" pushing "forward until it shall become alike lawful in all the States..."—Mr. Lincoln knew, when he uttered these words, that they contained a false imputation against the people of the South. They have never attempted to thrust slavery upon the North; and if they did attempt it, he knows that the attempt would be as futile as it would be absurd. He has thrust in this idea of aggressiveness on the part of the South, to give some color of justification to his aggressiveness on the part of the North. His position, stripped of his fictitious antithesis, is simply this—the Government of the United States must be made a Government of a people, entirely homogeneous in their institutions—they must be all free, and slavery must be abolished. "The opponents of slavery" in the United

19 Mercury, July 30, 1860.

20 Ibid., August 4, 1860.
States must do two things to accomplish this policy—1. They must "arrest the further spread of it"; and 2. "Place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction." Now mark, these two things are not to be done by slave-holders or the slaveholding States. They are to be done by "the opponents of slavery." They are to "arrest" it—they are to "place" it. The first branch of their policy is — "to arrest the further spread of slavery." This, we suppose, refers to our Territories. Slavery is to enter no more into any of the Territories of the United States and there are to be no more Slave States admitted into the Union. The second branch of their policy—is the emancipation of our slaves. There is to be no "rest" in the public mind of the North, until Mr. Lincoln and his kindred Abolitionists shall bring about this "crisis," and place slavery "in the course of ultimate extinction." Now, we submit it to the candor of any man who has a particle of honesty in him—does not the language of Mr. Lincoln distinctly declare the policy of abolishing slavery in the Southern States? And as he is the candidate of the Black Republican party for the Presidency of the United States— is not the question of the emancipation of the slaves of the South, distinctly put at issue, in the Presidential election? The man who denies it, it appears to us, must be either a fool or a knave. The Chicago Times, understood to be the home organ of Lincoln—certainly printed at his door—makes no affection of concealment as to the purposes of the Black Republican Party. In its last issue it speaks as follows:

"The only thing that can prevent a complete and bloody slave insurrection throughout the Southern States, is the preservation of the Union. If the Union be preserved, and if the Federal Government be administered for a few years by Republican Presidents, a scheme may be devised and carried out which will result in the peaceful, honorable and equitable emancipation of all the slaves. The States must be made all free. . . . The work will be one of time and patience, but it must and will be done."21

By the beginning of August the Courier conceded that unless the anti-Republicans in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania could unite, Lincoln would be elected. No matter how they wrestled with various coalition or fusion schemes the uncompromising character of the fight between Democratic candidates portended ominous results at the polls in November, forcing the Courier to come to grips with the question the Mercury had answered long ago: What shall the South do if Lincoln is elected?

Cautious comments which referred to "the consequences of Lincoln's election,"

21Ibid., August 6, 1860.
or "measures for the emergency," were the prelude to the Courier's shift from Unionism to cooperationism, and the first indications of the clear and rapid swing of conservative elements throughout the State towards disunion.

Late in July James L. Orr, respected Unionist, and organizer and leader of the conservatives of the State, wrote the Courier to decline its call for him to become a candidate for the State Legislature from the Charleston District and used the opportunity to make his first public testimonial for cooperative secession. He said in his letter, published in the Courier and Mercury on August 4, that though he would vote for Breckinridge, Lincoln and Hamlin would be elected and the South would then have to decide the great question whether or not they would submit to "the domination of Black Republican rule," when their fundamental principle was "open, undisguised and declared war on our social institutions." Orr concluded that "the honor and safety" of the South required the prompt secession of the slaveholding States, but that he emphatically repudiated separate state action. A correspondent of the Mercury wrote that he thought Orr's public statements asserted the conviction of the Southern people more impressively than those of any other public man.

On August 8 the Courier published a letter from another influential South Carolina conservative, W. W. Boyce, who thought Lincoln, "a Northern Abolitionist," would endeavor to humble the South in the course of establishing his "new order." Boyce wrote:

If Lincoln be elected, I think the Southern States should withdraw from the Union; all, if not all, then as many as will, and if no other,

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22 Courier, August 3, 1860.
23 Courier and Mercury, August 4, 1860.
24 Mercury, August 8, 1860.
South Carolina alone, in the promptest and most direct means. ... The vital principle of this party is Negro equality, the only logical finale of which is emancipation. To see this it is only necessary to look at their platform... which says "we hold that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty," etc., and this on the motion of Mr. Giddings. This is intended to include Negroes.25

In a carefully reasoned article Boyce stated that for the South to consent to its domination by the Republican Party was death. He did not anticipate startling measures of aggression, for Republican leaders, he said, were "men of too much sagacity to be driven ahead of their program," and that program was, "too obviously a wise moderation."26 Cauthen, measuring the effect of the letters from Orr and Boyce, referred to a letter from the South Carolina war Governor, Andrew G. Magrath, written from Fort Pulaski prison in 1865, in the interest of his release, to the effect that when Orr and Boyce announced their position, "there came to be but one purpose everywhere," going with the State or opposing it.27

While the Courier and most of the State were slowly convincing themselves that secession was necessary to the preservation of Southern interests the Mercury was engaged in far more advanced secessionist activities. Much of the conservative feeling in the State in August, though clearly swinging towards secession, thought its actual implementation should await some "overt hostile act" on the part of Lincoln or his administration. The Mercury, however, thought Lincoln's election would in itself be the overt act and that upon his election the South should take immediate steps

25Courier, August 8, 1860. Boyce's letter also appeared in the Mercury, August 9, 1860.

26Ibid.

27Cauthen, op. cit., p. 27.
to dissolve the Union. In what seems to be a sophisticated bit of reasoning, and obviously directed at gaining conservative support, the Mercury also took the position that its particular brand of disunionism was really unionism. For example, R. B. Rhett stated that over the years he had striven three times to get the State to resist, "not to destroy the Union, not to break up the Government, but because I believe it would save, support, and make it worthy of our admiration and love, and thus transmit it down to our latest posterity." Rhett remarked that while others said to yield for the sake of the Union, he said resist for the sake of the Union. Rhett's position seemed to be that disunion sentiment would purify and, therefore, strengthen the Union!

In an article in the Mercury entitled, "The Presidential Election and Union-Savers," the Rhetts' actual position was spelled out with more clarity:

1. The Presidential election turns upon a single fact. If the Northern people believe that the Southern people will dissolve their connection with them, should the Black Republican party succeed in electing Lincoln to the Presidency—Lincoln will be defeated. Should they, on the contrary believe, that the Southern people will submit to Black Republican domination by the election of Lincoln to the Presidency—Lincoln will be elected.

Point by point the article then reasoned as follows: second, since Union against Lincoln was the only thing which would convince the North, "everything, therefore, which tends to disunite the South, aids the election of Lincoln." Third, the only party in the South standing simply on the sectional rights of the South was that which supported Breckinridge which in turn had the immense majority of Southern people. Fourth, those opposing

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28 Mercury, August 1, 1860.

29 Courier, July 11, 1860.
that party in effect satisfied Northerners that Southerners would submit to Lincoln's domination. "They, therefore, powerfully aid his election in the North." Fifth, Union-savers showed a greater regard for the Union than for Southern rights. Sixth, since Black Republicans believed the Union was stronger than slavery by the South, movements tending to verify that, efficiently cooperated with the North. Seventh, and finally, "If the above positions be true, then the Union-savers in the South and the Black Republicans are one in their policy; which is, to subject the people of the South to Black Republican domination, by the election of Lincoln to the Presidency."30

One of the Mercury's tactics in their unremitting effort to persuade the State to secede if Lincoln were elected, was to reprint articles from Northern newspapers which evinced scorn or skepticism of Southern determination to do so. The greater the ridicule and contempt in the Northern press towards the threat of secession the more likely the Mercury was to pass the article on to its readers. For example, it cited from Henry J. Raymond's Republican New York Times that:

they are led into these ridiculous demonstrations simply by taking the Northerners for fools. There is not a man of them who would not turn pale as a ghost, if he were well assured that next November, Mason and Dixon's line would become the dividing line between a Northern and Southern Republic.

In the same issue it quoted with obvious relish the remark from Horace Greeley's New York Tribune, often quoted since, that "the South could no more unite on a scheme of secession, than a company of lunatics could conspire to break out of bedlam."31

30 Mercury, August 4, 1860.

31 Ibid., August 3, 1860.
The Mercury's campaign portrait of Lincoln began with the observation that he was at home, attending to the reading of letters which, "he has neither the time nor inclination to answer... He is astonished to read of the great number of men to whom he is indebted for the position he now occupies. The 'original Lincoln man' is ubiquitous; he lives in every Northern State and has near relatives over the border." Later in a thorough article on Lincoln's silence the Mercury wrote that, "Lincoln complains of his correspondence, and between the conservatives and radicals he has a very pleasant time. The Illinoisan is wary, and cannot be seduced into any extravagances of pen and ink." Then the Mercury printed a letter from Lincoln's friend John G. Nicolay, written on June 8, 1860, to someone inquiring of Lincoln's views on the slavery issue:

Your letter to Hon. A. Lincoln of May 28, and by which you seek to obtain his opinion on certain political points has been received. He has received others of a similar character, but also a greater number of the exactly opposite character. The latter class beseech him to write nothing whatever upon any point of political doctrine. They say his positions were well known when he was nominated, and that he must not now embarrass the canvas by undertaking to shift or modify them. He regrets that he cannot oblige all, but you perceive that it is impossible for him to do so.

The Mercury's treatment of Lincoln, despite such a tempered article as above, remained essentially that of establishing his connection with anti-slavery and extreme abolitionism. Often its tone was petty, as when it noted that Republicans were calling Lincoln and Hamlin the "White Man's Ticket," and remarked that, "as the ticket of Lincoln and Hamlin is based upon... the elevation of the black man to an equality with the white, that should be called emphatically the black man's ticket." Other

32 Ibid., August 2, 1860.
33 Ibid., August 24, 1860.
34 Ibid., August 4, 1860.
times its tone was serious, but always the point was the same. It continually identified him with John Brown and called his party "the Brown-Helper party." It included him with "such creatures" as Wilson, Burlingame, Greeley, Webb, Sumner and Corwin and said of them all, that they were "brutal fanatics, who praise God in their politics—who formerly burned witches, and murdered the poor Arcadians—and who now honor John Brown as a martyr, and send out strychnine and revolvers to the slaves of Texas to murder their masters." And, it scoffed as it cited a New York Herald correspondent who talked to Lincoln and reported that Lincoln did not feel that slavery met with the universal sanction of the Southern people, and that while many Southerners were obliged to sustain slavery they "secretly abhorred the institution."

Both newspapers continued to heap scorn upon Lincoln's humble origins and obscurity as the campaign progressed. The Courier wrote that for one whose reputation was based upon rail-splitting Lincoln did not even know how to split rails properly; that "Lincoln men in their wigwams amuse themselves in splitting rails"; and, referred with scorn to a new order instituted by his followers identified by the initials "F. R. S."—Fellow Rail Splitters. Further, like the pot were calling the kettle black, the Courier wrote that:

knowing full well that Abe Lincoln is not fit for the Presidency, some of the blackest of his admirers and servile supporters, are endeavoring to degrade the Presidency to his level, by personal abuse

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35 Ibid., September 1, 1860.
36 Ibid., August 27, 1860.
37 Courier, July 30, 1860.
38 Ibid., August 13, 1860.
and ridicule of President Buchanan. Several Black Republicans sheets never mention the President but in connection with epithets and "slang" which are disgraceful to the press. 39

The Mercury told its readers that both Lincoln's brother-in-law and a cousin were stumping Illinois for Douglas, and cited from the New York Mercury "an amusing Life of Lincoln," the main points of which were his obscurity and sudden rise to prominence. A short example from this "life" suffices to establish the article's tone:

When he was about ten years old Boston suddenly became the hub of the Universe, and required so much greasing that cleanly people were obliged to move away. The Lincolns went to Illinois, where Abraham became the ablest lawyer in the State in less than a week, and learned to chew tobacco. 40

Although the Courier's shift from Unionism to cooperationism in August, was marked enough to be identified as a distinct editorial change it was neither as sudden nor as consistent as some historians have indicated. Either in the name of objectivity or simply because they were not convinced of the ultimate benefits of any kind of secession, the Courier continued to press for Lincoln's defeat through Democratic unity and gave a fair voice to the arguments of South Carolina Unionists in their paper, back to back, as it were, with frequent secession sentiment. It editorialized less as secession sentiment increased and took most of its significant articles on secession from other papers, both North and South, or letters from prominent citizens. It was obviously waveriing back and forth between secession and Unionism. It introduced the letters from Orr and Boyce cited above, with sentiments such as that taken from the Cheraw Gazette that, "once let a Black Republican Administration get possession

39Tbid.

