THE STRANGE CAREER OF A PERSISTENT WHIG:
A RECONSIDERATION OF THE LIFE OF
WILLIAM GANNAWAY BROWNLOW
by
Gary Steven Kilgore

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
History

GARY STEVEN KILGORE
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
May 1974

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.
APPROVAL

Name: Gary Steven Kilgore

Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Thesis: The Strange Career of a Persistent Whig: A Reconsideration of the Life of William Gannaway Brownlow

Examining Committee:

Chairman: Dr. J.P. Spagnolo

Dr. Michael D. Fellman
Senior Supervisor

Dr. Don S. Kirschner

Dr. R.B. Horsfall
External Examiner

Date Approved: May 24, 1974

(ii)
PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis or dissertation (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Dissertation:
"The Strange Career of a Persistent Whig: A Reconsideration of the Life of William Gannaway Brownlow"

Author:
(signedature)
Gary Steven Kilgore
(name)
7 June, 1974
(date)
ABSTRACT

William Brownlow is best known to historians as the Radical Republican governor of Tennessee during Reconstruction. In his own day, his reputation rested more on his career as a Whig (and Methodist) propagandist, on the editorials in his newspaper, the Knoxville Whig. Brownlow's only scholarly biographer, E. Merton Coulter, treated Brownlow's forty-year career as a Methodist minister, Whig propagandist and Unionist agitator as an extended prelude to his four-year tenure as a "scalawag" governor. This thesis will attempt to redress what I see as a historical imbalance. A major, if implicit, theme of this work will be the argument that Brownlow's gubernatorial career was in many ways the acting-out of the values, assumptions and commitments forged in forty years of religious, political and economic controversy.

Brownlow was many things. He was a Southerner, a Tennesseean. More importantly, he was an East Tennesseean. In this thesis I explore some of the implications of his specific regional origins and loyalties. In religion, he was a militant and committed Methodist. In politics, he was a Whig, later a fervent Unionist, who finally converted to Republicanism. He was a businessman, with interests in iron manufacturing and railroads as well as in the newspaper business. He was an early, urban bourgeois living in what the historian Eugene Genovese has called a "pre-bourgeois" culture--the Slave South. For forty years, Brownlow attempted to defend commercial, middle-class, nationalist Whig virtues while remaining loyal to a stubbornly agrarian, quasi-aristocratic, and increasingly Secessionist South. His entire career was an attempt to develop a moral, political and economic ideology appropriate to his
East Tennessee constituency, one which might aid in the integration of his region into the State, the State into the South, and the South into the Nation.

The War for Southern Independence provided dramatic proof of the failure of Brownlow's Whiggish project. It also provided Brownlow and his fellow Southern Unionists with an ultimate test of principle. While other Tennessee Whigs capitulated to the planters out of a narrow self-interest and a self-destructive sense of Southern loyalty, Brownlow recognized that his principles and interests demanded allegiance to the Union, to the North. He reached the height of his propagandistic fame during the War, touring the North in support of the Union effort. His career as Reconstruction governor was essentially an attempt to act on his final recognition of the irreconcilably revolutionary and anti-bourgeois nature of the old planter regime, and to lay the foundation for a truly "new" South. If he failed in this, the failure was due more to the strength of the resistance to his attempt than to his lack of capacity for growth, effort and vision.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is an academic word for "thanks." They go to a variety of people. To Cindy, for helping sanity reign during three years of frustrated research. To Mike Fellman, for gambling on the personal (and academic) meaningfulness of this project. To Dr. Don Kirschner, for providing a wise voice and interested ears in his forced capacity as second advisor. Belated thanks to the advisor for my first major project, Dr. William Hamilton—after two years of guiding me through the intricacies of Europe's intellectual life, through William Blake and dialectical logic, he encouraged me to take on something more concrete this time, to get my historical feet back on the ground before setting out once more into the murk of intellectual history. And very special thanks to the administrative and research staff of the Archives and Manuscripts divisions of the Tennessee State Library and Archives. In terms both of efficiency and sensitivity to research needs, they must be among the very best in their trade.
CONTENTS

Title................................................................. 1
Approval............................................................ ii
Abstract........................................................... iii
Acknowledgements................................................ v
Introduction....................................................... 1
   Notes........................................................... 12

Chapter I--William G. Brownlow: The Making
   of an Agitator................................................ 13
   Notes........................................................... 26

Chapter II--The Nation's Faiths: Brownlow's
   Religious and Political Ideology............................ 29
   Notes........................................................... 59

Chapter III--Circuit-Riding for the Union:
   Brownlow's National Campaign.............................. 65
   Notes........................................................... 78

Chapter IV--Brownlow and the Era of Reconstruction........ 81
   Notes ........................................................... 101

Conclusion: Brownlow, Tennessee, the South and the Nation... 104
   Notes........................................................... 108

Bibliography....................................................... 109
INTRODUCTION

Tennessee is a fascinating and paradoxical place, a state in which the historian can watch the "drama of American nation-building" played out in full and in miniature. As Thomas P. Abernethy pointed out, Tennessee took less than 100 years to develop almost all the economic and political themes found in over 250 years of Virginia or Massachusetts history. Its frontier period coincided with the establishing of the Union; and by 1876, its integration into the Nation fairly complete, it ceased to be the rebellious backwoods producer of strong-willed Presidents. The period of this thesis is the final stage of the "dramatic" phase of Tennessee history, from the Age of Jackson to the Era of Reconstruction.

One of the more important and most interesting Tennesseans of this period was William G. "Parson" Brownlow. His entry into a public career coincided with the beginnings of Whiggism, and he died, with his era, in 1877. During that period, he established a national reputation, from his various bases in the Methodist ministry, the iron business, the emerging railroads and the partisan politics and polemical newspapering of his day, which led to a short and violent experience with the wielding of political power during Reconstruction. This was a period of growth, and the Parson grew within it. His career coincided with the age of settlement--with the period in which Tennessee (and the Nation) became something more than a geographical expression. This was particularly difficult in a state which contained within it almost all the major divisions of the Nation itself. When the War came, agricultural West Tennessee went Rebel, mineral-rich East Tennessee went Yankee--although parts of the northeast (Andy Johnson country) followed the Southern lead.
Tennessee, made up of at least three distinct types of geography, was also the home of three competing types of capital, and, some have claimed, three distinct types of people. The agricultural West and the resource-laden East have always competed for the alliance of the large region of Middle Tennessee. Brownlow's public career as a Whig may be seen in large part as one East Tennessean's forty-year attempt to build that alliance and to give it a Unionist (nationalist) direction. In the end, with the momentous Secession vote, Brownlow's project failed. Most of the Middle Tennessee Whigs, and many of their East Tennessee counterparts, sided with the South, with their immediate economic interests. Brownlow, however, was less a man of "interests" than a man of principle. That is, he was an ideologue—and a sincere, passionate one. Ideologues, to the extent that they are successful, often see social realities more clearly for seeing them more explicitly and at longer range. Brownlow, like Alexander Hamilton before him, understood the interests of his class earlier than the majority of them did themselves. Brownlow the scalawag took the step into Republicanism, and implicitly, therefore, into the "age of enterprise," somewhat early—and for what may be considered highly subjective reasons. He was not a "typical" figure of his class, time or place; but his career and his decisions, perhaps because of their peculiarities, may help the historian better understand the parameters of that class, that place and time. Most human beings live their lives unconscious of the major implications of their class, place and time. Brownlow took on himself the ideologue's task of raising these questions to the level of consciousness. This necessarily renders him an "atypical" figure—but it does not necessarily render his understanding incorrect,
nor his actions inconceivable.

Brownlow's career in the ministry coincided with the period of Jacksonian Democracy, with the transition from the frontier to the settled phase of Tennessee's history. His response to the new state of affairs was to quit his ten years of backwoods circuit-riding, to marry and settle down. He married into a family of prosperous warehouse and foundry owners, and planned to enter the life of business. Reluctantly, and only at the request of friends, he left the family business a few years later to put his frontier-preaching skills of oratory and vituperation at the service of the party he felt best represented his region and his class. He undertook a career as editor for one purpose only—to provide an effective East Tennessee outlet for Methodist, middle-class, Whig propaganda. Newspapering was a more overtly ideological enterprise in those days than in ours; and Brownlow came near to being the complete ideologue. He is remembered, and actively disliked by some subsequent historians, precisely because he did his job so well—in his own day, he had a reputation as one of the best in the trade. Brownlow was a good and gentle man. He was a mean, vicious orator and writer. He was a professional, not a fanatic. If he sometimes seems to verge on schizophrenia, it may well be of a kind endemic in his trade and calling. And what holds true for his editorializing holds for his governing as well—Brownlow was an ideologue, but he was also a party man. The events of "Brownlow Reconstruction" must be seen in a more detached light than that in which they have been viewed by previous historians.
To the extent that historians have discussed Brownlow, they have necessarily relied heavily on the 1937 work of his only scholarly biographer, E. Merton Coulter. 1 Coulter's picture of Brownlow is that of a sincere, if misguided fanatic. Coulter, while very effectively "placing" Brownlow in an identifiable geographic (East Tennessee) context, tended to treat him too abstractly, to place him outside any recognizable class or ideological context. For Coulter, Brownlow was not only a fool, but a failure--"he left nothing behind." 2 This caricaturing of the scalawag, who is a fool when he is not a demon, is consistent with Coulter's overall historiographical stance, a stance which has made him one of the last of the Dunningite historians among a generation of Revisionists (for explication of these terms, see below). One of the main, if implicit, aims of this thesis is to make Brownlow's life seem less disconnected, less abstract than presented by Coulter. Brownlow was the ideologue Coulter portrayed; but Coulter forgot that the successful ideologue is the one who knows himself, his place and his times, and who acts on that knowledge. In assuming that Brownlow was a real, ordinary person responding ideologically to real, dramatic problems, I am in this thesis partially answering the challenge laid down by Coulter in the Preface to the 1971 re-issue of his biography: "In all their writings, the 'revisionist historians' have not found it desirable or possible to 'revise' the Parson as set forth in this biography." 3 I am not sure, for reasons given below, that I wish to place myself in the "revisionist" school of Southern and Reconstruction historiography. And a factual "revision" of Brownlow's life and career is neither possible nor desirable: with a few exceptions, Coulter's work remains chronologically and factually
accurate. However, a reconsideration, a reinterpretation of Brownlow, a re-placing of his public life in the context of his times, is not only possible and desirable, but necessary.