40Mercury, August 16, 1860.
of the purse and the sword, and it will be a difficult job to wrest it from them. Better far to prevent than to remedy the evil." Then as a prelude to a shift back to Unionism, the Courier cited from the New York Courier and Enquirer a most unusual conversation, if true, between an anonymous, wealthy slaveholding Southerner and a group of disunionists in which the slaveholder argued against disunion, insisting that while Lincoln’s election would necessarily prevent the extension of slavery into the Territories, Lincoln would scrupulously stand by all the constitutional rights of the slave States, and further:

exercise a moral influence at the North, favorable to a faithful execution of the Fugitive Slave Law, and adverse to the interference of a handful of troublesome abolitionists, whose incendiary conduct was disgusting Republicans at the same time that scheming Democratic leaders privately encouraged their interference with the South in order to foster slavery excitement.

Finally, on August 20, the Courier printed a long letter from the respected South Carolina Unionist, B. F. Perry, which was a careful reasoned plea against disunion, solely if Lincoln were elected. Perry predicted that Lincoln would be a minority President, elected by only one-third of the voters, and that therefore, his administration would be too weak for him to overcome hostile Senate and House majorities, in turn forcing him to pursue a cautious, politic and wise course towards the South. As an example of its vacillation, the Courier not only gave Perry’s letter warm editorial support but in the same issue, took the opposite view, arguing that in the event of Lincoln’s election it would

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11 Courier, August 10, 1860.
12 Ibid., August 18, 1860.
13 Ibid., August 20, 1860.
favor a convention of Southern States, "to present to the North the alternatives of a new and satisfactory understanding of our political compact, or a dissolution of the Union. We prefer the alternative of disunion, however sad, to any further submission to Northern aggression." Then, two days later, the Courier printed a summary of Perry's letter taken from the Columbia South Carolinian stressing the point that Lincoln's election would not endanger the institutions of the South to the point the last remedy of disunion was necessary.\textsuperscript{45}

As the campaign developed, the Mercury continued to define Lincoln's anti-slavery views in increasingly extreme tones, and pressed for disunion as the only honorable and safe remedy to his election. Noting that the Chicago Democrat, "reprints Mr. Sumner's vile abolition speech ... and declares with a flourish of trumpets that it contains the true doctrine," the Mercury stressed that the Democrat was Lincoln's home organ and that, "to prostrate the South is the 'true doctrine.' To drive Southern men 'to die like poisoned rats in their holes' is their 'true doctrine.' To expel Southern men 'from all seats of national power' is the 'true doctrine.'\textsuperscript{46} A week later the Mercury took a long article from the New York Herald titled, "Lincoln's Election In The South—The Disunion Question," containing a sympathetic development of the dilemma in which the South found itself since 1850, as a result of their political minority in the Senate. The article argued that the question of union or disunion must be settled with Lincoln's election because acqui-

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{ibid.}, The Mercury, which rarely cited the Courier, did pick up and pass on to its readers this remark. \textit{Mercury}, August 28, 1860.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Courier}, August 22, 1860.

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Mercury}, August 8, 1860.
esence by the South would result in such an accumulation of Northern anti-slavery strength in every department of the Government as to render subsequent secession movements "foolish and impotent." The Herald added:

The simple truth is, that in submitting to Lincoln's election, the South must be content to prepare deliberately for the abolition of slavery from Delaware to Texas. This is exactly what this thing means. The will and the power will be given, with Lincoln's election, to a party founded upon this "one idea," and pledged to this work; and they will do it. Hence it is, perhaps, that we find this apparent general indifference in the South to their own ticket of Breckinridge and Lane—Southern men like Mr. Orr give it up, and are casting about what to do, not to defeat, but to meet Mr. Lincoln's election.47

A more definitive basis of comparison between the Mercury and the Courier and their treatment of Lincoln and his anti-slavery views may be found in their separate reactions to Seward's first campaign speech for Lincoln and Hamlin in Boston. The Courier regretted that in that speech Seward shifted the onus of the irrepressible conflict doctrine to Lincoln and wrote that Seward "confounded some of the more prudent of the Black Republicans by proclaiming the doctrine of the 'irrepressible conflict' as the basis of the policy of Lincoln's administration." Noting that Seward himself avoided that doctrine the year before while seeking the nomination for himself, the Courier continued that losing that nomination, "he throws the burden of the original doctrine upon Lincoln. . . .\ Out of sheer malice, he holds his party to the extreme doctrines of the Ultra Abolitionists,"48 The Mercury avoided editorial comment on Seward's speech and simply quoted, with appropriate emphasis, the most radical portions:

48 Courier, August 20, 1860.
What a commentary upon the wisdom of man is given in this single fact, that fifteen years only, after the death of John Quincy Adams, the people... who hurled him from power... are calling to the head of the nation, to the very seat from which he was expelled. Abraham Lincoln (enthusiastic cheers) whose claim to that seat is that he confesses the obligation of that higher law (applause) which the Sage of Quincy proclaimed, and that he avows for himself, for weal or wo, for life or death, a soldier on the side of freedom, in the irrepressible conflict between freedom and slavery. ... I tell you fellow citizens that with this victory comes the end of the power of slavery in the United States. 49

As the campaign reached its midpoint the Courier was still alternating between hope for some sort of Democratic unity through which Lincoln's defeat could be effected and pessimism that fusion schemes could not heal the Democratic split. For example, its Washington correspondent wrote that fusion had been abandoned in Pennsylvania and that "between the Douglas and Breckinridge men, exists nowhere." The writer felt that the fusion between Douglasites and Bell men in New York was likely but that it would not be enough to move the State from Lincoln. 50 The same correspondent eight days later excitedly wrote that the Breckinridge, Douglas, and Bell supporters in New York had at last agreed to cooperate and that arrangements for the union would be made in another week. He said in a wave of optimism, "You can rely on this as certain. Thus the last nail is driven into the political coffin of Abraham Lincoln." 51 As if they were only waiting for such a hopeful note, the Courier the next day, August 29, ran another unionist article by B. F. Perry giving it a warm editorial endorsement which ended, "but he [Perry] does not apprehend any danger from Lincoln's administration. Read the following words

49 Mercury, August 20, 1860.
50 Courier, August 20, 1860.
51 Ibid., August 28, 1860.
and remember they come from South Carolina." In the same issue the Courier wrote that the indications of the great reaction and reunion in New York against the "fanaticism and suicidal folly of Lincolnism are of deep significance." Continuing with an article from the sympathetic New York Herald, Union hopes were fed more fuel with the statement that the uprising of the national conservative men to put down Lincoln, "goes bravely on, and from every side we receive cheering evidence that the great masses of the people are opposed to all sectional doctrine in whatever shape or from whatever quarter it may come. . . . who in November next, are determined to vote for the ticket that will beat Lincoln."52

The Courier's optimism for fusion possibilities lasted no longer than the meeting in New York of the Democratic factions at which Douglas and Breckinridge groups again proved to be irreconciliable. The Courier, whose vilification of Douglas had always been intense, threw the onus for fusion failure squarely on Douglas and the "contrary" New York politicians. As early as August 20, the Courier had reported that Douglas, despairing of his own election had as his sole object insuring Breckinridge's defeat, and had reported off and on throughout July and August that Douglas would rather have Lincoln win than his Democratic opponents. As the failure of fusion in New York became apparent, the Courier lashed out in disappointment at the fact that, "the peace of the country—so far as it depends on the defeat of Lincoln—is subjected to the caprice or interests of a set of New York politicians, who do not trust each other, and in whom no one can place the smallest degree of confidence." In another section of the same issue, the Courier concluded, "It is certain Lincoln

52Ibid., August 29, 1860.
will be elected President, and it is made certain by New York Democratic leaders... on one side, and the Lincoln predilections of the Douglasites on the other.  

Comparisons of Douglas and Lincoln which appeared in both the Courier and Mercury were another relatively definitive medium of editorial comparison. The Courier cited from a private letter, written by an influential and intelligent gentleman in Kentucky to a prominent gentleman in Chicago, which appeared in the Chicago Press and Tribune on August 10:

It may seem strange to you, but it is nevertheless true that the South looks to the election of Lincoln by the people and would prefer him to Douglas. Our most ultra Southern men seem to respect him, and to have confidence in his honesty, fairness and conservatism. They concede he stands on a moderate platform, that his antecedents are excellent, and that he is not likely to invade the rights of anyone; but they can't go for him because he holds opinions relative to the rights of slavery in the territories directly opposite to the Southern view. Still he is an open and candid opponent, and, therefore commands Southern respect.

Then, from the St. Louis Express, "a candid and independent advocate of Lincoln," the Courier cited for its readers the feeling that while the people of the North might have been very enthusiastic over Douglas for approximating their wishes in his free soil views, they would nevertheless vote for Lincoln because Lincoln advocated a policy that would, "bring about directly and openly what the policy of Douglas would accomplish indirectly and stealthily." The Mercury, whose tactic was clearly to show that every presidential slate but that of Breckinridge and Lane was an antislavery slate, and which wrote articles on "John Bell's Black Record,

53 Ibid., September 9, 1860.
54 Ibid., August 24, 1860.
55 Ibid.
and "Edward Everett An Abolitionist," sought to establish that Douglas was Lincoln's Abolitionist tool. Thus, "squat... ed to black Republicanism"; and Douglas was described as, "Lincoln's Lieutenant" and future "aid-de-camp" who would, the Mercury reported, "complete the coercing process that John Brown began." The Mercury's editorial position throughout the campaign with regard to Douglas was simply that if Breckinridge could not win, it was "better for us as well as the country, that Lincoln should be elected rather than any Democrat."57

As if its readers were not yet convinced that Lincoln was an Abolitionist, the Mercury, in a long article taken from the Illinois State Register entitled, "Lincoln An Early Abolitionist," told its readers that Abolitionism was Lincoln's "ruling idea, the chief article of his political creed throughout his partisan career." The article stated that Lincoln had opposed three resolutions introduced into the Illinois legislature in 1837 against abolition societies and anti-slavery movements, and that he voted for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia while a member of Congress. The article concluded:

The shuffling of his organs now, to say nothing of his record in 1858, cannot efface the Abolition "spot" which is upon him. He is for making "all the States free," per force, and . . . he knows no constitutional bar to the carrying out of his great leading idea. He is for the abolition of slavery in the States where it is recognized, whether the people thereof are willing or not. He is as much an Abolitionist as are Garrison, Gerrit, Smith, or Wendell Phillips.58

Caithen wrote that by the end of August there was little doubt

56Mercury, August 23, September 9, and September 19, 1860.
57Ibid., August 30, 1860.
58Ibid., September 7, 1860.
that those who opposed secession in South Carolina had become a "very small minority." To the extent that the Courier represented the majority view in South Carolina towards secession, Cauthen's statement may be confirmed in its pages for by the end of August the Courier's Union sentiment appeared to have run its course. Even though it objected to conceding the election to Lincoln on the grounds that, "even were it so, why admit it and weaken the fight in other quarters," Its Washington correspondent wrote that if Lincoln were to be "the conservative safe ruler" B. F. Perry showed him to be, he would have to be "hypocritical and treacherous to his party and friends," an event the Courier concluded was unlikely. The Courier devoted more and more editorial space to predictions of Lincoln's victory and the course the South should take in that event. It printed J. O. Ashmore's speech to his constituents on the recent session of Congress in which he conceded Lincoln's election and urged them to immediate secession in such an event. And finally, it appeared to have accepted completely Senator J. H. Hammond's statement that, "the election of Lincoln would put the Union at imminent and instant hazard."

The secession movement has received a great deal of critical scrutiny by historians as the years since the Civil War have unfolded. One study which pictured Lincoln through the issue of secession, was a

59 Cauthen, op. cit., p. 27.

60 Courier, August 30, 1860.

61 Ibid., August 25, 1860. In quite an accurate prediction, Ashmore said Lincoln would receive 177 electoral votes. He actually received 180.

62 Ibid. Also, Mercury, August 25, 1860. Hammond's remark was particularly significant since neither he nor South Carolina's other United States Senator had yet committed themselves to secession in the event of Lincoln's election.
Yale Historical Publications study (XIII) by David M. Potter, Lincoln and His Party In The Secession Crisis. In its preliminary remarks on secession, where the issue was briefly carried up to the campaign, the author described it as the "shopworn threat." He made the point that long use had made the threat of secession as a campaign device as valuable as its actual use as a minority safeguard. The doctrine was orthodox throughout the South; constant reiteration had enabled every politician to master the theory, and continued practice at sectional debate made its advocates "quick on the draw" with the weapon. The turbulent agitation of the slavery issue in 1858-9 had kept the issue at white heat and when Lincoln was nominated the cry did not have to be revived, merely transferred to the candidate. 63 This is, of course, what was done. Secession threats, Potter noted, were scarcely more numerous than in 1856 but seemed, "more grave and sincere," taking the form of solemn notices deliberately tendered rather than a campaign ruse in the midst of partisan conflict.

The secession movement in South Carolina during the first half of the campaign was like a gathering storm, like a large stone slowly gaining momentum of its own after having been pushed along for so long. Long before Lincoln was elected, the Governor of the State and every member of the South Carolina delegation to the Federal House of Representatives had committed themselves to secession in the event a Republican were elected President. 64 As the uncommitted portion of the State—Unionists, conservatives, moderates of all stripe, and that indifferent group in every electorate who seem to only oppose any changes—as these groups came to


realize that Lincoln would probably be elected, and that his party was founded upon anti-slavery opposition, then the whole electorate swung to the view that Lincoln's election would be "cause" to secede. The goal of the Mercury and other secessionist mediums of propaganda in the first half of the campaign had been to convince the conservatives that this was justified. When the conservative groups in the State accepted the premise that Lincoln's election was just cause to secede the most important phase of the secession battle may be said to have been won.
CHAPTER IV

THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN FROM SEPTEMBER TO THE ELECTION

During the second half of the campaign the flood gates of secession feeling opened wide. The rolling stone broke free completely and rushed on to its violent end. Now, even when there were no specific warnings the idea was implicit everywhere. The "tendency to assume it as a premise," Potter wrote, "rather than defend it as a conclusion, was a more serious evidence of danger than any amount of rant and gesticulation."¹ The momentum of the secession movement shifted the feeling in the State from the view that Lincoln's election was "cause" for the dissolution of the Union to the view that it should be the "occasion" to secede. The full force of a very formidable secession propaganda effort in the State lashed out at every group and diverse sentiment in the State to achieve unanimity. The education of the people in the principles and necessity of secession had already been carried out with a skill and success that Cauthen thought not inferior to the masterly propaganda of the Abolitionists themselves. The task at hand now was to convince the State to act immediately upon Lincoln's election.²

The means to accomplish the task were as varied as they were many but the foremost issue, the issue upon which all battle lines were drawn in one way or another, was that of slavery. In this respect alone, though

¹Potter, Loc. cit., p. 5.
²Cauthen, op. cit., p. 32.
of course its argument was different, the Charleston press reflected the intense interest in, and feeling on, the issue throughout the country. Despite its radicalism, the Mercury captured the essence of the conflict in its diatribes on the "true issue." A more moderate, and perhaps therefore, more meaningful, example of the attention slavery received in the Nation's press was described in an article in the Mercury taken from an unnamed Philadelphia newspaper which had discussed the relative merit of the English, French and American Press:

But there is one topic eminently and almost peculiarly American, which takes priority over all others, and towers with overshadowing magnitude above the host of exciting and agitating subjects which daily pass in review before the public mind in the columns of our journals. Turn over what journal of the day you will, slavery stands forth prominently among the topics of its leaders and the articles of its intelligence. . . . Slavery, it is quite plain is just now the grand subject of American reflection, enquiry and anxiety. The principal plank in every party's platform is the doctrine it avows on the subject of slavery. . . . And the question will probably never rest until a very decisive majority of the people have decided what shall be the policy of the country respecting it. Then peace will return to us. 3

As the campaign reached into September the Mercury changed its course slightly. While its earlier effort had been to establish Lincoln as a fanatical abolitionist to convince the people it had cause to secede, it now began to present to its readers the course he would pursue when elected. It cited articles from the New York Tribune that showed Lincoln meant to expel slavery in the territories where it had obtained a foothold, "and then bolt the door against its return," and that the Government was to be administered "in the interest and to the advance of free labor." 4 In a subjective interpretation of an article in the Democratic

3Mercury, August 31, 1860.
4Mercury, August 28, 1860.
New York Herald on "The Course Lincoln Will Pursue," the "mild plan" Lincoln and his party would use to "urge on the irrepressible conflict" was described as follows:

The first step will be the appointment to every post of executive or administrative power within the gift of the President of men who believe that slavery is an evil and a sin; that it is their moral and social, as well as political duty, to make war upon it in every way; that "the Union cannot stand half slave and half free". . . . with men holding these views. . . . there will commence an agitation of the slavery question such as the world has never witnessed. Federal officers may refrain from immediate participation in criminal acts, but the abductors of slaves, the fomentors of servile incendiaryism, and coming John Browns, will pursue their iniquitous labors, in the full confidence that, if arrested and brought to trial, it will be by marshals, prosecuting attorneys, juries and judges that sympathize with them, and who believe that the cause in which they are engaged is the cause of righteousness. The effect of this fact alone upon the spirit of fanatic abolitionism in the country will produce the most disastrous results. Give the criminal but the confidence that men of his stamp will sit as judges over him, if arrested; and crime will at once become the audacious ruler of society. So will it be with the "irrepressible conflict." . . . and day by day the whole country will recede farther and farther from the rule of reason.

Thoughts on the course Lincoln would pursue were the natural prelude to descriptions of military activity in the North by which the South would be forced to accept that course. Under a heading of "Black Republicans Arming," and in reference to the growing Wide-Awake organizations in the North, the Mercury reported that Seward's home was arming. "This is eminently right and proper," it stated. "The election of Abraham Lincoln means war upon the South, and the Wide-Awakes, therefore, are but preparing, in the event of his success, for the irrepressible conflict. . . . to drive the slaveholders, like poisoned rats, into their holes." The Mercury explained to its readers that, "the name Wide-Awake was the designation by which John Brown's company was known in Kansas, and was adopted

5Ibid., September 8, 1860.
6Ibid., September 10, 1860.
in compliment to the martyred hero," and that the Wide-Awakes now called themselves "rail splitters" and, "stand by to give military support to Lincoln if the South interferes with his inauguration." Pointing ominously to the future, the Mercury concluded, "from these and similar signs, it is apparent that... we have tough work cut out for us."

The month of September was a relatively quiet one for the Courier with regard to Lincoln in particular and politics in general. Having apparently abandoned Unionism for cooperationism it was as if it were "laying low," watching which way the wind would blow. As a result, its columns were unusually heavy with news of commerce during the month.

When it did speak, the editorial tone seemed reminiscent of the Mercury back in June. In describing a recent caricature of Lincoln, it referred to him sitting on a rail pen in his shirt sleeves, "with all his hideous phiz." The Courier continued:

In between the cracks of the rail pen on which he is sitting is seen a nigger. Horace Greeley is standing alongside, urging a conservative to vote that ticket. He insists it is not the Abolition platform, but the conservative declines, and says he thinks he sees "the nigger in the wood pile." Old Abe is astonished that for splitting rails he should be elevated so high.

The Courier also began to mention for the first time phrases such as the "true issue," the "irrepressible conflict," and other indices of the extreme Southern view.

As in the past, the Courier used articles from other papers to make its points. From the Richmond Enquirer it took an indignant letter from a group of prominent Southerners vacationing at White Sulphur Springs who noted with more anger than alarm, that at a recent Norfolk speech

Ibid., September 13, 17, 1860.

Courier, September 7, 1860.
Douglas had answered a written question from the floor asking him what he thought the President should do if after his election the South were to secede, by stating that it would be the duty of the President to subdue them by arms and that he, Douglas, "will counsel him to do so and aid him to do so by all means in his power." The authors of the letter, in language similar to the Mercury's, stated that with Lincoln's election, "the power of slavery will end," and that the "irrepressible conflict will be pressed to its infamous and bloody close."9 Citing from the Albany Journal later, Courier readers saw a Northern opinion regarding Douglas' speech in Norfolk to the effect that, "Mr. Lincoln, if called out by his friends would have given expression to these sentiments."10 On the same subject, the Courier still later took from the Cincinnati Gazette the statement that since his speech at Norfolk, Douglas was losing ground in the South. "He is charged," the Gazette wrote, "with having pledged himself to support Mr. Lincoln's Administration, and with intending to affiliate with the Republican party."11

Continuing in the same trend, the Courier printed an article from a correspondent of the New York Journal of Commerce, that those who desired secession ought to support Lincoln with the special object of widening the breach between opposing parties as much as possible. The article concluded that the fair Republic could be broken up even faster if the North would send more Abolition preachers to the South, "to teach treason to our laws and institutions."12 The Courier rarely identified Lincoln

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9Ibid., September 12, 1860.
10Ibid., September 18, 1860.
11Ibid., September 24, 1860.
12Ibid., September 19, 1860.
with abolition views either editorially or through the remarks of others. The closest it came, even into September, was to say, "if Mr. Lincoln becomes President, and he is suspected of endorsing, even remotely, those who endorse John Brown . . . the brotherhood of our Union must become alienated, and every succeeding year will find the breach widened until endurance ceases to be a virtue." Near the end of September, however, it published a letter from U. S. Congressman L. M. Keitt, which though typical for the Mercury in which it was also printed, was rather extreme for the Courier. Keitt had written to Congressman Murray urging disunion. With regard to the Republican party he wrote:

Its leaders proclaim that the "conflict is irrepressible," and can only end in the destruction of Northern or Southern society. Irreconcilable enmity is embodied in the very platform of the party. Inextinguishable hatred gleams all through the recorded declarations of its chieftains, and flames out through the avowals of its nominees. Abraham Lincoln, its obscure nominee for the Presidency, has a record which brittles all over with anti-slavery fanaticism.

As the Courier adopted a more extreme tone the Mercury reached out for the extreme radical "fire-eating" expression for which it is known today. If it spoke well of Lincoln it was typical that it would be through a known Abolitionist. For example, Caleb Cushing, the Boston Abolitionist, was quoted in the Mercury as saying of Lincoln that, "in his canvas with Douglas he beat him in law, beat him in argument, and beat him in wit." The supposed slave insurrections in Texas which had been followed closely in the Mercury and hardly at all in the Courier, gave the Mercury ample

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13Ibid.

14The article continued in the same vein citing from Lincoln's House Divided Speech. This was the first time this speech was cited in the Courier. Ibid., September 27, 1860.

15Mercury, August 30, 1860.
opportunity to warn its readers of "Abolition Horrors in Texas" in their own kind of language. In summing up those incidents the Mercury referred to Negroes with Strychnine, assassination plots, the hangings of 20 or 30 Abolitionists, and remarked that the excitement has killed off conservative feeling and that Texans "were now all Disunionists and do not care how soon the crisis comes." Supposedly referring to Texas opinion but undoubtedly reflecting its own, the Mercury also noted that a prominent Texan had said:

We do not care a toss of the copper whom you elect President. If you elect Douglas or Breckinridge, or B all, this hollow Union will continue a few years longer; and if you elect that miserable old rail splitting abolitionist, Abe Lincoln, you only hasten by a few years, the event which is bound to transpire.  

By the middle of September the Mercury had developed what might be called a "one-two-three-punch" towards Lincoln. It consisted of first establishing his abolitionism, second describing the course he would take towards the South as an Abolitionist President, and third showing that his followers were arming to enable him to implement his policies by force. A move in early September by Northern conservative Republicans and Southern Unionists to present Lincoln as more conservative on the slavery issue than the Mercury believed him to be, gave it an opportunity to demonstrate this one-two-three sequence.