I have made reference to schools of interpretation, and this requires some explanation. Historiographical distinctions are in part, of course, professional questions concerning proper gathering and weighing of data, worse and better approaches to the questions of evaluating and interpreting material, etc. More importantly, they are also questions of personal and social values, consciousnesses and intents. Within this larger framework, there have thus far evolved two dominant schools concerned with the periods and problems surrounding Brownlow, the Phillips/Dunning and the Revisionist schools. They are loosely identified in the historiographical literature as "conservative" and "liberal," respectively; and this thesis may be seen as a small contribution to a third, growing historiographical stream, the Marxist. I generally accept these loose definitions. These definitions are not only "academic," they are also political and ideological. That is, they imply that a dominant interpretative tendency is related to certain dominant social tendencies. As Marx said, the ruling ideas of an age are the ideas of the ruling social classes.

Merton Coulter's work is very self-consciously in the Phillips/Dunning tradition; indeed, Coulter has continued to be something of a lone, last representative of that school. The work of U.B. Phillips on the Slave South and of W.A. Dunning on the Civil War and Reconstruction have generally been judged conservative, a label Coulter would accept. Their school depicts a South of rough gentility, of a
harmonious relation between free, superior whites and enslaved, inferior blacks. In this interpretation, the War was a product of a misguided and misinformed North, waged against a South which fought for the preservation of an admirable civilization. Reconstruction was an age of dangerous excess, excess fed by a great deal of ignorance and a fair amount of greed. It threatened to "unleash" an uncivilized black population upon the white race of the South, until cool heads and firm hands set to redress the "natural" racial balance and to return the South's "natural" leaders to power. This interpretation is called conservative, but its proponents were often turn-of-the-century Progressives. Their understanding of class and race was, as the historian Staughton Lynd and others have pointed out, shared by such other Progressive historians as Beard and Turner. This school was grounded in a middle-class, American idea of social purity and an intuition, if not an understanding, of the dynamics of class. Kenneth Stampp, a liberal revisionist, suggests:

The intellectual climate in which the Dunning interpretation of reconstruction was written. It was written at a time when xenophobia had become almost a national disease, when the immigration restriction movement was getting into high gear, when numerous northern cities (among them Philadelphia and Chicago) were seriously considering the establishment of racially segregated schools, and when Negroes and immigrants were being lumped together in the category of unassimilable aliens.4

This characterization is not only useful but true; provided always that it does not lapse into a vulgar sort of political or economic determinism, a particular temptation for liberal scholars.

The Revisionists are a more varied group. They "are a curious lot who sometimes quarrel with each other as much as they quarrel
with the disciples of Dunning. At various times they have counted in their ranks Marxists of various degrees of orthodoxy, Negroes seeking historical vindication, skeptical white Southerners, and latter-day northern abolitionists.\textsuperscript{5} They have, for all their differences, been loosely defined as "liberal" in distinction to the "conservatism" of earlier historians. This was a reasonable definition: as Stampp and others have pointed out, liberal began to confront conservative scholarship in Southern historiography when black liberalism began to confront white conservatism on the Southern social and political fronts. This provided the often-conscious social basis for Revisionist scholarship, despite the variety of its forms. Assuming the academic reader's familiarity with them, I suggest that Stampp's \textit{The Peculiar Institution} and \textit{The Era of Reconstruction} are very nearly the "classic" examples of Revisionist scholarship in this area. In general, the Revisionists have tended to treat the complexities of the 1830-1880 era with more sympathy and a finer touch than did their predecessors. This sense of nuance is one of the hallmarks of liberalism as a political outlook. It is the positive side of the much-abused allegation that liberals tremble before action. The scholarly counterpart to this anti-activism has been a tendency among many Revisionists to minimize the seriousness of the fundamental nature of the struggle which was the Civil War.

A decade or so after the liberal-conservative confrontation, liberalism itself was faced with two serious challenges. It ceased once more to be the sole, serious "progressive" possibility in American politics. Also, the scholarship of the renewed American Left took as one of its primary aims the attack on the intellectual and cultural
hegemony of liberalism—the reexamination of the ideological nature of American liberalism and of its historical interpretations. One assumption of this "new scholarship" (now about fifteen years "new," but with far to go) is that, to the extent that it is new, it must somehow move beyond Revisionism. This hardly means repudiating all revisionist sources, but it does mean a qualitative break with liberalism in matters of approach, interpretation, and handling of material.

The work of two scholars may usefully be cited to suggest some important indications of this new direction in the field of Southern history. Eugene Genovese, basing himself on Lenin and the theoretical work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, has made a partial return to U.B. Phillips' picture of the antebellum South. Working from the Gramscian concept of "hegemony," Genovese asks what kind of ruling class could have created the essentially stable plantation society. His researches tend to describe a planter class increasingly dominant, increasingly aware of its own strength and integrity—a class, therefore, with a slowly-growing sense of a separate, national identity, and with the growing willingness to engage in a nation-splitting revolution to give that consciousness a concrete reality. Robert Starobin, more influenced by the "Third World" stream of contemporary Marxism, produced only one, very important monograph before his death. While agreeing essentially with Genovese as to the futility of debating the "feudal" versus the "bourgeois" nature of the Southern economy, he points out that the economic base of this "pre-bourgeois" society (the phrase is Genovese's) included a large and growing industrial, as well as agricultural and mercantile, component. Starobin relates in detail how
Southern industrialists sought, often very successfully, to make their peace and their fortunes with slavery. Together, the work of these two historians suggests a South which was strong and secure, and one which had little reason to question the economy or morality of its peculiar institution. By bringing in the question of industrialism, however, Starobin's researches necessarily raise the question of a potential, internal contradiction in Southern society—one which it took a war to make apparent and to begin to resolve. That the contradiction went greatly unperceived at the time need not give us pause. That there were at the time ideologues who were conscious of the potential contradiction, and who offered suggestions for its peaceful and satisfactory resolution, seems only reasonable. The George Fitzhugh presented in Genovese's World the Slaveholders Made was such an agrarian ideologue. Brownlow's career may legitimately be seen as the formation of such an urban ideologue.

Which brings us to the project of this thesis. Being generally satisfied with Genovese's analysis of the class-composition of the pre-bourgeois, antebellum South, I want merely to help round out that analysis with a contribution to Starobin's account of the development of an urban and essentially bourgeois culture within that South (to the very limited extent one can have a bourgeoisie without a proletariat). Brownlow was a leading figure in that culture; and his attitudes, career, choices and commitments may suggest some helpful insights for further digging into the roots of his class, his times and place. This does not require that Brownlow be shown to be somehow "typical" of his class; and
I do not attempt to extend Brownlow to cover his times, nor do I undertake on extended analysis of Southern society. That is, I base all discussion of the relation of Brownlow to his times almost entirely on analogy—and almost entirely on secondary sources written since Coulter's biography. Hence, my earlier use of the term "re-placing"—if Brownlow can legitimately and seriously be made to "fit" into the South being described by the new scholarship, then the intended purposes of this thesis have been fulfilled. The further tasks of proof and analysis, of using Brownlow within a larger analytical framework, are matters for another essay, one dealing with the whole of the antebellum proto-bourgeoisie. All this by way of saying that I have no intention of falling into that trap, so often laid for young Marxists, of a premature "definitiveness"—one which can easily be confused by both author and reader for an intended and simplistic determinism.

I should also mention here what might seem to the reader a distortion in the chronological covering of Brownlow's life. In Chapter I, I devoted relatively more space to Brownlow's pre-editorial career than does Coulter. Brownlow was thirty-four when he became an editor—by that time, he had made most of his lifelong contacts, positions and commitments. The future pattern of his beliefs, and his methods of defending those beliefs, were in many ways set. Similarly, in Chapter III, separate space is given to Brownlow's brief Unionist campaign and his celebrated Northern lecture-tour. His four years of political rule were essentially a self-conscious acting-out of the commitments and promises made during the War. Also, the importance of Brownlow was recognized in his own day as essentially ideological
and rhetorical, not institutional and practical. Therefore, the tour and Parson Brownlow's Book are a crucial and necessary preface to the whole question of Brownlow Reconstruction. The bulk of the space of this thesis is devoted to Chapters II and IV, dealing with his editorial and political careers, with the periods of his greatest productivity and the fullest development of his ideological position and of his brief chance to apply some of that position in practice. In the Conclusion, I will offer a brief assessment of Brownlow as a man and as a historical figure.
NOTES


2. Cf ibid, 399-400.

3. Ibid, xxii.


5. Ibid, 8-9.


CHAPTER I: WILLIAM G. BROWNLOW: THE MAKING OF AN AGITATOR

Brownlow, born in 1805 in southwest Virginia was brought up in the all-but-politically continuous southwest Virginia-northeast Tennessee region. His parents were among the second wave of settlers in that area, following such families as the Kilgores and Carters in southwest Virginia and the Donelsons and Seviers in Tennessee. His father, a heavy drinker, was an acting justice of the peace in Blount County, Tennessee. His mother was a Methodist lady from an old Virginia family, the Gannaways. Brownlow learned early of the weakness of politicians and of the blessings of Methodist decency and respectability. Orphaned early, he was reared by Virginia relatives. Brownlow was a frontier child—but that did not preclude his family's owning a few slaves; even the mountain frontier was a Southern, that is, a slave frontier. And that frontier was the stage upon which families like the Donelsons were able to make a modest fortune in real-estate speculation from the very beginning of settlement.1

Although Virginia was the place of his birth and adolescence, Brownlow always considered himself a Tennessean, and chose to spend his adult life there. The East Tennessee of the early nineteenth century was already a place of highly-developed economic and political activity, the home of relatively fixed economic and political establishments. These institutions gained in clarity and fixity for being family-based. The small number of families among the early waves of settlers assured that differences in social status among those families would stand out with greater clarity than in the larger world from which they had come.
It also assured the necessity for a good deal of intermarriage among the families; and, although this had the effect of slightly obscuring family-status distinctions, it had the greater effect of creating large numbers of cadres who identified with and defended the great, extended families in their political and economic competition with each other. Sullivan County was Stockley Donelson country, home of John Donelson's son and Andy Jackson's future brother-in-law. Knox County in Brownlow's youth was the home of William Blount's already-disintegrating political machine. Greene County, which was to give the world Andrew Johnson, had been the stomping-ground of the popular John Sevier. These familial, political divisions were to hold for at least another fifty years—indeed, they may still be seen in attenuated form in Tennessee politics today. The working-out of these familial-economic tensions had already laid the foundations for East Tennessee's uniqueness and separateness, as in the famous State of Franklin episode, when the region attempted to "secede" from the rest of the territory, to enter the Union by itself. This, then, was the East Tennessee of Brownlow's early days, and the East Tennessee of which the later Brownlow was so powerful a defender.