First, in an article titled "Lincoln's Radicalism Proved," it wrote that the attempt to show Lincoln moderate on the slavery issue was "utterly futile and vain. Even if Lincoln were not the bigot and extremist which his own words and those of Seward prove him to be," the editor wrote, "he would necessarily have to act on the one great idea which underlies the

16 Ibid., September 8, 1860.
whole structure of the Republican Party." The article continued to the
effect that even if Lincoln "were the most conservative man in the world,"
he could not resist the force of the party nor excuse himself, "from the
duty of protecting the extreme rights of every human being, whether bond
or free."17

The second step in the sequence came the next day through an
article from the Pennsylvania titled, "What Would Be The Effect Of Lin-
coln's Election," in which was stated:

Should Lincoln be elected... he is pledged to do all he can
to bring about the end of slavery... He would have none but
Abolitionists and Black Republicans in office... Should Lincoln
be disposed to be moderate, he would not be allowed to do so... He
would be compelled to carry out the program of a sectional ad-
ministration of the Government and an unrelenting war on slavery.
The South would have no President and no benefit from the Govern-
ment. The conservative element of the North would also be without
the benefit of the Government. Lincoln would be the President of
the Negroes and the Abolitionists, and in all likelihood he would make
the experiment of appointing Negroes to office.18

The third and final step in the sequence, in late September, con-
sisted of warmly endorsing the Minute Men organizations which were spring-
ing up in the South as a Southern imitation of the Wide-Awakes; of numer-
ous articles on the military defenses of Charleston; and, of numerous
statements such as that from State Representative Colonel G. P. Elliot,
who told his constituents at Orangeburg, in particular reference to
Douglas' statement on page 71 above about the use of force, that the
Northerners were duty bound to resist secession by force, and that "Abo-
lation from Delaware to Texas will surely follow Lincoln's election."19

17 Ibid., September 16, 1860.
18 Ibid., September 17, 1860.
19 Ibid., September 22, 1860.
An editorial titled "The North the Aggressor—The South on The Defensive," amplified the force theme. R. B. Rhett Jr. wrote:

Nor will the adoption of a bullying tone, whether by a Douglas or an Andrew, a Lincoln or a know-nothing, remove the necessity that exists for meeting this issue frankly in the pending contest for the Presidency. The Black Republican army of Wide-Awakes will not be equal to the task of dragooning the South into compliance with whatever Black Republican law-givers dictate; they will but nerve the Southern people to sterner resolves and more energetic action.20

The increasingly uncompromising tone of the Mercury could be seen in every issue and on every subject. Speaking of "South Carolina And The Submissionists," it intimated Lincoln and "his army" would take possession of Federal patronage type offices in the South, and, "we are to have a General Gates—and, perhaps, a Lexington and Bunker Hill. The Revolution of '76 is getting stale.... Its incidents want refreshing, by some striking repetitions." 21 Referring to Southerners who might take office under a Republican President the Mercury printed a statement from one Balie Peyton, who, "although an old Whig and a Bell elector from Tennessee, thinks like a true Southern man." Peyton was reported to have said that "he did not believe if Lincoln was elected, he could find a man in the South who would accept any important office under him. If such a man was to be found, he was a traitor, and deemed to be tortured to a terrible death." 22 The Mercury often printed Abolitionist sentiment from the Northern press. A particularly incendiary example consisted of extracts from a speech Caleb Cushing made in Tremont Square in Boston. Concluding on the "true issue," Cushing said that:

20 Ibid., September 24, 1860.

21 Ibid., August 27, 1860.

22 Ibid., September 20, 1860.
The Republican party has been conceived, born and nurtured into strength in order, if possible, to force or seduce the Federal Government into Abolitionism, or else the Republican party is a monstrous or ridiculous abortion, a gigantic falsehood, swindle and fraud. And I reassert confidentially, if Mr. Lincoln is elected, the Republicans will have to burst up at once, or to attack the domestic rights of the States.23

The Mercury printed secession articles of its own almost daily, and whenever it could, gave its readers the secession testimonials of various prominent individuals about the country. It resurrected a statement by ex-President Milliard Fillmore made at a speech in Rochester in 1856 that the success of the Republican party with its particular objects would bring about a dissolution of the Union.24 Intimating that a Tennessee correspondent spoke for Breckinridge, the Mercury left the impression that:

From the hour in which Lincoln was inaugurated, he [Breckinridge] was proud to be a rebel—he would mount the scaffold in such a cause. He would consider Lincoln a perjured traitor when he took the oath to support the Constitution. It had been said the South would wait for some overt act of aggression. He would pursue no such policy.25

The Mercury found a supporter in Congressman W. B. Reed of Philadelphia and used his statements frequently. Reed found grave objections to Lincoln's candidacy. Noting that with one exception Lincoln had maintained a resolute and prudent silence and that his discussions with Douglas had been characterized by frankness and ability, Reed said that Lincoln had nevertheless, a year ago, been "betrayed into language, which, though not very precise, and a little ambitious, was ominous. It was this: 'this is a world of compensations, and he who would be no slave must consent to

23 Ibid., September 22, 1860.
24 Ibid., August 15, 1860.
25 Ibid., September 24, 1860.
have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not them-
selves, and under a just God cannot long retain it." Reed, who called
Lincoln a "progressive republican," continued:

It is not easy to say what this means but it has an ugly look. 
Since his nomination, Mr. Lincoln has spoken once, and once too of-
ten. I refer to his speech at Springfield four weeks ago, which was 
the more significant as he appears to have been taken by surprise, 
and to have spoken out, under an impulse, his inner thoughts. . . . 
His language was: "My friends, you will fight for this cause, four 
years hence, as you now fight for it, and even stronger than you now 
fight for it, though I may be dead and gone. . . ." Does it mean 
there is to be no repose, no settlement, no finality under his ad-
ministration . . . that not content with the victory of a compact 
North over the stricken and insulted South, the arms are not to be 
laid aside.26

As the effort to promote secession advanced, the Mercury left 

Constitutional arguments more and more alone and sought to appeal to any 
and every side of its listeners that it could. To the merchants and those 
who were financially indebted to Northerners, it said Northern merchants 
would have to wait for bills owed them until "all the exigencies of our 
new condition shall have been provided for—until we are armed and for-
tified—until good crops bring us full pockets."27 As if to shame those 
who would not resist Lincoln's election the Mercury said submissionists 
were, "women, better fitted to rock the cradle and sing the infant lulla-
by, Rock A Bye Baby."28 To those who might question Lincoln's extremism 
it editorialized that the $50.00 that they heard Lincoln had contributed

26 Ibid., September 25, 1860. Keitt's letter to the Courier and 
Mercury cited above contained a slightly different interpretation of this 
strangely prophetic remark. He reported Lincoln as saying "that this agi-
tation would go on long after he had passed away"; and that "years hence 
his party would be engaged in the same crisis." Courier and Mercury, Sep-
ember 27, 1860.

27 Mercury, September 24, 1860.

28 Ibid., September 25, 1860.
to a fund for purchasing Sharpe's rifles for Jim Lane and John Brown in Kansas would have bought two rifles. "Possibly one of these rifles is the one with which Lane shot poor Jenkins when he came to get a bucket of water from his own well; and the other the one with which old Brown murdered the Doyles—father and son." And, to the young men of South Carolina it issued poetical, patriotic proclamations such as, "Have you sharpened your swords for the battle is nigh—The morn of the conflict is breaking." In the particular passionate plea which followed that proclamation, all the elements of the one-two-three sequence could be seen. Lincoln the Abolitionist, exponent of "the most powerful faction which has ever polluted the political history of our Country," would seal the doom of the Democratic party and, "inaugurate the millennium of freedom and universal liberty by expunging from our midst the existence of the institution of slavery... We must accept ruin—certain, fixed, inevitable ruin—in the Union, or we must take our chances out of it." His election alone, the Mercury concluded, would be the consummation of the "overt act," and that therefore, the South should sharpen its swords.  

Just as the ultimate denunciation to the Mercury was that one was an Abolitionist, so the inexpressible degradation would be for one to be rejected by the Abolitionist Black Republican Party, a fate the Mercury attributed to Douglas when it reported, "the only reason Mr. Douglas is not a Black Republican at this time, is because the Black Republicans would not have him."  

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29 Ibid., September 26, 1860.
30 Ibid., September 28, 1860.
31 Ibid., September 18, 1860.
a fanatic Abolitionist, the effort continued to establish his running mate's mulatto status. Thus one read that, "in their fanatical and insane desire of humiliating and insulting us of the South, it has pleased them to put forward a candidate for the Vice-Presidency, a man asserted to be, and thus far without contradiction, a mulatto." 32

As the last month of the campaign opened, the Courier found itself in a dilemma of its own making. Having committed itself to secession, even though by cooperation, it still obviously regretted the prospects of a divided Union. It could on the one hand say that Lincoln was "the apostle of John Quincy Adams, who began life by betraying his father and his party, and ended by betraying his country; and who, in the rapture of his fanaticism exclaimed: 'let emancipation come, though it come stained with blood of five hundred thousand Southern men, women and children," 33 and, on the other hand, print with approval, a note from the Savannah Republican to the effect that "Senator Chestnut told a gentleman ... a few days ago that he would not regard the election of Lincoln as a cause for seceding from the Union." 34 On the one hand the Courier would write of the "Real Design of Black Republicans," while on the other hand their only editorial comment on Keith's secession letter consisted of an appraisal by the Washington Constitution that, "while our readers will readily understand, we cannot endorse all the doctrines which the talented South Carolinian enunciates therein, we find much in it to admire and commend." 35

32 Ibid., October 2, 1860.

33 Courier, September 27, 1860.

34 Ibid., October 1, 1860. Chestnut was one of South Carolina's U. S. Senators. He promptly repudiated the statement in both the Savannah Republican and the Courier.

35 Ibid., October 6, 1860.
Similarly, the Courier mentioned "muskets for the South" and questioned the adequacy of Southern military readiness, while at the same time they continued to ask "what shall we do in the event Lincoln is elected." So far as it can be accurately determined, the Courier's position in early October towards disunion was first that cooperative secession was "practicable," but that outright secession was an "infatuation" and State sentiment was "not favorable to independent State action." Secondly, it obviously hoped that commerce and a healthy economic environment would not be interrupted by Lincoln's election. In this regard it hopefully stated:

"Though the newspapers are full of politics and terrific forebodings, the minds of the people are engrossed in the eager pursuit of business, which, in all its branches, and in every part of the Union was never more profitably prosecuted than now. Even should Lincoln be elected, the attention of the people will not be diverted for a day from their customary pursuits."

In a significant conservative editorial shift, from roughly October 10 through 27, the Courier vainly attempted to stem the secessionist tide. After numerous moderate cooperationist articles the Courier picked up the Northern conservative argument that even if Lincoln were elected he would be faced with a minority in both Houses of Congress and, would have to encounter a very formidable opposition from the commencement of his administration, thus forcing him to be cautious and moderate towards the South. Following up that theme with a long article from their Washington correspondent, the Courier reported a week later:

There is a current rumor that Abraham Lincoln is very desirous of an opportunity to disclaim in public, as he has done in private,

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36Ibid., October 2, 1860.
37Ibid., October 4 and 6, 1860.
38Ibid., October 12, 1860.
some of the views and designs that have been erroneously imputed to him, as he says, both by political friends and opponents. It is reported that he intends, after the election, if he be elected, to cause to be published a statement to the effect that he intends to administer the Government in strict conformity with the Constitution, and with the strictest regard for the rights of the South. He will deny that he is in favor of the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, or the suppression of the inter-State Slave Trade, or the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law. . . . A large portion of the old line Whigs who support Lincoln are conservative on the subject of slavery, and they say that they intend to sustain Lincoln in the "conflict" which he is to have with the Abolition wing of the Republican Party. 39

The Courier's purpose seemed to be to attempt to convince its readers that the anti-Lincoln majorities in Congress and the strength of the Constitution itself would render Lincoln's victory "barren of any fruits." Citing from the New York World, the Courier assured its readers that, "it would not be possible for the coming President to harm the South, even if he had the disposition; and that knowledge of his complete inability ought of itself to banish every apprehension from every Southern mind. There is really no antagonism of interests between sections." 40 Even while the Courier offered its readers such conciliatory notes it seemed to sense that the die had been cast and it could not successfully oppose the unanimity of feeling in the State without losing its support. So, while it sought to prevent disunion it continued to mention almost daily, such things as the arming of Minute Men; the adequacy of Charleston Harbor defenses; the support and defense of slavery, and inconsistently paid lip service to the majority feeling in the State that Lincoln's election would put the Union at "imminent and instant hazard."

Southern Unionists faced a painful dilemma. They did not believe

39 Ibid., October 17, 1860.
40 Ibid., October 15 and 18, 1860.
secession was a proper remedy for the State's grievances but they could not express themselves too vehemently against a movement which was assuming the character of a super patriotic move for Southern independence. Intense local pressure brought them into the disunionists camp but it truly was a case of the lesser of two evils. So the Courier shifted back and forth from Unionism to disunion, from no secession to cooperative secession. Late in October it wrote:

"On every side we see some signs of an apprehended political agitation in the country consequent upon the election of Lincoln. An individual so obscure as he is, one of whom so little is known, could hardly be chosen President, unless as an agent of some strong and intelligent organization. It is in this light that he is viewed. . . by those who deem his election an adequate cause for breaking up the present confederation. In every other point of view he would not be dangerous." 41

The article continued on to speak of Lincoln's probable ineffectiveness as a minority President. Two days later the pendulum swung the other way and the Courier flatly stated, "Resistance to Lincoln is Obedience to God," and again that, "the election of Lincoln is the dissolution of the Union."