Brownlow was born into the "mountain middle class." Neither white trash nor planter aristocrats, these were the famous "plain folk" of the Old South. Whether or not they represented the majority of the Appalachian population remains a disputed issue, but it is likely that most mountain-people had origins on a somewhat humbler social and economic plane than Brownlow's. The plain folk worked—and worked hard—for a living, but a given family might very well own a slave or two.
The first generation were almost entirely subsistence farmers, although a few grew small cash crops or speculated in land. Their sons and grandsons went into trade or the professions where chance and skill allowed. Their daughters tried to marry upwards, usually married at their own level, and very rarely married downward on the social scale. They were an upwardly-mobile people, and the society in which they moved, in which they hoped to succeed, was Southern society. As time passed, their allegiance to that society had an increasing ideological and a decreasing economic basis. This contradiction was one basis of their politics—and, therefore, of Brownlow's.

Like most people in the early days of Appalachia, Brownlow was given at least the basics of literacy; like most of the upwardly-mobile young men of that time, however, the great bulk of his education was self-acquired. Throughout his life, Brownlow manifested the tendency toward over-compensatory aggressiveness and self-assertiveness historians associate with the self-taught man. Brownlow's guardians apprenticed him to a carpenter, but he read as he could—and when he could afford it, he left his trade to pursue his education in one of the few ways available to a young man on the frontier.

After the death of my parents, I lived with my mother's relations, who raised me up to hard labor, until I was eighteen years old, when I removed to Abingdon..., and served as a regular apprentice to the trade of a house-carpenter. I have been a laboring-man all my life long... Though a Southern man in feeling and principle, I do not think it degrading of a man to labor... My education was imperfect and irregular, even in those branches taught in the common schools of the country. I labored, after obtaining a trade, until I acquired the means of again going to school. I afterwards entered the Methodist
Travelling Ministry, and travelled ten years without intermission. I availed myself of this position to study and improve my limited education, which I did in all the English branches.

Brownlow, the young Southerner who believed in the ideology of "educated labor," became a Methodist minister in 1826. This was a common occupational route for a member of the Mountain middle class who had no important business contacts and little hope for an academic future. One could become a circuit-rider or a deputy sheriff: in much the same way, the priesthood and the police force were later to provide a starting-point for socially-mobile young Irish immigrants in the Northeast.

Brownlow remained a Methodist circuit-rider for nearly ten years. During that time he rode a variety of circuits, encompassing part or all of southwest Virginia, East Tennessee, western North Carolina, northwestern South Carolina, and northeastern Georgia. Being a "frontier preacher" in those days (1826-36) meant being a man of battle. Denominational strife was a major enterprise; and preachers, as representatives of their denominations, considered each other fair game for all sorts of invective and vituperation. At one time or another, the following slanders were hurled at the young Parson Brownlow: his sister was the madam of a western whorehouse; another sister had borne an illegitimate child by their uncle; one of his sisters was a jewelry thief; his various maternal uncles included a liar, a forger, and a miscegenating squaw-man. Than non of these things were true was irrelevant to many ministers and their congregations—all was fair in denominational war, and besides, it was all great fun in the Davy Crockett tall-tale tradition. Brownlow developed his skills of oratory and invective early and well: it was
his job, it was expected of him. The battle of the Christian soldier was fought on three fronts, the spiritual, the denominational, and the political: for the circuit-rider was not only an apostle of the Gospel—he was also supposed to be a very self-conscious spokesman for the Methodist Church and its allied religious and secular institutions.

Brownlow’s first published work, a pamphlet, no longer extant, was a semi-political treatise attacking the Nullifier aristocrats of South Carolina, among whom he was unsuccessfully preaching at the time. This political issue seemed to him to have a denominational basis as well: "The Parson was not surprised to find that all the Presbyterians and Baptists were Nullifiers...."7 Also, the Nullifiers were aristocrats who selfishly wished to upset the established federal order: something abhorrent to a serious Methodist, that is, to a "common-man conservative."8 Brownlow simultaneously attacked both their religion and their politics—he had declared himself, as early as 1828, "a FEDERAL WHIG of the WASHINGTON and ALEXANDER HAMILTON school."9 Not only Brownlow, but the elders and leaders of institutional Methodism saw these political polemics as proper and necessary behavior in the pursuit of ministerial responsibilities. True, he was mildly censured: parties often feel it necessary to censure their front-men without actually restraining them. More significantly, he was rewarded by his home Holston Annual Conference in 1832 with a membership in its delegation to the Methodist Annual Conference in Philadelphia. Brownlow’s skilled use of the verbal bludgeon was given serious institutional sanction by his superiors. Long after he ceased to be a duly-rewarded young man on the
make, this pattern of calculated attack, followed by a favorable response from his peers, remained a general characteristic of Brownlow's style and of his career.

Brownlow the individual, and Methodism, a very individualist Christianity, complemented each other well. Each contributed to the other's success in Tennessee. As David Donald noted in a discussion of Lincoln, self-made men are wont to accept given social institutions as both desirable and fixed. Of course, their raising of their own class-position thereby implies a contradiction of this idea of fixity of station. This contradiction is usually smoothed over in their minds by the increased support they give those institutions. This was certainly Brownlow's life-experience—and the Methodist concept of "conservative reform," of America's raising itself only within the given context of Protestantism and the Constitution, provided an excellent and appropriate world within which Brownlow could grow and learn. A rising man in a laissez-faire society is apt to view himself as an individual par excellence: his "good" rise to a high position is an individual achievement, and therefore all "bad" social positions are likewise at root the fault of lesser individuals. Methodism codified this asocial individualism, this inability to see institutional causes of Evil: "For Methodists the most important fact about human nature was the freedom of the will—that man was a responsible agent." The Lord would help them that helped themselves; and the Church would help them that filled the pews. Brownlow was able to do both quite well. His physical and verbal ugliness drew large crowds of the curious, many of whom stayed on in the crowds of the faithful. He did the "one thing most necessary" more than well, and the Methodists
and their middle-class elders gave approving attention.

The evangelical denominations tended to equate numerical success with faithfulness to the evangelical mission. Methodism had outdistanced all other denominations...there was a tendency on the part of the Methodist leadership to evaluate all proposals...by their probable effects on the rate of membership increase.12

Methodists viewed themselves collectively as comprising that expression of Protestant Christianity which was more efficient, more Scriptural, more apostolic than any of the competing denominations. And the success of Methodism in open competition with other churches confirmed its members in this assumption.13

Brownlow continued to do battle on the denominational front. In 1834 he published Helps to the Study of Presbyterianism, which was essentially a defense of Methodism and its institutions against alleged slanders and misrepresentations by the Presbyterians.14 One Presbyterian in particular, F.A. Ross of Kingsport, was singled out for the heaviest invective. Ross was from a wealthy family of East Tennessee cotton-factors and iron-mongers. He was also, according to Brownlow, descended from miscegenating Tories. As was always his habit, Brownlow claimed to have proof of his allegation, should Ross wish to challenge it; it was usually the case that, when Brownlow claimed proof, his challenges were rarely taken up. Either the bulk of his accusations were true, or else the accused thought a response not worth the bother or that rising to any reply would be self-incriminating. At any rate, Ross did not answer in print. In his book, Brownlow combined reasoned criticisms of certain Presbyterian institutions with personal and vulgar attacks in a way that would seem reprehensible today. In so doing, he seemed to give equal weight both to Ross' Calvinism and to his "nigger blood." Two things
should be remembered here. First, Ross' racial parentage would have seemed important to almost all of Brownlow's readers—in indulging in racist rhetoric, Brownlow was reflecting the consciousness of his audience, not merely engaging in a private viciousness. Second, the tendency to judge a movement so thoroughly by its individual members was a characteristic of American society in general, and of the Methodists in particular. This was a corollary to the circuit-rider's injunction to preach and practice a narrowly-defined "holiness"—and to demand signs of respectable holiness in colleagues of other denominations. This holiness extended to social, political, and economic life, or was supposed to. Milton Powell notes "an increased emphasis upon the doctrines of 'holiness' or entire sanctification in the first half of the nineteenth century. And it is significant that in Methodism it was the leaders and official spokesmen of the denomination who were most active in the movement." 

Methodism was, or claimed to be, several things. It claimed to be the religious expression of the common man. It claimed to be conservative, yet also to be a reform movement. It hoped to bring about reform and stability through encouraging the good and denouncing the bad within the dictates of a personalistic ethic. It claimed to be the religious analogue to the secular promise which was America—provided always that one understood that "America was not merely Christian, she was Protestant," that is, predominantly Methodist, "and her institutions were not merely civilized, they were republican." Like the later labor movement, the Church was willing to use "immoderate" means (the violent camp-meeting, the bloody strike) to obtain its essentially
moderate ends (a large, middle-class congregation, a twenty-cent raise). The Methodists were therefore in no position to condemn a partisan who proved so skillful in this enterprise. This is, after all, one legitimate definition of the function of a partisan "agitator." In "the fighting Parson" Brownlow, Methodism produced one of its ablest agitators: and it honored, encouraged, and used him for his entire life. When he retired from the circuit, he retained his active ministerial status, and was a welcome guest speaker in various churches. For forty years he wrote articles and books in defense of Methodism, and Methodists showed their gratitude with subscriptions. During his later tenure as governor, Brownlow saw the reunification of Methodism (which he had earlier encouraged to split) as a cause importantly related to the reunification of the Nation.

After ten years on the circuit, Brownlow decided to settle down. He had had plenty of time to get to know and be known by the "right" local people, to make useful contacts, and to move to a higher station in life. He chose well, given the opportunities at hand. His marriage took him from the world of the church assembly to the world of the businessmen's convention.

As the eighteenth century closed and the nineteenth century opened, the most important non-agricultural activity of the tri-cities area seemed to be the mercantile business...The merchandising operations of the Lynns, O'Briens, and Rogers were important in the area. John Lynn began operating a store in Boat Yard [Kingsport] about 1812; he was associated with the Abingdon...merchants, William Trigg and Charles Carson. Later Mr. Lynn sold his property to John and James O'Brien. By 1831 the O'Briens had acquired much more property in Boat Yard...This property
consisted of many dwelling houses, two warehouses on the river bank, one store and warehouse...and other real estate. William G. "Parson" Brownlow...married Elizabeth O'Brien, heir of part of the O'Brien estate.

The O'Briens were not only merchant capitalists and real estate speculators; they were active in the early industrial development of the region, as well. After the marriage, James O'Brien, Brownlow's father-in-law, gave him a managing position in the family's iron-manufacturing business—a position Brownlow was to hold for three years, although he kept his eyes open for other possibilities after the Panic of 1837.

Even after he began his editorial career, Brownlow at first contracted assurance that it would not take too much time away from the iron works. As Nancy Haley notes, Coulter's biography passes very quickly over these three years of Brownlow's life. Of course, a Brownlow who had concrete, practical experience in the world of business (and, therefore, in the world of politics), who might make a claim to judging issues on the basis of fact, does not easily fit the fantasizing fanatic Coulter wishes to describe.

It was probably at this time that Brownlow had his first experience of slave ownership. While we know that he kept "one or two boys" to run his presses in later years, it is likely that his managerial position first brought him into ownership, or at least control, of a group of slaves. Robert Starobin has done much to remind us that all labor in the antebellum South, non-agricultural as well as agricultural, had a large slave component. "The manufacture of iron was...heavily dependent upon slave labor....Slaves were the chief labor force at most upper-South iron works." Brownlow, until the War changed
conditions irreversibly, never questioned the use of slaves in mercantile and industrial, much less agricultural, activity. If his later defense of slavery was a principled one, based on a socially-endemic racism and the Methodist concept of "calling," it was also grounded in a realistic assessment of the needs of his class and an understanding of its place in Southern society. To the extent that the antebellum South had a native bourgeoisie, it was a slave-owning bourgeoisie. Brownlow was a slave-owning manufacturer and businessman. He was a slave-owning Unionist. He was a slave-owning advocate of the "rights of labor." And he lived with those contradictions for twenty-five public years.

During his ten years of preaching, Brownlow had spent most of his time in the backwoods and countryside. When he settled down and settled into business, he settled into the city. The iron works and Brownlow's first newspaper were located in Elizabethton, a small town in the northeast. As the paper grew, and his fame and importance with it, he moved his family to Knoxville, the principal city of East Tennessee. While the ideological home of the South was, as Eugene Genovese has so ably demonstrated, the plantation, Robert Starobin has reminded us that its political and economic life was necessarily channeled through the cities and towns: "Most southern cities were commercial and residential in character....Factors, bankers, lawyers, and slave dealers dominated the urban economy, while the townhouses of wealthy planters hosted the urban social life....Backcountry towns served initially as centers of politics and trade...." Brownlow and at least a few of his fellow city-dwellers were early, urban bourgeois in a pre-bourgeois culture. They were necessarily few, given the South which
surrounded them; and the propagandist Brownlow would hardly be typical of most of them. But of such was the New South to be born, as Brownlow was later to realize. In the meantime, businessmen like Brownlow attempted sincerely to serve both the South and their own interests. When the time for decision came, many East Tennessee businessmen, like Brownlow, chose Unionism, free labor and their long-range interests over Secession, slavery, and their immediate interests. It was a difficult choice, and hardly a foregone conclusion that even some would make it; the story of Brownlow is one of the more dramatic examples of that painful choice.

Of the important political interests of Brownlow and his fledgling class, the single most important was the old issue of "internal improvements." In East Tennessee, the practical meaning of this notorious term was well-known: support of the iron-makers. The industry flourished from settlement to the 1870's, and the need for transportation was continually a major issue of that period. The East Tennessee industrialists needed internal improvements, and the Whigs were the internal-improvement party. Indeed, the Whigs' first major candidate was Hugh Lawson White, whose fight with Jackson was as much an expression of the East's disgust with Middle Tennessee policy as a confrontation over national issues. Brownlow, as a public figure and a businessman, could not help but take sides. He made a reasoned choice, not an abstract decision. He had a particular place in society, and he supported the party which best represented his interests. He never wavered in his support of the Whig party (although he had little respect for William Henry Harrison and Winfield Scott). Later, when he could justify doing so as a good Southerner, he followed the Northern
Whigs into Republicanism.

The Tennessee Whigs were pro-slavery and pro-tariff, but internal improvements was their real touchstone. When they elected Governor Carroll, it was for his internal-improvement policy. Whigs gave when Brownlow solicited railroad subscriptions. The one patronage job Brownlow ever allowed himself to accept was a commission from President Fillmore (whose religion and commitment to improvements made him a Brownlow hero), to study navigation problems on the Tennessee River. As Governor, Brownlow was to convince a Yankee capitalist to relocate his textile industry in East Tennessee. Brownlow the businessman remained a consistent and a persistent Whig.

Methodism, commerce and industry, and Whiggism--these constituted the parameters of Brownlow's life from 1826 to 1839. Methodism gave him a set of values and a talent for polemics. Business gave him a secure and visible place in life. The Whigs gave him a party within which to use those polemics in defense and celebration of that place. Brownlow owed much to Whiggism, and was willing to serve it long and well. Although he was reluctant to leave his business to take over the responsibility of editing the party organ for East Tennessee, his friends and associates convinced him that his frontier-preaching skills were just what was needed for the violent political struggles of the day. The fact that, at that time, there was no Whig outlet in East Tennessee probably decided the issue for Brownlow. It was, to use the cliche, a momentous decision. It placed Brownlow back into the profession of agitator, this time in print. And this time for good.


3. *Cf* Abernethy, 64-90.

4. In my own family, my paternal grandmother was of plain stock, my grandfather was definitely white trash—when they married, my grandmother was disowned and disinherited by her middle-farmer family. The incident was rare enough to bear retelling up and down the valley for the next fifty years.


8. *Cf* Milton Bryan Powell, "The Abolitionist Controversy in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840-1864" (Iowa City, University of Iowa PhD Dissertation, 1963), esp 20-51, for an excellent discussion of the interplay of religious and political themes in Methodism.


11. Powell, 42.

13. Ibid, 106.

14. William G. Brownlow, Helps to the Study of Presbyterianism or, an Unsophisticated Exposition of Calvinism, with Hopkinsian Modifications and Policy, with a View to a more easy Interpretation of the Same. To Which is Added a Brief Account of the Life and Travels of the Author, Interspersed with Anecdotes (Knoxville, F.S. Heiskell, 1834).

15. See Powell, 95-6, for a discussion of the "anti-Fourierism" and "implied Donatism" of Methodist thinking on social and institutional problems.

16. Ibid, 80.

17. Ibid, 21.

18. Cf Howard Zinn, The Politics of History (Boston, Beacon Press, 1971), esp 137-52. While Zinn might object to the use of his typology of "agitation" to describe Brownlow and Methodism, it seems legitimate here. Brownlow did behave as an "agitator." And "reform" in the years 1830-60 covered a variety of movements and motivations, including temperance and nativism no less than community and abolitionism. The very looseness of Zinn's definition, so useful here, has very legitimately been criticized by historians like Eugene Genovese and Aileen Kraditor.


24. Powell, 51; as Powell explains, "calling" was used in a very broad sense to include the nineteenth-century concept of one's "proper station." One held that station or calling at the Lord's pleasure, to fulfill His purposes. This was assumed to be true for slaves no less than for freemen.

25. Starobin, 8.


27. Ibid, 63-4.
28. Indeed, the issue of good roads is still one of the hottest issues in East Tennessee's constant fight with Middle and West Tennessee; cf Ibid, 108ff.


30. Ibid, 83.

Brownlow's fame and influence rested on his newspaper, the Whig, which he edited and controlled for almost forty years. The Parson claimed that it had the largest circulation of any paper in the Southeast; indeed, it was one of the most popular journals in the country, boasting subscribers in all the states and territories. The purpose of this chapter will be to examine some of the more important ideological themes of the paper, to explore some of the positions and values put forward by Brownlow and read by a fairly large sector of the American newspaper-reading public. I will begin with a recapitulation of Nancy Haley's valuable work on the formative period of the Whig, then move on to a consideration of Brownlow's later writing.

Brownlow was talked into the newspaper business by Thomas A.R. Nelson, among others. Nelson was one of the most prominent men in the state, and one of the most respected of Whig party leaders. He was a substantial businessman and an important backroom politician, like Brownlow. Until 1864, at least, when Nelson became a leader in the Conservative Union movement, he and Brownlow were close personal and political friends. Since many later historians have attempted to portray Nelson as a Conservative hero to Brownlow's Radical villain, it is perhaps important to remember that the Whig was in great part Nelson's idea. When Brownlow finally decided to commit himself fully to the enterprise, he did so in a thorough and businesslike manner. If he carried gossip, it was for the same reason as do today's papers: it aroused interest, and therefore upped circulation. As the editor of a political
newspaper, Brownlow would not and could not rely solely on advertising for his finances, so he constantly kept an eye toward increasing subscriptions. This was in part a matter of democratic principle; as Haley notes, Brownlow assumed that mass circulation would provide a counter to the tendency toward domination of political newspapers by family or party cliques. Also, it seemed to him reasonable to assume that high circulation figures implied popular approval for his verbal onslaughts against the Democrats: again, we see the Brownlow pattern of calculated-attack-and-sanction mentioned above. Brownlow received professional sanction as well, in the form of testimonials from a variety of major newspapers. His culture and his new place within that culture make Brownlow's work comprehensible: Brownlow attacked the Democrats as he had been taught to attack the Baptists. He could also defend as well as attack: he frequently wrote articles praising East Tennessee and extolling its iron and coal industries, in which he had an interest.