Another two days passed and it recommended John Townsend's incendiary secessionist pamphlets to its readers only the next day to state, "rumors are rife about extraordinary overtures from the Republicans to the South, if the leaders will only keep quiet. . . . Combinations are forming which will astound the Country." 42

The Mercury left Lincoln alone throughout the first week in October, devoting most of its editorial effort to persuading its readers to require Presidential electors to pledge themselves to a State secession convention before being allowed to accept their commissions. As the

\[41\] Ibid., October 20, 1860.
\[42\] Ibid., October 25, 1860.
Courier developed its theme on Lincoln's moderation, however, the Mercury recognized the threat and rose to the challenge. Noting on October 8, that some of the Southern presses were apologizing for Black Republicanism and presenting it as having become more moderate, it ran extracts from Seward's recent speech in St Paul, Minnesota in which Lincoln's support of the irrepressible conflict was supposedly established. Seward said that the overruling power by which the higher law controlled even the most perverse wills meant that the country would become, as it was meant to be, a land of freedom, not slavery. He continued:

Slavery today is, for the first time, not only powerless, but without influence in the American Republic. . . . This victory is won, provided that you stand determined to maintain the great Republican party, under its great and glorious leader, Abraham Lincoln, in inaugurating its principles into the administration of the Government . . . until the adversary shall find out that he has been beaten and shall voluntarily retire from the field.43

The "High Priest of Secession" and his son, R. B. Rhett, Jr., the editor of the Mercury, must have remembered their completely unexpected defeat at the hands of the Unionists and cooperationists in 1852 for as the last month of the campaign drama unfolded an extraordinary effort was directed towards convincing South Carolina to secede. When the Mercury's Washington correspondent wrote that Lincoln somehow hoped to quiet the fears of the South through a conservative plea, the Mercury wondered if the South was to be thought of as a tame elephant which Seward and Lincoln could alternately feed and beat. It said Lincoln and Seward were "no-bodies in the great contest; only the froth on the top of the wave." Then placing all the blame for the present turbulent state of affairs on Lincoln and Seward, it stated, "they have, by their demogogical and fanatic

43Mercury, October 8, 1860.
appeals to the people of the North, divided the Union into two great antagonistic sections. They have taught the people of the North that it is their... high and holy mission to extinguish African slavery in the South." The article in which these statements appeared continued:

But they cannot arrest the tide of sectional fanaticism and ambition, short of its great consummation—the abolition of African slavery in the South. If Mr. Lincoln was to come out and declare that he held sacred every right of the South with respect to African slavery, no one should believe him; and, if he was believed, his professions should have not the least influence on the course of the South.

The Mercury next submitted "proof" of Lincoln's "unchanged fanatical abolitionism" to its readers, by printing excerpts from a speech he had delivered the previous year in Kansas while the fight over the speakership in the House was in progress. Though edited and emphasized to suit its purpose; the Mercury's rendition of that speech, cited below, contained more of Lincoln's actual remarks than was printed in its pages at any other time from his nomination until South Carolina seceded:

You Democrats greatly fear that the success of the Republicans will destroy the Union. Why? Do the Republicans declare against the Union? Nothing like it. Your own statement of it is, that, if the Black Republicans elect a President, you won't stand it. You will break up the Union. That will be your act, not ours. To justify it, you must show that our policy gives you just cause for such desperate action. Can you do that? When you attempt it you will find our policy is exactly the policy of the men who made the Union, nothing more nor nothing less. Do you think you are justified to break up the Government rather than to have it administered by Washington, and the other good and great men who made it, and who first administered it? If you do you are very unreasonable, and more reasonable men cannot, and will not submit to you. While we elect a President, it will be our duty to see that you submit. Old John Brown has been hung for treason against a State. We cannot object, even though slavery is wrong. That cannot excuse violence, bloodshed, and treason. It could avail him nothing that he might think himself right. So, if constitutionally, we elect a President, and, therefore, you undertake to destroy the Union, it will be our duty to deal with you, as Old John Brown has been dealt with. We can

Ibid., October 13, 1860.
only do our duty. We hope, and believe, that in no section will a majority so act, as to render such extreme measures necessary.\(^5\)

The final remarks in the *Mercury* on secession before the election comprised a variety of incendiary appeals. It appealed to Southerners' patriotism by mentioning the wild threat of a Virginian named Pryor that,

> If Abraham Lincoln should dare to invade Virginia with Federal mercenaries . . . the Old Dominion, prolific mother of heroes and patriots, would supply some Brutus to plant the dagger in the bosom of the tyrant; and, for myself, I would covet no greater applause of posterity, than to be the instrument of the deed and that deliverance.\(^6\)

It reminded its readers that, "slave property, is the foundation of all property in the South," and that by submitting to the administration of Lincoln and Hamlin the value of slaves would immediately drop $100,00 each which at 4,300,000 slaves amounted to a $430,000,000.00 loss on slaves alone. The depreciation of slave value would, the *Mercury* cried, shake the stability of real estate and all other property including banks, bonds, and stocks. "Timid men will sell out and leave the South. Confusion, distrust, and pressure must reign."\(^7\) It wrote that while secession would suspend Northern debts, war would extinguish them. Also, it frequently appealed to Southern women with such statements as, "will they not shame any husbands, or sons, or brothers, who wish to submit to free Negro rule, in the persons of Lincoln and Hamlin (the latter part Negro)!\(^8\)

In an article entitled "The Beginning To The End," the *Mercury*

\(^5\)*Ibid.*

\(^6\)*Ibid.*, October 8, 1860.

\(^7\)*Ibid.*, October 11, 1860.

\(^8\)*Ibid.*, October 27, 1860.
let its readers know of an advertisement from the **Pittsburgh Dispatch**, commenting, "It speaks for itself":

*Colored men of Pittsburgh and Vicinity—You are requested to meet and form yourselves into Wide-Awake clubs immediately, for the purpose of furthering the interest of the friend of the human race, Abraham Lincoln. Do not leave the Dutch and Irish to monopolize all the honor of electing Lincoln and Hamlin. Colored men have a right to act at the polls as a Vigilance Committee for the prevention of illegal voting. John Brown, the hero of Harpers Ferry is yet to be avenged.*

OSSAWATTOMIE

In the same vein the **Mercury** ran an article from the **Montgomery Mail** which asserted that, "Lincoln's strength is in no inconsiderable degree, swelled by buck Negroes; and these are the people that Yankee emissaries ask the South to submit to." Adding that the day of amalgamation had not come, it concluded: "Massachusetts may mulattoize herself, and doubtless will—but when she seeks, with the other Northern States, to institute the doctrine in the South, by imposing on us a free Negro Vice-President, the day will have come for dissolution.*

Amongst the **Mercury**'s final observations on Lincoln during the campaign was its view that Seward was thrust aside in the nominating convention because he had temporized with the South and lacked the nerve to carry through measures to subjugate that section. Lincoln was considered the more dangerous of the two because he was considered "more honest in his convictions," and possessed the "decision of character and earnestness required" to be fully equal to any emergency originating in Southern attempts at resistance. Summing up its view of Lincoln, the **Mercury** added:

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49 Ibid., October 19, 1860.

50 Ibid., October 29, 1860.
Nor will anyone who has examined the lineaments of his countenance, as depicted in the engravings of his admirers, doubt his being a proper tool to accomplish the purposes of our enemies. The beau ideal of relentless dogged, freecoll, border-ruffians—a Southerner by birth, a Northerner in feeling and association—a fanatic in philanthropy, and a vulgar mobocrat and a Southern hater in political opinions—he is the very man for the occasion. If ever in possession of the executive powers of the Government, he will neither turn back from his work, nor do it by halves—fit chieftain of those who selected him—the author who first gave expression to the doctrine of the "impressible conflict," now chosen to be the finisher of the faith.51

As the campaign drew to a close, three distinct though interrelated attitudes towards Lincoln and his probable election could be seen in the Mercury's columns. Its fundamental attitude was that it was not the election of Lincoln or any other man they opposed but rather the placing in power of a party, "purely and entirely sectional in its political principles, its morals and religion."52 Such a position, however, was too matter-of-fact to be used often as the inflammatory propaganda material necessary to convince the State to secede. The second attitude was framed by the impatient desire to secede immediately after Lincoln's election, and the Mercury, therefore, actually hoped for his election. Though it occasionally paid lip service to the Union, there can be no doubt that this was so. By the end of October it spoke openly of that desire when it observed that Breckinridge would only, "protract, for a few years, a feverish and therefore dangerous existence." Putting the matter more colloquially but also more to the point, its position corresponded with the feelings of a South Carolinian who wrote from Texas:

I talk Breckinridge whenever I get a chance; but if Lincoln is elected, and South Carolina and the South Submit, I am going to

51 Ibid., October 15, 1860.

52 Ibid., September 11, 1860.
Mexico: I would rather be a greaser than a South Carolinian or a Southerner. I hope Lincoln will be elected, and that we will get face to face with those d---d yankees. If he is elected, and my native State faces the music, I will be at home by the first train.

The *Mercury* could not campaign for Lincoln of course, therefore, its third attitude—the attitude for the masses and the position receiving the most editorial attention as the campaign drew to a close—was that:

In other words, Mr. Lincoln *ADVOCATES BOLDLY and CLEARLY, a war of the North against the South, of free States against slave States—a war of extermination—to be continued relentlessly, until the one or the other shall be subdued, and all the States shall become either free or slave.*

Late in the campaign both the *Mercury* and the *Courier* caught a rumor from their Washington correspondents that Lincoln would offer the office of Secretary of State to Mr. William O. Rives of Virginia, and the post of Attorney General to a South Carolinian. The *Courier* gave the rumor a greater spread in its newspaper and left its editorial reaction to the rumor neutral. The *Mercury* reported the rumor sarcastically, underlined the part about the office to a South Carolinian and concluded no Southerner "would so consent to outrage the public." Despite its seemingly neutral acceptance of the rumor, the *Courier's* editorial tone was increasingly disunionist. From the *Montgomery Mail* it reported the South was infested with hundreds of Abolition Agents, whose business was "to prepare our people for the rule of Lincoln. . . . to entrap Southern voters into such commitments as to prevent ever any effectual resistance.

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54 *Ibid.*, October 23, 1860. The statement was introduced as a remark to Lincoln by Douglas in their debates in 1858.

55 *Courier and Mercury*, October 27, 1860.
to Abolitionism." From the same source, the Courier reported that the
"overt-act" men were gradually disappearing, that the blood of Souther-
ners was getting hot and that, "if for no other reason, the South would
resist the Lincoln Administration on account of the mulatto Hamlin."56

Towards the end of the campaign the Courier assumed a more bit-
ter and extreme tone. It spoke of stock market disorders which would
be great and far reaching as a result of the mistaken confidence of those
who bought and sold on the assumption that Lincoln's election would not
destroy public confidence. It acidly observed that, "the fall of the
stocks, etc., certainly shows that the public judgement is that Lincoln
will be elected, and that, therefore, the farce may extend generally to
business operations."57 It began to use the word "nigger" more often, a
word the Mercury rarely used, referring to Lincoln's party as, "nigger
worshippers."58 It reported that many leading conservative politicians
in the State contended "that to submit to the election of Lincoln is to
consent to a lingering death,"59 and, it mentioned numerous toasts to
secession, at banquets and the like, such as, "The Last Straw That Broke
the Camels Back—Lincoln."60 By its petulant tone as much as by its ac-
tual statements, the Courier indicated that though its attitude towards
secession reflected the majority sentiment in South Carolina, it did so
begrudgingly.

56 Courier, October 27 and 29, 1860.
57 Ibid., November 3, 1860.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., November 7, 1860.
60 Ibid., November 6, 1860.
The Courier's final remarks on Lincoln seemed to consist of a wistful analysis of his alleged conservatism. It admitted that it was possible that Lincoln would not commit an aggressive act upon the South and that he might also form a conservative cabinet, but it wrote that it nevertheless considered such an eventuality as too unrealistic a betrayal of the party that elected him, and that the South would feel no security in that betrayal even were it probable. It realized it was too late for a reconciliation, for the Gulf States would have acted long before Lincoln's inauguration, so that his supposed conservatism could not save the Union anyway. It concluded its reporting of the campaign, with the observation that, "the South looks to your military and militant Wide Awakes, to your Banners, your speeches, your press, your votes and not to what Mr. Lincoln may say or do after his election. . . . The only voice that can or ought to have weight with the South is the vote of the North." There was no evidence of delight or joy at the Courier offices when news of Lincoln's election was received.

The Mercury closed out the campaign with a typical flair. It wrote sarcastic notes, such as, that all Lincoln was asking of the South was that they voluntarily give up $3,200,000,000.00 in slave property. It printed long summations on disunion from such extreme secessionists as John Townsend, President of the Edisto Island Vigilant Association and The 1860 Association. It reminded its readers in every issue that Lincoln was a fanatical wild-eyed abolitionist who, with his "Brown-Helper" party, sought possession and complete control of the Federal Treasury.