But politics was the principal reason for the paper's existence; Brownlow's task was to make Whigs in a region where there had been only Democrats before. Later events, later elections, proved his success. It has often been suggested that Brownlow's reportorial methods for achieving that success were one-sided. This may be to misunderstand the purpose of a free press, to misunderstand its particular and necessary definition of fairness: "In his estimation, 'public men' were 'public property'; therefore, he had the right to speak freely about them, exposing their indiscretions, if need be. However, he was the first to offer persons assailed by his paper a chance to defend themselves in the Whig." He not only "assailed" Democrats; he was always willing to call
up short any erring Whigs, especially if they lagged in support of the beloved Clay. This policy brought him further popular and professional approval—a good party man who brought in the votes and yet obviously maintained an independent spirit was seen as a thing of value. He was repeatedly invited to take over the editorship of other Whig papers in the state, although he declined to leave his home area. He was also invited to several "in" gatherings of Whig editors, which he refused to attend—he argued that there was a great deal of difference between party loyalty and what he feared might be backroom news-manipulation.

Politics in the days of "Freedom's Ferment" was a very inclusive entity, encompassing morality as well as power and economics. And Brownlow was nothing if not a somewhat old-fashioned moralist. Not only as a Methodist, but as a Whig, Brownlow was actively committed to the middle-class ideal of conservative reform. His idea of reform, as stated earlier, was necessarily a personalistic one: America was good to the same extent were as her individual citizens. Drunkenness being the worst of vices, and the Democrats including many drunks among their ranks, it stood to reason that they were the party of low demogoguery and vulgar appeal. The Whigs, on the other hand, containing many of the "better sort of people," were the party of the good man; of men like Brownlow, who walked upright and never asked others to live up to standards he himself did not follow. This "middle-class morality," which only strengthened as Brownlow grew older, provided an important link between his early Methodism and his later Whiggism. It also provided the psychological strength to carry on almost fifty years of agitation.

Brownlow's circuit-riding years had prepared him for the role
of agitator. During his first two years as an editor, he had institutionalized that role, and established the principles, interests, and causes to which he would devote a long life of agitation. He now knew what he had to say, and had found a platform from which to say it. I would like here to quote at length from Haley's fitting summary of those two years:

Not only did Brownlow's "strictly political journal" create havoc in the ranks of the area Democrats...it also furthered the Whig cause in the state at large...the newspaper fulfilled its purpose, that of advancing the Whig party and damaging the opposition's cause. A decided difference was made in state politics by creating Whig strength in an area previously controlled by Democrats...in fairness to the Whig it should be emphasized that the discussion of personalities took a "back seat" to the presentation of party tenets and candidates...Essentially, this was a "fighting" political newspaper...In spite of the fact that Brownlow was untrained in journalism, the Whig was amazingly professional in its outlook and manner....That the Whig grew steadily was due chiefly to the inexhaustible energy of its editor. What he did not know about the newspaper world he learned....Progressive by nature, Brownlow experimented...and...created a fresh originality not found in many southern newspapers....The first two years of the Whig can only be called successful.

As mentioned above, Brownlow devoted a great deal of space in the Whig to the defense not only of Whiggism, but also of Methodism. Both Methodism and Whiggism were movements of cautious reform, agencies of respectable change. Both claimed to represent the broad middle class of America, and Whig businessmen made up a larger component of the Methodist leadership than had been the case in the early days of the circuit-ministry. And the Methodists acknowledged in their practice this altered constituency, as Milton Powell notes:

The political and social structure of society
functioned as a given context for the work of the church....the church was not to be evaluated by its observable effects upon the social structure, but on the numbers converted....as Methodists, individually and collectively, became more prosperous, these criteria would increasingly be equated with the size of the denomination's membership...and the conventional social behavior of the middle class.17

In 1856 Brownlow's Southern Whig defense of Methodism resulted in one of his two best-sellers, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined*. This was a polemical response to *The Great Iron Wheel; or, Republicanism Backwards and Christianity Reversed*, a virulent pamphlet-attack on the Methodist Church by the Baptist preacher, J.R. Graves. The Brownlow-Graves War was widely followed, each published a second volume in the controversy, and each combatant was warmly encouraged by his own denomination.19

Early in the book, Brownlow made it clear that he had no objection to the existence of Graves' book, that is, to the mode of denominational controversy. For Brownlow, controversy equaled freedom of speech, and therefore freedom in general: "He [Brownlow] believes that had it not been for controversy, Romish priests would now be feeding us all with Latin masses and with their wafer gods!"20 However, after years of being taught that true Christianity meant middle-class Weslayanism, Brownlow found it difficult to treat the Popery of the immigrants and the Baptism of the poor whites as spiritual equals of his own denomination: "Methodism has been a prominent object of attack by the enemies of Christianity, as well in Europe as in America."21 Polemics against Methodism was the work of Christianity's enemies. Brownlow may or may not have believed this fully (he surely believed it to some extent), but it certainly made good press.
Methodism, and the Parson it once paid to preside over near-riotous camp meetings, had become respectable. It had become an Establishment; and, like most religious establishments, it turned on the "enthusiasm" that gave it birth. In the case of the Baptists, enthusiasm was not hard to find and to condemn. To drive the point home, Brownlow went right for the heroic fount of American Baptism, Roger Williams.

I am aware that Roger Williams is often complimented as the advocate of freedom of opinion, and of religious toleration; but it is known to all impartial readers of history that he was a religious bigot, and full of that fanaticism so peculiar to Baptists.

According to Brownlow, the most wrong-headed thing about the Baptists was the practice which gave them their name. Aside from being un-Scriptural and based on shaky theological premises, Brownlow declared, the practice of baptism-by-immersion provided a most unrespectable (and therefore un-Christian) spectacle.

On different occasions I have witnessed these indecent personal exhibitions, of respectable females coming out of the water with their thin garments sticking close to their skin, and exhibiting their muscles and make in so revolting a manner, that ladies present have felt constrained to surround them, so as to hide their persons from the gaze of the vulgar throng. I witnessed this disgusting sight several times....

It was a bit more difficult to launch such an attack on the respectable Presbyterians: it required a great deal of looking. Brownlow looked, and found

President EDWARDS, at the head and front of Presbyterianism of his day, speaking of the great revival in New England in the year 1734, and in defense of the enthusiasm of the subjects of that revival....
As always for Brownlow, the religious and the political-institutional were never very far apart. The most important institutional issue in American Christendom in the 1840's and 50's was the division of the churches. Sooner or later, most of the major denominations split into Northern and Southern factions. The general cause was the slavery question; among the Methodists, the particular issue was the right of the clergy to own slaves. Graves, however, attributed the split to a factionalism allegedly inherent in Methodism, and to opportunism among Southern Methodists hungry to get at Southern church property. Brownlow saw the matter differently—although church unity was one of the highest values of the Methodists, a surgical separation of the two regional groupings of the Church might allow each half to better minister to the needs of its particular constituency. More importantly, Brownlow felt that he and his fellow Southerners were in the right in this internecine Methodist controversy over the morality of slavery, and therefore incurred no guilt in calling for a separation. Most importantly, the split ended the increasingly bitter debate between Northern and Southern Methodists. It was a compromise to save the larger Unity, the Nation, a compromise seen by Brownlow in the same light as the later, Southern Whig-supported Missouri Compromise. To Brownlow, already beginning to fear for the future of his glorious Union, the issue between him and Graves was simple. Graves was a born Northerner and a demagogic Baptist, therefore (potentially) abolitionist, therefore dis-Unionist: Brownlow was a born Southerner and a respectable Methodist, therefore pro-slavery, therefore Unionist. In the light of history, the equations may seem absurdly wrong-headed. Be that as it may, they were the very heart of conservative nationalism, and of
many businessmen in both of the Nation's estranged sections.

Graves ridicules the Methodist Church for the separation which took place in 1844, and attributes the cause to the government of the Church, and the ambition of a corrupt and designing ministry! That was a glorious act on the part of the Methodist Church, and a proud day in her history. It was the Abolitionists of the North who rent in twain the Methodist Church in 1844.27

And now, people of the South, why is it that Elder Graves can publish a book of 570 pages, north of Mason and Dixon's Line, WHERE HE WAS BORN, and discuss so many different subjects, some of them growing directly out of the slavery agitation, and never say one word AGAINST ABOLITIONISM, or one word in favor of SOUTHERN SLAVERY? After leaving New England, it is said that he took up his abode in "Western Reserve," in Ohio, and in Indiana, the great theatre of Free-Soilism! It has, moreover, been said of him, that he was an Abolitionist before he came here to reside! One thing is certain—he keeps very dark upon this grave question, and ought to be made to come out explicitly, if he concludes to take up his permanent abode in the South! We are on the eve of unconjecturable events, and every Southern man ought to show his hand...The bonds of the Union have resisted political agitation, but can they withstand religious fury? Abolitionism has travelled from political dominion to religious conviction, and has infected the whole mind and heart of the North. Under its palsyng touch, some of the strongest cords that held the Union together have snapped; others are now assailed, and I fear they will give way!28

Although he continued to use his paper and position to fight the good fight for Methodism, the real point and purpose of the Whig was the presentation and defense of Whiggish economic and political interests and principles. Brownlow's "little Knoxville paper" did this at least as well as its Nashville and Richmond big-city counterparts.

Southern Whigs had their own special roots, and were always careful to assure the electorate that the party's policies supported
particular Southern needs and interests. They were never simply Whiggish, but were also Southern. Indeed, in Tennessee, the party was born more out of local than of regional issues, and particularly out of the internal feud between the Hugh White and Andy Jackson factions of the old Blount machine. Nonetheless, Whiggism was an identifiable, nationwide class phenomenon. And most Southern Whig politicians could describe careers of party loyalty and commitment similar to that of the northerner Lincoln.

"In '32, I voted for Henry Clay, in '36 for the Hugh L. White ticket, in '40 for "Tip and Tyler." In '44 I made the last great effort for 'Old Harry of the West.'...Taylor was elected in '48, and we fought nobly for Scott in '52." The leaders of the Whig party were his heroes; Henry Clay, in particular, he "loved and revered as a teacher and leader." Proud of his Whig principles, Lincoln boasted that he "had stood by the party as long as it had a being." He did not like the thought of being "un-whigged," and only after the death of his old party did he, rather reluctantly, join the Republicans.

A Northerner could join the Republicans. A Southerner could become a Know-Nothing, as going back to the Democrats would have been moral and political treason. Neither Lincoln nor Brownlow were traitors.