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
and of the Army and Navy, as a means of whipping the South into line. When Lincoln's election was reported on November 8, crowds flocked around the Mercury office and cheered as the resignation notices of Federal Officers were posted upon the Bulletin Board, and again when the South Carolina State flag was unfurled from an upper window of the Mercury building. The Mercury recorded the feeling which prevailed as follows:

Yesterday, November 7th will be a memorable day in Charleston. The tea has been thrown overboard—the revolution of 1860 has been initiated. Intense though quiet excitement prevails throughout the community. The Government officials, as our columns will show, have resigned. From early evening on Tuesday, until two o'clock the next morning, the Mercury office was crowded with anxious expectants of the news. . . . Our bulletin board was surrounded and our office filled with a continually flowing crowd. At twelve o'clock there was unfurled from our windows and stretched across the street a red flag, with the Palmetto and Lone Star. A shout from below, and twice three hearty cheers greeted its appearance. The Association of 1860 immediately assembled, and arrangements have been made for a public meeting to endorse the action of the Legislature in the call of a State Convention to assemble as soon as practicable. The feeling on all hands is for prompt State action. . . . On every lip is the stern cry "Vive La Libertat!"

The joy which both the Mercury and Charleston secessionists met the news of Lincoln's election contrasts markedly with what Dumond reported as the general attitude in the South. He said that most of the Southern press reported that the election of an anti-slavery President was thought of as a coldblooded insult which was met, not by noisy threats or passionate exclamations, but by "a settled determination that the South shall never be oppressed under Lincoln's Administration." In the Mercury's joy at Lincoln's election may be seen the elation of those who successfully prevented the Democratic Party at its conventions, from uniting on a single candidate or national platform by picturing the Demo-
cratic Party as an organization without a creed, divided on every prac-
tical issue including the tariff, internal improvements, slavery, and
the Constitutional right of secession. In its joy may be seen its
success at keeping the Democratic Party split by thoroughly discrediting
Douglas and his popular sovereignty as any kind of representative of
Southern interests. Finally, in its joy may be seen the persistent,
though sometimes veiled, desire that Lincoln would be elected so that the
issue of secession or submission could be met with once and for all.

Editorial positions in the Courier throughout the campaign were
marked by indecision; indecision first as to whether or not secession
was necessary, and later, when reluctantly committed to the idea, in-
decision as to how it should be best accomplished. The Courier's lin-
ering Unionism, which was never completely masked, reflected its earlier
hope that Lincoln could somehow be defeated, and its later hope that the
nation could yet live in peace under him.

Editorial positions in the Mercury from first to last, were cen-
tered around the idea that Lincoln's election itself constituted an overt
hostile act of such magnitude as to immediately endanger the peace and
threaten the liberties of the South. For all practical purposes the se-
cession movement in South Carolina ended when Lincoln was elected Presi-
dent, for by that time the vast majority of the people were convinced not
only that the State must secede, but that it must do so promptly. The
actual mechanics of secession were almost anti-climatic.
CHAPTER V

SOUTH CAROLINA SECEDES

According to Dwight Dumond, the majority of the Southern press in November and December were devoted to a discussion of Southern grievances; the possibility of securing definitive amendments to the Constitution, and the means whereby cooperative secession was to be accomplished. In Charleston, however, the Mercury was appealing to the people in stirring poetry and prose to join the crusade for independence while the Courier continued to examine Lincoln's conservatism and moderate appeals. Both the Mercury and the Courier printed with approval every resignation of a Southern Federal appointee of whom they received notice. Their pages were a forum for a discussion on the design of a new national flag for the State. They discussed the adequacy of military preparations in the South, the State and City, and recorded with pride the military activities of the local minute-men organizations, which groups increased in number almost weekly. They rarely missed an opportunity to print some item of abuse or insult from the Northern press.

The issue which received the greatest amount of editorial comment in either newspaper concerned the mechanics of secession. South Carolina was the only State in the Union in 1860 which chose its presidential electors by a vote of the Legislature. That body remained in session after casting the State's vote for Breckinridge until the result of the election became known so that in the event Lincoln was elected it could call a
State Convention to consider its course of action without having to be called together especially for that purpose. The Legislature ordered an election for December 6, to choose delegates for a State secession convention which was to assemble in Columbia on December 17. There was an effort in Charleston to bury party differences in the election of the convention delegates by limiting nominations to a single ticket of twenty-two names representing the radicals and moderates equally, but the idea failed and there were finally no less than twenty-three separate tickets. The Mercury caused deep resentment when it attempted to force every candidate to commit himself both to immediate and permanent dissolution of the Union as a prerequisite to his election by daily classifying the candidates as "explicit" or "not explicit" according to whether they had satisfactorily answered the questions. Most candidates gave satisfactory replies to the Mercury which were printed in its sheets. A few, out of indignation, refused to reply. These included active secessionists such as R. N. Gourdin and John Townsend of "The 1860 Association," as well as a number of conservatives.

These were times of extraordinary excitement during which the idea of secession was raised to a lofty patriotic peak and adorned with the sacred cloak of a crusade for Southern independence. Secession, which had been heretofore thought of as simply the exercise of a great and unquestionable Constitutional right, became apotheosized as a revolutionary movement for freedom from the tyranny of naked Northern oppression, spawning numerous poetic announcements such as:

Hail November's seventh morn!
Hail auspicious, glorious dawn!
Hail banner to the breeze just thrown!
Hail Southern chivalry
While in humble prayer we bow,
God will bless our solemn vow,
Ever to maintain as now,
States Rights—Liberty!

Most of the mention of Lincoln in the Courier in November dealt with his alleged conservative views. On three separate occasions it referred to the conservative Republican U. S. Representative, Thomas Corwin of Ohio, as one of the authorized channels of communications between Lincoln and the public for purposes of disclosing Lincoln's conservative views towards the South. The first occasion, the day after Lincoln's election was announced, it mentioned a letter Lincoln reportedly gave Corwin when he visited him in Illinois. The Courier felt that whatever disavowals of radicalism might be in the letter would not disarm the hostility of the South, but would only render him less odious to Northern conservatives. When Corwin arrived in Washington on November 12, the Courier reported that he said the South should have no cause of complaint against Lincoln, that Buchanan's Administration was against coercion and that all parties in Washington concurred that the best policy was to leave the South to the South. Finally, its Baltimore correspondent wrote that Corwin gave frequent assurances "that Mr. Lincoln's Administration will be eminently conservative—that it will, in fact, be a Clay-Whig Administration in all respects."

Other reflections on Lincoln's conservatism in the Courier included an article from the New York Times containing, it stated, a dis-

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1*Mercury*, November 30, 1860.
2*Courier*, November 9, 1860.
patch from Springfield, Illinois that Lincoln's cabinet would be extremely conservative consisting of either Seward of New York, Cameron of Pennsylvania, or Rives of Virginia for Secretary of State; John Bell of Tennessee for Secretary of Interior; Cassius Clay of Kentucky for Secretary of War; Colfax of Indiana or Chandler of Maryland for Postmaster General; John Minor Botts of Virginia for Secretary of the Navy, and Henry W. Davis of Maryland for Attorney General. The Courier's Baltimore correspondent continued to argue that the checks and balances inherent in our form of government and the opposition in Congress against him would render Lincoln impotent, and "leave the South time to elect a President congenial to their views." Finally, in a rather ingenious line of reasoning a Courier correspondent writing under the pseudonym of "Quintus" generated some interest by arguing that Congress could not legally organize if any State's delegation were absent. He continued that if Congress could not organize, the Electoral College could not report Lincoln's election, therefore, if the State's delegation were absent, his election would be void and secession would not be necessary. Quintus' remarks were not too well received.

The Courier did not always mention Lincoln's conservatism in as neutral a tone as that above. It reported, for example, that soon after his inauguration he would obtain a Congress of the same views and then the Supreme Court would be "reconstructed." Then, "with a sectional Congress to enact sectional laws, a sectional court to affirm their Con-

5Ibid., November 10, 1860.
6Ibid., November 11, 1860.
7Ibid., November 17, 1860.
stitutionality and a sectional Executive to enforce them, what real and substantial rights can we enjoy in the Union? We will live almost by suffering." It also took a note from the Spartanburg Express that Lincoln's supposed conciliatory proclamations to the South were a humiliation which added insult to injury. Finally, its New York correspondent wrote in hot indignation that "the defiant, outrageous, language" used by Lincoln's supporters there, which he thought was "unscrupulous, unconstitutional or disgraceful," could be seen in the following example:

By his oath of office he will be required to see the laws of the United States faithfully executed. But, at the same time, he will be left to consider and adjudge what those laws are. Will he, with a coward's brand on his brow attempt to enforce the infamous Fugitive Slave Law—a law which though signed and enforced by Milliard Fillmore, is repudiated by all Christendom, and which, till the end of time will stink in the nostrils of every independent man and citizen.

One of the more realistic comments to appear in the Courier on the course Lincoln would probably pursue, came towards the end of November. Reporting that the New York Evening Post contained a letter from Lincoln's home in Springfield, Illinois, written by an unnamed confidant after a private conference with Lincoln, the Courier indicated the Post styled the letter as a "semi-official program of the intentions of the President elect." The writer said that:

Lincoln will conduct his Administration conformably to the sentiment of his previous speeches, and will not be driven from his course by the threats of the Disunionists or the counsels of the timid Republicans. He will make no publication of his policy but is determined to be President of the whole country. He approves of Jackson's course in regard to South Carolina and Nullification, and will act as much like him as circumstances permit. His cabinet will be com-

8 Ibid., November 9, 1860.
9 Ibid., November 10, 1860.
10 Ibid., November 15, 1860.
posed of true Republicans and not even Bell will be asked to take a seat therein.\(^{11}\)

The whole cycle of first reporting Lincoln's alleged conservatism, second scorning that conservatism, and finally concluding that it was too late, or too unlikely to be true, was repeated again in the Courier late in November. From the Chattanooga Gazette it reported that a wealthy Southern planter, who needed more slaves to pick his crop but was concerned that their value would depreciate too much in the troubled times to warrant the purchase, actually visited Lincoln in Illinois to determine for himself his views on slavery. Lincoln was reported to have told him he neither favored interference with slavery in the States nor abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia, but only opposed the extension of slavery in the territories. Further, Lincoln remarked that if South Carolina seceded he would let her go as long as Congress did not pass a force bill, and that if no one would accept office in the State they would, of course, receive no benefits from the Government, and would have to bear the expense of the distribution of the mails themselves. Finally, Lincoln was reported as advising the planter to purchase as many slaves as he needed and that in twelve months slave property would be worth more than it had ever been. Perhaps naturally, the planter and the Gazette reported Lincoln as, "a man of profound acquirements, and that he doubts not will make as good, if not better President than Mr. Buchanan has done."\(^{12}\)

Just as the Courier allowed the Chattanooga Gazette to describe Lincoln's conservatism, it let another newspaper repudiate it. From the

\(^{11}\text{Ibid., November 21, 1860.}\)

\(^{12}\text{Ibid., November 23, 1860.}\)
Chicago Democrat, the Courier took an article reporting that, "the whole conservative stampede at the South is got up on purpose to make Lincoln turn his back upon the principles which elected him." The Democrat asserted that the days of slavery were numbered and that "no Lincoln could stay the fiat of the people against it." Further, the Democrat added, "any attempt on the part of Lincoln to favor the South, as touching the institution of slavery, would only make Northern people still more excited against the institution."\(^\text{13}\)

The Mercury was so engrossed in the progress of the secession movement and so convinced of its ultimate success, that it rarely mentioned its views on the discussion of Lincoln's conservatism in both the North and South. On the last day of November, however, it finally did print a letter to the editor on the subject as follows:

Among the various movements of these stirring times, we notice none so curious, artful and subtle in its real purpose as the gentle, yet earnest tone of conciliation which pervades the Northern press. Surely, surely, there is no sensible man in the great North who, for an instant, imagines that an exposition of Mr. Lincoln's policy, however conciliatory it might be, can, in any way, reconcile the South at this juncture... The South is truly on her way to destiny, and if prudence, wisdom, honesty and discretion guide her councils, that destiny will be the brightest and most glorious in the annals of the world.\(^\text{14}\)

Both newspapers eventually, correctly related Lincoln's silence and past record to the probable course he would follow, just as Lincoln had asked the curious to do. The Courier reported that the remarks Lincoln made in the course of the Senatorial campaign with Douglas were "believed to indicate his position correctly."\(^\text{15}\) The Mercury reported that

\(^{13}\text{Ibid., November 29, 1860.}\)

\(^{14}\text{Mercury, November 30, 1860.}\)