It is very important to recognize this Southern-National tension in Brownlow's Southern Whiggism. Historians too often tend to oversimplify the possible variants of political commitment in the two decades before the war. Although the War narrowed the issue to one of choosing between pro-slavery anti-unionism and anti-slavery pro-unionism, there were some anti-slavery anti-unionists, like the Garrison who burned the Constitution. There were also pro-slavery pro-unionists—including most Whigs, South and North. Although the events of the Fifties made the
tensions of the last position unbearable and unnecessary for most Northerners, the deeper values that position implied did not simply fade away. The attitudes of the Republican and Know-Nothing constituencies, if not their respective party platforms, were not so very far apart on the issues of racism, nativism, and economic goals. The one thing that irrevocably divided the two groups of Old Whigs was slavery, or more precisely, slave expansion. Many Northern Whig-Republicans were farmers who had to live with the dominant businessman; many Southern Whigs were businessmen who had to live with the dominant planters. The work of both Eugene Genovese and Robert Starobin help make it clear why the mission of these Southerners--Brownlow's mission--had to end in frustration, in an eventual bedding-down with either Cotton Aristocracy or Black Republicanism. It is a tribute to Brownlow's moral consistency and his sense of the future that he chose, finally, to make his peace with the latter.

Earlier generations of historians tended to suggest that the choice was an obvious one, difficult though it might be. The researches of Genovese and Starobin tend to suggest a very close bond between slave-owning planters and slave-owning businessmen. According to Genovese, it was a marriage of necessity, that is, the businessmen, and particularly the industrialists, had little hope of escaping the power of the planters; and they had little reason to escape, given their limited development and their reliance on and access to the planter market. According to Starobin, it was more a marriage of convenience, both sets of slave-owners living in what they saw as an at least potentially harmonious relation: the businessmen had generally the same interests as the planters. Given the particular demands of their large-scale, structural analyses,
neither historian looks in a detailed manner at the daily workings of practical politics. This was, however, the arena in which the agitator Brownlow lived and worked. And at this level, the issues are always less clear-cut. Brownlow and his kind wanted to keep the "Southern Way," and lived and profited within the slave economy. However, their ties to that economy were looser than the planters', and their industrial and mercantile hopes and projects had a more clearly nationalist focus. Like the "fire-eating" Southern Democrats, they favored slave expansion --but they shied away from the question of re-opening the unsavory and unrefined slave trade. Like the "abolitionizing" Northern Republicans, these capitalists favored the Tariff--but they rejected a Free Soilism which would discriminate against the peculiar nature of Southern labor-use. Like the Republicans of a later date, they often tended toward a paradoxically hard-headed politics of nostalgia, wanting both rampant progress and middle-class decency in one package. And, as we shall see later, Brownlow--like those same Republican farmers, but a full decade earlier--discovered the idea of a national (as opposed to sectional) imperialist policy as one way of solving the problems of his isolated section and class. 37

Having made this brief allusion to the general framework of the larger political economy within which Brownlow lived and moved and had his being, I would like to turn now to an equally brief examination of Brownlow's own political ideology and practice. This can perhaps best be done through an examination of two of his more influential campaign-propaganda works, written in the Forties and Fifties. As indicated above, these books were in very great part simply compilations of editorial and
reportorial material from the *Whig*, and may also serve to convey some sense of Brownlow's journalistic style and stance. Because they have a great deal of the paste-pot about them, the reader should not expect to find much stylistic or thematic unity to the two works. Rather than attempt to artificially impose such a unity upon them, I have chosen to discuss them section-by-section, in order to present them more accurately as they were for presenting them less systematically than they could be. After a look at these two books, I will go on to finish this discussion with a look at some of the more important political characteristics of the critical Fifties.

Political leaders come and go, but the political teachers of this world are rare. Brownlow, no less than Lincoln, considered Henry Clay to be his great teacher—Clay was the standard by which mere politicians were measured and found wanting. In his 1844 *Political Register*, Brownlow tried to make it clear that this man was a hero not least because he most objectively and rationally understood the South's interests and the Nation's needs. Brownlow's Preface declared that his mission was the "advocacy of HENRY CLAY, the greatest man now living..." Just as, polemically speaking, Methodism equalled Christianity, so did Clay equal Americanism—despite the prattle of Gentile scoffers: "It blunts the keen edge of sarcasm, and defeats the purposes of malignity, to know that one serves the cause of humanity, of truth, and of his country." And it was the task of the party agitator to convince the misled people that this was the case, even if it required him to "assail a succession of leaders, from GEN. JACKSON down to col. haynes..." It was not only a question of personalities, of course; there
were also substantive issues and policies at stake. Brownlow made clear in his Introduction some of the policies and practices most in need of assailing:

The destructive vicissitudes of commerce—the prostration of the mercantile class, as necessary to the body politic, as the hands and feet to the body corporeal—the ruin of the currency of the country—the inroads of faction—the tendency of modern Democratic principles—their countenance of thefts, perjuries, forgeries and counterfeiting—the long sway of the grossest and vilest demagogueism, the fatal tendency to array the ignorant against the intelligent, the poor against the rich, the wicked against the pious, the vulgar against the decent, the worthless against the worthy, and thieves against honest men; beside the most deadly inroads upon the Constitution, all too in the name of Democracy. 42

Although himself a good and fiercely loyal Southern man, Brownlow did not hesitate to call up short even "the great leader of these violaters of law and order, JOHN C. CALHOUN, 43 whom he saw as a willing accomplice in the nation-destroying "triple alliance of Democracy, Nullification, and Abolitionism." 44 For all the differences among these three, Brownlow felt, each had the potential for destroying the Union, for pulling it apart; and he took it as a sure sign of the opportunistic, demagogic nature of Democracy that it could provide even a temporary home for both militant pro-slavery and anti-slavery men.

The main body of the Political Register began, predictably enough for a Whig tract, with a discussion of the Bank question. Brownlow opened with an I-told-you-so:

For the last ten years, or upwards, as our readers well recollect, the Locofocos have very unjustly charged the Whig party with being the Bank party—whereas, they (the Locos) created most of the Banks whose frauds and failures
have, of late, produced such general distress and suffering. We might refer to the speeches of eminent Whig Statesmen, predicting, ten and twelve years ago, the very disasters that have now fallen upon the country, from overbanking....

He went on, as was his wont, to produce mountains of statistics, graphs and charts to make his point, getting in a dig at the hard-currency policy along the way. Linking the Democrats' money policy to their Free-Trade policy, Brownlow made an interesting point, coming somewhat surprisingly from a conservative Southerner and a small slave-owing businessman:

The price of labor! Can any subject be more worthy the deep and impartial consideration of the great body of the American People?—Already our laborers are paid too little in our country, and yet, the "free trade" doctrines of the Locofoco party, evidently leads to the reduction of wages. What class of American citizens could view with indifference a reduction of wages...in these days of hard money prices....

The question of Free Trade was also the question of the Tariff, the second Whig bone of contention after the Bank-and-currency issue. In Chapter VI Brownlow expounded on that economic nationalism that places him in the camp of Alexander Hamilton and Henry Clay. He argued that, despite planter counter-claims, Southerners had as much stake as Northerners in the issue.

At the North--in the South--to the East--and in the far off West, the cry is, "Protection of Home Industry." All intelligent men now regard this question, as one deeply involving the future prosperity and interests of this whole country. It is a broad and momentous question, in which every American has a mutual interest, though demagogues, for partizan purposes, may endeavor to array the South against the North, or draw the lines of party....
The Democrats, according to Brownlow, were guilty of a kind of economic treason, allowing partisan sectional interests to create a situation in which English capital was allowed to ruin American. A year before Engels drew the economic implications of the condition of England's army of unemployed, semi-employed, and employed workers, Brownlow wrote that

England is overrun with manufactures, and she abounds with hundreds of thousands of naked and perishing men, women and children, who are glad to find employment for a mere livelihood, and by which means she turns out immense quantities of every kind of the products of labor with which she abounds, and which is forthwith shipped to this country and sold at low rates, so as to put down our own establishments—turn our laboring poor out of employment—break up and ruin our capitalists and injure every branch of our business in our whole country.48

Brownlow next turned his attention to the problem of Church and State, the issue of Democratic control of the urban immigrant vote, and the alleged "unholy alliance between the leading Romanists and Locofocos of this country."50 For Brownlow, two things were at stake here: most Protestant leaders were seriously worried that a great influx of European Catholics would undermine the presumably Protestant—yeoman composition of the Republic; also, and of more immediate concern, these immigrants tended to be caught up in the big-city political machines against which the conservative reformers continually fought.

Popery is alarmingly on the increase, as every attentive observer is aware, mainly on the score of emigration— but to a far greater extent than is generally believed, by its close and insidious connexion with what is known to the American reader, by the imposson appellation of Jackson Van Buren Democracy....Hundreds of thousands, every year, reach the shores of America, from Ireland, Austria, France, and other countries; and strange as it may
seem, it is nevertheless true, that almost to a man, in the State and National elections, they vote the Locofoco ticket.51

One reason for this bloc voting, Brownlow argued at length, was the over-reliance of the Catholic immigrants on the clergy for guidance, to an extent unimaginable among decent, middle-class Protestants.

Who has not been startled at the call of BISHOP ENGLAND, in 1840, upon the Catholic population of the United States, to rally to the standard of Democracy, and support for the highest office in this country, MARTIN VAN BUREN?52

Brownlow had many other complaints against most Catholics, not least of which was their competition with Protestants, and especially Methodists, in the mission field. Brownlow's point, however, was a call to action, not only action at the polls, but the informal voluntary-association action at which Americans excel. For one thing, they should of course buy "Whig papers, and documents, which oppose Popery."53 For another, Native American Associations should be formed, in order to check this foreign interference, or the unjust interference of foreign emigrants, to pervert the institutions of this happy Republic. Alas! that the bitter sectarian broils of Europe should now be introduced into this country to disturb its peace, and interpose with its prosperity!54

The reference to "European broils" included, among other things, the separate-schools issue. This was not merely an American-nativist issue; it was a major point of controversy in European political and religious life during the nineteenth century. Brownlow, as many Americans and Englishmen, felt that separate schools, especially if they received a portion of taxpayers' money, would only hurt "the "Protestant cause.... the cause of common school education."55 Brownlow cited Jefferson as an
earlier opponent of the "Papist menace," and he also made an interesting choice of contemporary allies.

We respectfully call attention here, to the eloquent appeal for the West, from the pen of the Rev. Dr. Beecher, a distinguished and aged Presbyterian Clergyman, urging the union of the East and West, in efforts to save our country from the prevalence of papal and other destructive errors. We concur in all the apprehensions of the Doctor, in respect to the increase of Popery—and especially do we concur in his views of the necessity and importance of union among the various sects, in opposition to Romanism. But it is not enough to save our country from the dominion of Rome—our churches should unite in putting down the politicians, who favor the vile schemes of papists....