\(^{15}\text{ Courier, November 10, 1860.}\)
Lincoln himself stated that in relation to the course he would follow, that if his record for the past six years gained no credit his present assertions would be treated no better. 16

Editorial comment on secession, in which Lincoln was mentioned, seemed to be of two distinctive types. There were the now standard slogans or pronouncements such as, "submission to Lincoln will be the ruin and degradation of the South," 17 which the Courier seemed to favor, and long bitter polemics such as the Mercury seemed to favor. An example of the latter was R. B. Rhett's speech at the Institute Hall in Charleston on November 12, at a meeting of the people of the City to ratify the State Legislature's call for a secession convention. Rhett reviewed the causes of discord between North and South with his own fiery rhetoric and concluded that on the principle of hostility to African slavery the North had elected, "a Southern renegade—spewed out of the bosom of Kentucky into Illinois—and a Northern white—washed or octoroon mulatto, to be President and Vice-President of the United States." Rhett stated that a "naked sectional despotism" was organized over the South, "as hating as it is hated—with all the fury of fanaticism, and all the lust of avarice and ambition to direct its power." 18

The second type of secession comment, and one in which a subtle yet distinct shift in emphasis could be noted, seemed to originate in the Courier's acceptance of the statement that Lincoln's election was taken as an occasion for action but was not the only cause. 19

Richard Yeadon,

16 Mercury, November 20, 1860.
17 Courier, November 30, 1860.
18 Mercury, November 21, 1860.
19 Courier, November 10, 1860.
previously an editor of the Courier speaking at the same ratification meeting at which R. B. Rhett spoke, stated that he regarded the election of Lincoln as "overt act enough" and that whatever his alleged conservative opinions he was a minority President elected without the vote of any Southern State. Yeadon seemed to be attempting to reconcile the differences between radical and moderate secessionists by the observation that "separate state action is no longer identified with isolated state action." Shortly afterwards, the Courier reported that secession had come to mean cooperation. Still another change in the Courier's attitude towards Lincoln and the secession issue was its new emphasis on the Mercury's old position that the cause of the "quarrel" was "not that Abraham Lincoln has been elected President, but it is in the cause which led to his election. The fact is that the Government is about to be sectionalized." The best example of this point was taken from an address of Governor J. W. Ellis of North Carolina, who stated:

It is true, that Abraham Lincoln is elected President according to the forms of the Constitution: It is equally true that George the Third was the rightful occupant of the British Throne, yet our fathers submitted not to his authority. They rebelled not against the man... but against... that power "behind the throne"... So it is with us. It is not the man Abraham Lincoln, that we regard but the power that elevated him to office, and which will naturally maintain a controlling influence in his Administration.

These subtle shifts, the basically temperate statements in the Courier, and conservative opinion throughout the State found little expression in the Mercury. For the most part the Mercury beat the same

20Ibid., November 17, 1860.
21Ibid., November 19, 1860.
22Ibid., November 16, 1860.
23Ibid., November 24, 1860.
warning drum it had beat for so long. "Elect Lincoln and subdue the slaveholders," it reported was the Republican cry. It cited from a Northern newspaper identified only as a "State Journal," that "the miserable and insolent band of slaveholders must be subdued, not because they are slaveholders, but because they form a despotism intolerable to every section—a band of 300,000 petty tyrants." The Mercury stated that "Lincoln and his followers care not a straw for Negroes but they hate and despise the South." Its New York correspondent who wrote that statement, described a fantastic plot by which the Republicans intended to use the Illinois Railroad to rob the Government of 5,000,000 acres of public lands, and reported that Lincoln was selected as the Illinois Railroad Company's Presidential candidate, and was pledged to do all he could to carry through their design "to despoil the Government and people of money and lands."^25

The Mercury often referred to Lincoln when it spoke of the dangers of submission. With reference to a Force Bill to coerce South Carolina to stay in the Union, it wrote that all the North's "mighty heroes," including Lincoln ("the second Jackson greater than the first"), would "cower into nothingness and submission before the secession of South Carolina."^26 The Mercury told its readers that the North sneered at the suggestions that the South would not submit to Lincoln's election and not only thought Southerners would take office under Lincoln, but that once the wedge was entered they would split the South easier than Lincoln ever split rails. "No overt acts will be committed by Lincoln, but able men
will be his advisors, and by degrees the South will find that their power is all gone," the Mercury advised. "If you now submit, three years will not pass by before you will have an abolition party in the South, and then we know what will soon follow."27

Both newspapers contained a number of base, and even ridiculous, references to Lincoln in November and December, but in neither case did they represent editorial feeling towards Lincoln in those months. The Courier referred to Lincoln cheating Seward out of the Republican nomination on one occasion and on another to Horace Greeley as one "who has really made Lincoln President." It referred to him being burnt in effigy at an Aiken, South Carolina parade, the effigy being ridden on a rail and carried by two Negroes,28 and referred to a Baltimore reporter who shifted his support to Lincoln, as a "turncoat" and a "flatfooted Niggerite."29 It stated of Lincoln that, "the fanatic, who, . . . proposes to revive the Knight erranty of the infidel doctrine of social equality, should be left to the conviction of his own folly."30 Finally, on secession day itself, the Courier ran a filler item at the bottom of a page to the effect that "the livestock of Illinois is estimated to be worth nearly $100,000,000. This does not include Abraham Lincoln."31 The Mercury called Lincoln the tool of a party which would send him to make the South a province of the North.32 It provided some sort of explanation for the

27Ibid., November 26, 1860.
28Courier, November 12-14, 1860.
29Ibid., November 23, 1860.
30Ibid., December 18, 1860.
31Ibid., December 20, 1860.
32Mercury, December 11, 1860.
dearth of concrete information available in the South on Lincoln, when in regard to successful Southern censorship of Abolition papers and other literature, it commented that, "only one batch of papers have lately been returned from the South, on account of objectionable matter, and that was 500 copies of Harper's Weekly, which was made unexpectedly offensive by publishing a portrait of 'Old Abe' and his biography."33

On November 13, Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia made a great defense of Southern rights to the Georgia State Legislature urging immediate secession. The next day Alexander H. Stephens, later to be the Confederate Vice-President, delivered what Dwight Dumond called "one of the greatest speeches of his career" in answer to Toombs, arguing that no overt act had been committed by Lincoln's election, and that there was no immediate danger from him because Congress would be controlled by his opponents.34 Stephens argued against separate state action and expressed the belief that there were grounds for hope that sectional difficulties could be adjusted by Constitutional measures. Stephens' national prominence, the quality of his address, and the unusual fact that Lincoln wrote him to ask for a revised copy, created a considerable stir throughout the Southern press. The Mercury devoted a considerable editorial effort to dispel the effect of Stephens' remarks. On December 1, it rebutted his speech at length and on December 4, it cited a speech by F.W. Pickens (soon to be South Carolina's Governor) to the State House of Representatives at Columbia, which also rebutted Stephens' speech. Pickens referred to the second resolution of the Republican Party Platform which

33Mercury, November 30, 1860.
took from the Declaration of Independence the statement that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Pickens reminded his listeners, as R. B. Rhett had done earlier in the campaign, that this resolution was introduced by the Abolitionist Joshua Giddings, and asked: "Are we prepared to stand by and wait until an overt act is committed in the face of the open declaration of the Chicago Convention, that your slaves are your equals?"\(^{35}\)

When news of Lincoln's interest in Stephens' speech was learned, the *Mercury* informed its readers that Lincoln was "excessively pleased" with his remarks and stated that, "the best item of news he had received since the 6th of November was that of Mr. Stephens' election as delegate to the Georgia State Convention."\(^{36}\) The *Courier* cited the reaction of the *Columbia (Georgia) Times* to Stephens' speech for its readers:

> Every mail from the North brings fresh evidence of the comfort and consolation carried by the late speech of the Hon. A. H. Stephens to the Republican camp... "Old Abe" himself says it has been the only crumb of comfort which has reached him since the election... Is it not a humiliating reflection to Georgians, that one of the most honored and distinguished sons of the old commonwealth is the first and only one to send glad tidings to the councils of the worst enemies of the South?\(^{37}\)

President Buchanan's Fourth Annual Message to Congress delivered on December 3, contained as its central theme the feeling that the Union could and ought to be saved by peaceable methods. He suggested the adoption of numerous amendments to the Constitution favorable to the South.

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\(^{35}\) *Mercury*, December 4, 1860.


\(^{37}\) *Courier*, December 11, 1860.
His speech's significance to this thesis lay in the remarks it generated in the **Courier** with regard to Lincoln. Comparing the manner with which Buchanan and Lincoln would react to the secession of the South, the **Courier's** Washington correspondent gave further evidence of Lincoln's conservatism by stating that while Buchanan would act without any Force Bill in the enforcement of the collection of the revenue, Lincoln would not attempt coercion in any case unless Congress should pass a Force Bill. In that event, the correspondent added, he would consider it incumbent upon himself to carry out the laws. Two days later, the **Courier** reported that a note from Springfield, Illinois stated Lincoln had received a synopsis of Buchanan's message and, "comments very severely on its accusatory tone towards the North and says his own views are misrepresented." 

From December 6, when delegates to the State Secession Convention were elected, through December 20, when the secession ordinance was approved, there was even less mention of Lincoln in the Charleston press than usual. In nearly every case the delegates which were chosen were committed to immediate and separate State action, which virtually made the final action of the Secession Convention a foregone conclusion. Both newspapers printed numerous religious sermons which confirmed and blessed the budding movement for Southern independence and they continually printed secession testimonials from prominent Southerners. Editorial comment

38Ibid., November 8, 10, 1860.

39The **Courier** wrote that "not a single opponent of secession was elected." **Courier**, December 12, 1860. On being elected a delegate, R. B. Rhett remarked that, "nineteen years, have I served as a representative of the people of South Carolina, in her long contest for her rights and liberties. I began in 1828. For thirty-two years have I followed the quarry. Behold! It, at last, is in sight." **Mercury**, December 8, 1860.
on military preparation increased daily, and included histories of Major Anderson, Commander of the Federal troops at the Charleston forts; how the State would prevent the reinforcement of those troops, and even on how the forts were to be taken over. The tone of the Mercury was buoyant, exciting, and full of revolutionary fervor. The tone of the Courier, though more serious and careful, was increasingly "patriotic."

Both newspapers repudiated Lincoln's conservatism again prior to the secession of the State. They had heard that Jefferson Davis had received a dispatch from Lincoln to the effect that Lincoln was preparing a letter defining his position which would give "entire satisfaction to the South," and both cited an article from the Savannah Republican to the effect that, "Lincoln understands but little of the people of the South, and the real causes of the existing troubles if he supposes that he can write any such letter." The Mercury added that the Chicago Democrat reported that Lincoln stood "firmly and immovably upon the platform of the Republican Party, and is a believer in the principles therein enumerated. . . . We feel satisfied that he will do his duty fearlessly in any emergency that may arise."

For years the State had talked of secession and had advanced arguments in its favor. As the event approached reality the solemn business of justifying why, to themselves and to their posterity, began. The Mayor of Charleston, W. B. Carlisle, gravely announced that, "the election of Mr. Lincoln to the Presidency is an evidence that those who should have been our friends and protectors are determined to be our foes." A seces-
sion delegate, G. Manigault, speaking at the newly named Secession Hall on the celebration of the day when, seventy-eight years earlier, the British evacuated Charleston, stated:

we read our colonial history and the annals of the Revolution to little purpose, if we are not impressed with the fact, that the people of the North and the people of the South have been constantly growing more and more different—have become two distinct peoples—distinct nationalities.

Speaking for itself, the Courier editorialized, "a brave enlightened people may suffer but must succeed. The history of Greece, Rome, Sparta, Switzerland, Italy and South Carolina in the Revolution all have proven this." And, again, "the election of Mr. Lincoln... was an avowed declaration of war upon the institutions and rights of the States of the South."

On the second day of the State Secession Convention, the Courier succinctly summarized a portion of an address by Governor Cobb of Georgia to the people of that State. The fifteen points of its summarization taken together provide an accurate and representative "case for the South" as viewed by the Courier, in particular, and Southern conservatives in general.

1st. The Black Republican Party originated in opposition to slavery.
2nd. Men of all parties, however much they differed in opinion upon other topics united in a determination to destroy the institution of slavery.
3rd. The Constitutional rights of the South were to be ignored.
4th. The Supreme Court decision was repudiated.
5th. The Black Republican Party will adhere to the principles which brought it into power.
6th. Lincoln declared his hatred of slavery and that it must ultimately be overthrown.
7th. He declared that the Negro is the equal of the white man.

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\(^{42}\) Courier, December 15, 1860.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., December 19, 1860.
8th. Seward, Chase, Sumner, Greeley, Webb, and other Black Republicans, teach the same doctrine.

9th. They teach that there is a law higher than the Constitution.

10th. Ten Sovereign States have legislated upon this idea.

11th. The South claims protection, the North resists the claim.

12th. The Northern pulpit and Sunday Schools have taught the people of that section to hate the institution of slavery.

13th. A temporary majority in Congress against Lincoln will be unable to secure the rights and safety of the South.

14th. The whole power of the Government, with Lincoln at its head, will be used to destroy Southern rights, equality and safety in the Union.

15th. There is no remedy but secession for the existing difficulties worthy of consideration save that of new Constitutional guarantees as proposed by Mr. Buchanan, and they will be spurned by our Northern enemies.\textsuperscript{44}

On the fourth day of the Secession Convention the ordinance of secession was ratified. At the conclusion of the signing, the President of the delegates, D. F. Jamison, exhibited the parchment to the meeting proclaiming the State of South Carolina an independent Commonwealth. "On this announcement," the Courier reported, "the whole audience rose and gave vent to their enthusiasm in prolonged cheers, with the waving of hats and handkerchiefs. The spectacle was a sublime one, and can never be effaced from the memory of those who had the gratification of being present."\textsuperscript{45}

The next day the Mercury wrote:

The 20th day of December ... has become an epoch in the history of the human race. A great confederated Republic, overwrought with arrogant and tyrannous oppression, has fallen from its high estate amongst the Nations of the earth. Conservative liberty has been vindicated. Mobocratic license has been stricken down. Order has conquered, yet Liberty has survived.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Ibid.}, December 18, 1860.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}, December 21, 1860.

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Mercury}, December 21, 1860.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The search for the historical Lincoln in the Charleston press has been a frustrating task. During the first half of the campaign Lincoln's obscurity and campaign silence severely limited the information available on him. During the last half of the campaign, as censorship controls tightened, much of the information that was made available to other sections of the Nation's press and might have been used in Charleston was deliberately discarded. Campaign notice of Lincoln generally took the form of impersonal comment on "the Republican candidate." Moreover, the Charleston press, and particularly the Mercury, was biased; not in the sense that they differed in point of view with Republican or National Democratic principles, or defended Southern rights with such intensity, but in the sense that any serious notice of Lincoln was generally made with the specific intent to make or verify a sectional point. For example, the only speeches of Lincoln's that were ever mentioned were by way of associating him with Abolitionism, or establishing him as an Abolitionist. And, Lincoln was not an Abolitionist.

The only way one could discover the essential lines and nature of Lincoln's greatness in the Mercury and the Courier in 1860, as we appreciate them today, would be for one to read history backwards; to go into the times specifically looking for a characteristic such as Lincoln's honesty or his simplicity, and upon finding the sought for characteristic,
extract the words out of their context and apply them to the particular purpose at hand. Using such a method one could draw a picture of Lincoln which would correctly include his innate simplicity, homely visage, proverbial honesty, sense of fair play, and sense of humor. One could find out certain facts of his background, such as, that he was born in Kentucky and grew up on the Illinois frontier where he was forced to employ himself splitting rails and riding flatboats; that he trained himself as a country lawyer, served in the State Legislature and later as a U. S. Representative; that he was defeated in his first foray into political life when he sought election to the Illinois State Legislature, and again by Douglas in the Senatorial race of 1858. With regard to his politics, one could also find evidence that he opposed the extension of slavery in the territories; that he began his political career as a Whig; narrowly missed the Republican Vice-Presidential nomination in 1856; bested Douglas in their debates, etc. One could find all of these facts and many more in the pages of the Mercury or the Courier in 1860. But, lifting such facts out of context would be as biased an effort and the result, though recognizable to the reader, as great a distortion as the Mercury taking only Lincoln's anti-slavery sentiments to support the conclusion, previously made, that he was an Abolitionist. Therefore, the question which embarked the writer upon this thesis--could the essential lines and nature of a man history judges to be truly great, be found in a thoroughly hostile opposition press--must, at least in the case of Lincoln and the Charleston press, be answered in the negative, for it can now be asserted that the historical Lincoln cannot be found in either the Mercury or the Courier with enough accuracy to be of any value. It remains, then, to put the finishing touches to the pictures of Lincoln actually presented by the
Initial editorial reaction to Lincoln's nomination in both the *Mercury* and the *Courier* was dominated by their complete surprise at his selection and cloaked in each newspaper's particular editorial slant. Speaking for the radical slaveowners who for thirty years had preached resistance, nullification, and secession, the *Mercury* looked down from its lofty aristocratic peak and with characteristic disdain asked, "What is this common apparition the Abolitionists have chosen to lead them?"

The conservative, commercially oriented *Courier*, less parochial in its views, also asked who he was but with less disdain and greater interest. When Lincoln's simple frontier origins and actual obscurity became known the reactions of both newspapers towards him ran the gamut from suspicious belligerency (as if the Abolitionists had some trick up their sleeve) to disdainful scrutiny to contemptuous scorn. Genuine interest in Lincoln was evident to a very limited extent in the *Courier* but was nonexistent in the *Mercury*. That the Republican Party in its political infancy might have chosen Lincoln because the bright lights in its party were too radical, had too much of a record to defend, and would therefore have a more difficult time collecting the diverse elements of the party into its fold, apparently escaped both the *Mercury* and the *Courier*. That Lincoln's nomination might have been a clear cut manifestation of the Republican's determination to avoid extremes in their choice was a fact which apparently escaped the *Mercury* completely and was not appreciated in the *Courier* until late in the campaign.

During the campaign, the *Mercury*'s task, like that of other mediums of secessionist propaganda in the South, was to convince the people that submission to "Republican rule" would be the same as accepting a deliber-
ate an unrelenting war on slavery under the guise of an idealistic and pernicious pursuit of civil and political equality, the real motivation behind which was, "to drive the slaveholders, like poisoned rats, into their holes." The persuasiveness of its eloquent revolutionary rhetoric browbeat, cajoled, intimidated, and shamed a people, long ago educated in the principles and necessity of secession, into accepting the proposition that Lincoln's election was such an overt hostile act that it should be taken as the occasion for the State to secede. With but one or two isolated exceptions, the Mercury presented Lincoln to its readers in such a manner as to further its long standing dream of a Southern Confederacy. It developed a picture of him as a fanatic Abolitionist who would foment servile incendiarism and overthrow the fundamental institution of Southern society out of precipitate and ignorant zeal.

The success of the Mercury and of other mediums of secessionist propaganda could be clearly seen in the pages of the conservative Courier, which wavered back and forth between Unionism and disunionism throughout the campaign. Either through policy, or to mask its doubts about the correct course to take, the Courier editorialized less and sampled public opinion, both North and South, more than did the Mercury. Throughout the early part of the campaign the Courier sought in vain for some method of achieving Democratic unity in order to defeat Lincoln. Only when the certainty of Lincoln's election and the sectional nature of that victory became apparent to the majority of South Carolinians, did the Courier begin mentioning things like "the true issue" and the "irrepressible conflict" and shift to reluctant support of secession. About the time, late August, that the Courier, in behalf of all South Carolina conservatives, accepted the premise that Lincoln's election was cause enough to warrant cooperative
secession, it seems that it began to put the fact that Lincoln was chosen over the likes of Seward and Chase together with the nonoffensive character of his campaign silence and come up with the realization that though he was personally committed to anti-slavery views he was a conservative; one who though faithful to his party would proceed with caution and moderation upon his Presidential course. To those who loved the Union in the South, it must have been a poignant and ironic realization that though Lincoln was conservative enough in his anti-slavery politics to warrant "a chance," that knowledge came too late to dissipate the gathering secession storm. It is very likely that this sad conflict was the explanation for the Courier's vacillating course throughout the last half of the campaign and its bitter tone on the eve of secession.

The evidence, even in the Mercury and the Courier, that Lincoln's personal anti-slavery views were not of an abolitionist character, is overwhelming. His temperate statements regarding slavery in the years before he was nominated; the fact that by his silence he assiduously refrained from antagonizing the South, and the very real conciliatory feelers he put out to the South in October and November are the most likely explanation for the Mercury's apologetic shift of emphasis from "Lincoln the fanatic Abolitionist" to its sentiments in October, November, and December (while the furor over Lincoln's conservatism was at its height) that, "It's not the man but the power behind the throne."

Stung by titles such as "submissionists" and cowards, South Carolina Unionists answered the call of loyalty to their section and accepted the essentially conservative fifteen point summation of the case for the South on pages 108-109 above. Never completely accepting the proposition that Lincoln's election was in itself an overt act justifying immediate
and separate State action, the Courier and other South Carolina Unionists sat back and rode the flood tide of secession feeling out to its final consummation.

If the writer may be excused for using the same epigrammatic summations and oversimplified slogans which were the common journalistic weapons of the newspapers he has researched for this thesis, the following imaginary situation might best sum up an editorial comparison of the views of Lincoln held by the Mercury and the Courier. Let the reader imagine two converging paths upon each of which are posted large signposts representing the development of each newspaper’s view of Lincoln. In bold letters at the top of each sign upon the path the Mercury would have followed, may be found the word, SECEDE. Beneath this plea the signs themselves might have read as follows:

May and June. "Who Is This Nominus Umbra?"
July and August. "He Is A Fanatical Abolitionist!"
August and September. "A Bloody Slave Insurrection Will Be The Inevitable Result Of Submitting To His Rule."
September and October. "The North Is Arming. We Must Too."
October and November. "Its Not The Man, But The Power Behind The Throne."
November and December. "Join The Crusade For Southern Independence."

At the risk of overworking the simile, imagine the path down which the Mercury traveled to be as straight as an arrow. The Courier would have followed a winding path with numerous obstacles in the way, the signposts along its way simply containing the following statements:

May and June. "They Have Nominated Abraham Lincoln!"
June and July. "Can The Democrats Unite To Defeat Him?"
July and August. "Would His Election Be A Sufficient Cause For Secession?"

August and September. "The People Seem To Think So!"

September and October. "Must Lincoln's Election Also Be The Occasion For Secession?"

October and November. "Apparently!"

November and December. "Pity—He Seems Like He Would Be A Conservative Leader."

Some observers in Lincoln's time realized that he would stand higher with posterity than with his mass of contemporaries. The Lincoln legend has surely obscured the shortcomings of the man and glossed over those periods when he groped and blundered. The picture of a simple lawyer from Springfield, Illinois coming East for his inauguration with misgivings and misconceptions has given way, as a recent historian has remarked, to "a picture of a man following a well-marked path of destiny to abolish slavery, ... to give his life in the cause of Union, and, finally to belong to the ages." The independent-minded and mercurial Horace Greeley, in a brilliant editorial on Lincoln's death, wrote that one reason for this would doubtless be found in the external superficial tests by which people then gauged contemporary merit. Greeley went on to say:

A king without his crown and purple robes is, to the vulgar apprehension, a solecism, an impossibility. A coarsely clad, travel-stained, barefoot Jesus, could get no hearing in our fashionable synagogues, though his every discourse were a Sermon on the Mount. And Mr. Lincoln was so essentially, unchangeably a commoner. ... We have had Presidents before him sprung from the loins of poverty and obscurity, but never one who remained to the last so simply, absolutely, alike in heart and manner, one of the people. No one who approached him, whether as minister or messenger, felt impelled either to stoop or strut in his presence. He was neither awed by assumption nor disgusted by vulgarity.

Potter, op. cit., p. 315.
He never constrained nor uneasy in whatever presence, and he imposed no constraint nor ceremony on others.2

There are two aspects of an aristocratic viewpoint; the gracious and refined "noblesse oblige" which many think characteristic of the ante-bellum Southerner, and a common, vulgar brand of simple snobbery which, unfortunately, also figured in his attitudes. It hardly matters which aspect of the aristocratic viewpoint would motivate the editor of the Mercury to sarcastically refer to "King Lincoln" as a "low-born despicable tyrant,"3 or would motivate the Courier to describe Midwesterners as, "a race who developed a crude and empiric civilization, which never progressed, and who, with their manners, customs, religion and hopes have long since faded away before the brighter dawn of art and refinement, while their descendants are perceptibly retreating to the more distant West."4 What does matter is that both aspects of the aristocratic attitude were, even then, characteristically un-American, offending both the frontier spirit and the refined expression of political equality which marked, and still marks, our Nation and people. As a result, this thesis ends with the sad perception that even had Lincoln been a Southern Breckinridge Democrat, like the coarsely clad, travel-stained, barefoot Jesus of whom Greeley spoke, he would probably not even have had a hearing in Charleston, South Carolina in 1860.

3Ibid
4Ibid., pp. 250-251, citing from the Mercury, March 9, 1865.
5Courier, May 22, 1860.
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