Although Brownlow considered Catholicism wrong in principle, he had no desire to suppress its religious practice. What he did object to was its affiliation with the vote-manipulating and class-agitating politics of the Democrats. And Catholics were hardly the only offenders in this regard; Brownlow cited approvingly Lyman Beecher's dismissal of "Mormon, Universalist, Campbellite...deceivers." Brownlow was a reformer, but a conservative one. Standing mid-way between the "happy mediocrity" of Jefferson's eighteenth century and the "boosterism" of George Babbit's twentieth, he and his kind resisted any challenge to what they understood to be the fundamental structure of the Republic. Fascinated by the many strong radical and reactionary personalities of those times, many historians often forget that most people simply wanted to go about their normal affairs, that most people could not afford to wear their ideals on their sleeves. Brownlow did so because that was his job.

A large portion of the Political Register was taken up with
a blow-by-blow exposé of the personal and political faults of various leading Democrats, especially of Van Buren and Polk. Mention of Polk brought in the question of Whig-Democrat struggles on the Tennessee front; and Brownlow devoted a good deal of space to Tennessee Democrats, especially to the notorious "Immortal Thirteen,"\(^{59}\) and to Andrew Johnson in particular. Brownlow and Johnson almost never had a good word to say for each other—their Unionist alliance during the War was universally recognized as a truce, not a permanent peace. Johnson was the one East Tennessee Democrat the editor could not budge; and Brownlow was the one East Tennessee Whig the tailor could not out-insult. Johnson could not get around the fact that Brownlow was both an effective political propagandist and a man of principle; and Brownlow later acknowledged Johnson to be a man of "pluck, perserverance, and indomitable industry."\(^{60}\) He also, however, considered Johnson a demagogue—Johnson was too popular with the back-country white trash to suit the urban plain-folk Brownlow. This was, to Brownlow, a failing Johnson shared with almost all other Democrats.

They profess a sacred regard for the interests of the People—following the unworthy example of their great prototype, Robespierre, who, in the bloody days of the French Revolution, in order to incite the pious Jacobins to the commission of Democratic deeds, sung in their ears the honeyed phrases of Locofocoism, "Pauvre Peuple! Vertueux Peuple!" which being interpreted signifies Poor People: Virtuous People! American Locofocos, like their "illustrious predecessors" in France, have instigated rebellions....\(^{61}\)

The thirty-year battle between Brownlow and Johnson, which was to reach a climax during Reconstruction, was in many ways the old and ever-renewed struggle between the "goodness" of Jefferson and the "rightness" of
Hamilton, only writ small, played out by two men who were something less than Titans. There is likely no final resolution to the question, but it has been admirably posed by Ralph Haskins:

Johnson...belongs in the stream of anti-monopolism....One cannot read the Whig without feeling that the pristine purity of the old federal republic of Washington is being desecrated by the evils of modern society. Over their debate hung the shadow of East Tennessee, in its way of microcosm of the nation's diverse ideas. Was not the former tailor a spokesman for a little America of limited government, the America of farmer and mechanic? Was not the erstwhile ironmonger a prophet for a big America, the America of the leviathan state and the industrial society? In the light of the future, which was the reactionary?62

After roasting Polk, Calhoun, and Johnson, Brownlow concluded his anti-Democratic onslaught with an attack on Van Buren's alleged weakness on the slavery issue, and on his proposal for "an abomination in the shape of a Standing Army."63

The remainder of the Register was a campaign-biography of Henry Clay. There is little need to go into this in detail, all such hagiographies, even the better ones, being fairly similar. However, two passages deserve quoting as examples of Brownlow's development of the Whig myth. The first attempted to convince the reader that, even when Whigs lose, it is the fault of their virtues:

But the periodical discomfitures of the Whigs, to which we have alluded, is easily accounted for. The Whigs, taken in the aggregate, are those people, who do not spend their time in mourning over petty schemes of selfishness and ambition—they do not make politics a trade, like the mercenary demagogues to whom they stand opposed. Unlike the Locofocos, taken in the aggregate, the Whigs have regular pursuits,
on which they rely for the support of themselves and families. Therefore, the State elections do not cause them to abandon their several vocations. It is only on great and stirring occasions, such as was the election in 1840, and such as will be the one in 1844, that the Whigs to a man, will leave their usual vocations and go to the polls. The Whigs now, as in 1840, embrace a large majority of the American people. On the other hand, the Locofocos, taken in the aggregate, are politicians by trade, and look to the success of party for a living. Not a few of them—-are loafers and spongers—with nothing to loose and everything to gain. By politics they make their meat and bread—by politics they live and move and have their being—and at their trade they work! It was on this account, moreover, that they were justly denominated the "Spoils Party."

Thus, the Whigs as a sort of collective Cincinnatus-Washington, ever the conservative answer to the reactionary dream of a man on a horse. Brownlow even completed the equation with another reference to France, bringing in the "critical liberal" Lafayette as a Whig counter-balance to the rabble-rousing, Robespierrian Democrats: "Lafayette, the bosom companion of Washington, his comrade in arms, in the glorious revolution, feeling the deepest interest in the welfare of the United States, and well acquainted with our institutions and great men, always desired to see Henry Clay elevated to the Presidency." And so too, the book suggested, did all decent middle-class Americans. Brownlow was to consider Clay's defeat that year as one of the single worst events to befall the Republic before the War.

By 1856, the Whigs were gone, Clay was dead, many Southerners had defected to Democracy, and Republicanism was stirring in the North. All these events were hard blows to Brownlow, and it seemed he might become a man without a party. In the South, Know-Nothingism provided one last breathing-space for the old Whigs. Most of them had
always held to Know-Nothing principles, long before these principles became platform planks. As Eric Foner and others have shown, "nativism" was an understandable, if misguided, conservative response to social grievances and political machine-corruption. Also, Catholicism as an institution was at that time disliked by almost all Anglo-Americans from moderate leftwards: indeed, Disraeli and Marx were no less knee-jerk anti-Catholics than were Brownlow and Millard Fillmore. This is not necessarily to excuse the phenomenon, but to place it in its proper political and social context; and the context was the reign of Pius IX, of the Syllabus of Errors (cf Error #80, the belief that "the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization"), and the First Vatican Council. This is also not to deny that nativism grew both more cynical and more paranoid as it grew more political and more diffuse, through processes similar to those in the case of anti-slavery as described variously by Louis Filler and Michael Fellman.

Brownlow, however, was neither cynical nor paranoid. And when the American party put forward an old hero, Millard Fillmore, who had given Brownlow the internal-improvements patronage job, as its standard-bearer, Brownlow's support need not be attributed to shoddy motivations. He went to work with a sincere will, and put together Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, a defense of nativist principles and Whiggish interests. This campaign-work was also, like the one discussed above, a collation of Whig-material, and will be presented as it was written. The purpose of the book was to put on trial the Democrats and their ally, "the great criminal of the nineteenth century, the
PAPAL HIERARCHY." 69

What is Popery in Roman Catholic Europe? It is as intolerant in politics as in religion: it taxes and oppresses the subjects and citizens of every country; it interdicts nations; dethrones governors, chief magistrates, and kings; dissolves civil governments; suspends commerce; annuls civil laws; and, to gratify its unsanctified lust of ambition, it has overrun whole nations with bloodshed, and thrown them into confusion. So it is with this "Bogus" Democracy: it wages a war of extermination against the freedom of the press, and against the liberty of speech, the rights of human conscience, and the liberties of man.... 70

Brownlow began his text with a quote from Byron; indeed, although many of his class found Byron "shocking," Brownlow quoted him often throughout his books and articles, although he never quoted Shelley. With an unerring sense of taste, the bourgeois Brownlow knew an ally when he saw one. 71 Brownlow argued that, although the Byronic "spirit of Liberty" could show itself anywhere, it was in America that it had most clearly manifested, established, and institutionalized itself.

The civilization—the nationality—the institutions, civil and religious—and the mission of the United States, are all eminently American. Mental light and personal independence, constitutional union, national supremacy, submission to law and rules of order, homogeneous population, and instinctive patriotism, are all vital elements of American liberty, nationality, and upwards and onward progress. 72

This was typical campaign speechifying, but it was also Brownlow's credo; and he believed all of it, the part about Union no less than the part about demographic homogeneity. It was his reason for joining

The AMERICAN PARTY—composed of conservative, patriotic, Protestant, Union-loving, native-born citizens of every section...The paramount and ultimate object of our AMERICAN ORGANIZATION is to save and exalt the Union, and to
preserve and perpetuate the rights and blessings of the Protestant religion. We contend that American principles should mould American policy; that American mind should rule American destiny; that all sectional parties, such as a party North, or a party South, should be renounced; that all sectional agitations, such as are kept up by Abolitionists, Free Soilers, and Black Republicans, should be resisted; that Congress should never agitate the subject of domestic slavery, in any form or for any purpose, but leave it where the Constitution fixes it....

His chapter on Abolitionism was largely, in the best Brownlow style, an attack on a variety of individuals, including Ben Butler, Dana and Greeley of the Tribune, and, interestingly enough, Andrew Johnson.

In 1842, this same Gov. Johnson was a Senator in our State Legislature, and introduced the Abolition... White Basis System... He appealed to the prejudices and passions of the poor--inquired of the hard-working men... how they liked to see their wives and daughters offset... by the "greasy negro wenches of Shelby, Davidson, Fayette, Sumner and Rutherford counties." He made a real, stirring abolition appeal to the poor, and non-slaveholding portion of the crowd... to array them against the rich, and especially against the owners of large numbers of slaves.

The Abolitionists were not the only threat to the Union, of course. And Brownlow did not hesitate to attack, in the form of an open letter, even Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, who, although the revered grand old patriarch of pro-slavery and Southern Methodism, was a Democrat and therefore presumably weak on the Catholic issue. Brownlow argued that, "occupying a position in a Mississippi college, in the midst of Fire-Eating Disunion Progressive Democracy, you desire to please them, rather than serve the interests of your country or Church." It was still almost impossible for Brownlow to take the Southern nationalism of Longstreet or Yancey seriously. The specific point at issue here, however, was that
Longstreet seemed soft on Catholicism. (To make his points about Papism,
Brownlow larded his letter with quotes from the Quarterly Review of Catho-
lie apologist Orestes Brownson, appropriately enough an old Locofoco.)
Brownlow threw down the middle-class gauntlet to the aging defender of
the Cotton Aristocracy: "Your influence, whatever you may possess, is
against the Protestant faith, and in favor of Catholicism. In a word,
you are a dangerous man in a Republican government." 76

Since Longstreet had seen fit as a Methodist leader to warn
other Methodists against Know-Nothinism, Brownlow took it upon himself
to teach the old man a few things about religion and politics. For one
thing, the old Whigs, in the tradition of American toleration, had no
desire to go even as far in their opposition to Catholicism as had the
founder of the Methodist Church:

The American Party says only that they will not
vote for Catholics, or put them in office, be-
cause their principles are antagonistic to the
spirit of Republican institutions. Mr. Wesley
lays down the comprehensive...doctrine...that
"no government not Roman Catholic ought to
tolerate men of the Roman Catholic persuasion." 77

Brownlow found it amazing that Longstreet could be soft in light of "the
iniquitous reign of Pius IX," 78 and felt forced to state that "the only
excuse I can render for your strange and inconsistent conduct is, that
you are in your dotage; that you are a violent old partisan; and that
you are the tool of designing demagogues, infamous disunionists, and
unmitigated repudiators." 79 Brownlow was willing to blast Fire-Eaters
no less than Abolitionists. He ended his attack on Longstreet with an
interesting accusation against the Catholics, pointing out that "in our
country, not a single Catholic is to be found associated with the order
of Free Masons; and why? Masonry is founded upon the Bible, and it requires the reading of the Protestant Bible in all its Lodges, and it don't suit Romanism. That Brownlow was likely a Mason was an interesting fact, in light of the Anti-Masonic origins of so many Whigs.

In another open letter to a Democratic antagonist, Brownlow accused that party of dissembling: "You declaim most lustily in favor of religious liberty for Catholics, which you know we do not propose as a party to interfere with." The real issue, Brownlow suggested, was more immediate and concrete. It was that "American Protestant wives and children have to subsist on charity during our severe winters, in consequence of their husbands and fathers being elbowed out of employment by the competition of foreign pauper laborers!" This was not simply a businessman speaking, who might have had reservations concerning the implications of the statement, but a Southern businessman, who envisioned hiring many slaves cheap and a few free white men dear. Brownlow went on to support his position with apt quotes from the statesman Jefferson and the historian Macauley. He further argued that pro-Catholic fears of Americanist interference in religion were hypocritical: was not interference in the State the very essence of political Catholicism?

In 1848, when the people of France expelled Louis Phillipe from the throne in Paris, and established a Republic, the present old drunken, goutified debauchee Pope Pius IX, hurled at the French nation a fearful bull of excommunication, and denied them the rights of revolution!....no longer ago than the year 1854, this same old vagabond, Pope Pius, issued orders absolving his followers from all allegiance to the Sardinian Government, because that government chose to abolish the infamous monasteries,
which had been so long supported at the expense of an oppressed people!\textsuperscript{84}

Of course, Catholicism was not the only ism to infect the Democrats. Besides, Brownlow had very good things to say about the Gallican wing of the Church, and pointed out that only the Ultramontanes were excluded from the American Party.\textsuperscript{85} The former, he felt sure, were independent men and not the twice-removed tools of Metternich's and all subsequent Austrian cabinets.\textsuperscript{86} No, the Democrats were a veritable Pandora's box of isms:

It is made up of the odds and ends of all factions and parties on the continent, and is one of the most anomalous combinations of fanaticism, idolatry, prostitution, crime, and absurdities conceivable! The isms composing the party...are: Abolitionism; Free-Soilism; Agrarianism; Fourieritism; Millerism; Radicalism; Women's Rightsism; Mobism; Mormonism; Spiritualism; Locofocoism; Higher-Lawism; Foreign Pauperism; Anti-Americanism; Roman Catholicism; Deism, and modern Sag-Nichtism!\textsuperscript{87}

The balance of Americanism was taken up with biographies of the leading American, Democratic, and Republican candidates. Most of these sketches were rather un-memorable, except perhaps for the following insightful note: "Fremont is the representative of aggression: he is a Filibuster, and the exponent of a civilization above all constitutions, and all laws."\textsuperscript{88}

Brownlow ended the book with the "Sermon on Slavery," with which he began his brief career as a pro-slavery apologist and lecturer.

Brownlow did not, of course, write only during presidential-election years. The Whig was a Tennessee paper, and Brownlow, as a central power-figure in Tennessee Whiggism,\textsuperscript{89} developed his ideas and tactics within that context. I would like to conclude this chapter with a very brief look at that setting during the decade before the War.
Brownlow and most of the other Tennessee Whigs put their last hopes for national unity on their great Senator, John Bell. Bell was in many ways an ideal Whiggish-compromise politician. As a planter and an industrialist, he could speak for both important sets of Southern financial interests. Also, he was both a large slaveowner and a militant anti-Democrat. His plantation origins and life commanded respect in the South, and placed him more squarely in the midst of Tennessee's social elite than Brownlow could ever be. He was a Middle Tennessean: as implied above, this made him an ambiguous figure. He was in an ideal position to be courted by, and to represent, both the East and West Tennesseans; to some extent, he was the Tennessee Whig coalition. More clearly than Brownlow, he lived out the Southern-conservative-Unionist-capitalist life. Much less clearly than Brownlow did he understand or acknowledge its assumptions, implications, and long-range demands: like Thomas A.R. Nelson, he parted company with Brownlow when the War came. For most of their lives, however, their conditions, interests, and politics were the same. Here is John Tricamo's description of Bell:

Bell desired to maintain harmony between the sections...He sought to keep the Whigs united... He sought to achieve the economic development of the nation by continuing to call for the building of railroads...Bell made it a point to warn of the danger of any repeal of the tariff...Bell himself had considerable investment in coal and iron mines and therefore was interested in their eventual development. His business connections and economic beliefs impelled him toward a position of political conservatism based on national unity.

During the Compromise debates in 1850, Bell was a leading participant in the Senate discussions. Some think that, had he proposed and defended the measure instead of Clay, the whole process would have
gone more smoothly. Bell made a point during these debates of defending the institution of slavery against Abolitionist attacks. And not without reason: Bell saw the writing on the wall. The Compromise was barely three years old when Kansas burst on the scene, creating the havoc Bell had prophesied would come; as a last-ditch response to this new crisis, Bell proposed the formation of a conservative Union party to go to the electorate in 1856. Although Bell's proposal was supported by such leading Whigs as Brownlow and Nelson, it failed: "the bitterness resulting from the Kansas-Nebraska Act...destroyed the national unity of the Whigs." This was the basis of Brownlow's move toward the American Party. As Tricano notes, he saw the "Know-Nothings as an opportunity to recover political power [from West Tennessee] for both East Tennessee and himself. The more conservative old-line Whigs of Middle Tennessee, he realized held the balance of power, so he appealed to them vigorously, applauding John Bell in his editorial columns." Bell refused to take the bait. The Know-Nothings lost miserably in '56. With Bell increasingly in the West Tennessee-planter camp, the East Tennessee Whigs were isolated. Brownlow hit a political lull--he was a believer, but not a fool.

Despairing temporarily of saving the Union through the ballot, Brownlow took to the rostrum. Since a Southerner in the 1850's was practically bound to defend anything on the basis of its benefit to slavery, Brownlow undertook to argue on the lecture-circuit that Union and slavery were inseparable entities. In 1858, he travelled to Philadelphia and engaged in a week-long debate with Abram Pryne, a Northern Abolitionist minister. Brownlow's hope was to convince Northern moderates
of the seriousness of the South's commitment to slavery, to awaken them before it was too late to the danger to the Republic of letting its political destiny be left in the hands of Abolitionists and Fire-Eaters. It was this debate that has caused Brownlow to be linked with the pro-slavery ideologues. Brownlow was pro-slavery, and he was an ideologue. However, one cannot read his presentations without realizing that the defense of slavery followed a poor sixth after the plea for Unionism, the courting of Northern conservatives, the attack on Abolitionists, the parallel attack on Southern Fire-Eaters, and the presentation of Southern rights and needs. In general, Brownlow was content to repeat the standard Biblical, racialist, legalist, and a few quasi-sociological arguments.

The one point at which the old nationalist approached the originality of a Fitzhugh was in his suggestion of a national imperialist policy as an answer both to both parties to the slavery-expansion controversy. Colonizing and enslaving Africa, he argued, would keep slavery and planters alive while getting them out of the America of the small Republican farmers. It is possible that Brownlow's tongue was at least partly in his cheek when he said this. Nonetheless, it is both interesting and prophetic that this elder Hamiltonian Whig so early intimated the tactic of imperialism as a way of maintaining America's greatness, of creating new frontiers, and of moderating its internal conflicts.

A year later, realizing that something concrete and immediate had to be done, Bell Brownlow and other old Whigs returned to active politics and began forming of Conservative Union Party. But it was too late to rebuild the old ties: Southern nationalism had been growing continuously, and the Middle and West could not help being affected by it, Brownlow was a
principal leader in the Bell presidential campaign, in the anti-convention movement, in the anti-secessionist campaign, in the attempted East Tennessee counter-secession, and in the underground Unionist resistance. At each step, he saw more and more of the old Whigs fall behind, leaving him a nearly-lone hero. But that is matter for the following chapters.
NOTES

1. Nancy Marlene Haley, "'Cry aloud and spare not': The Formative Years of Brownlow's Whig, 1838-1841" (Knoxville, University of Tennessee MA Thesis, 1966), 103.

2. If most of the quotations are taken from Brownlow's books, this is because the great bulk of the books' material was taken directly from the pages of the Whig, and the books therefore provide an easy and accurate source of Whig-material.


5. Ibid, 29.


7. Ibid, 41.

8. Ibid, 61.

9. Ibid, 68.

10. Ibid, 70.

11. Ibid, 87.

12. Ibid, 89.

13. Ibid, 95.


15. The following passages are all from ibid, 101-105.


17. Ibid, 92.

18. William C. Brownlow, The Great Iron Wheel Examined; or, Its False Spokes Extracted, and an Exhibition of Elder Graves, its Builder, in a Series of Chapters (Nashville, for the Author, 1856).


21. Ibid.


23. Brownlow, 95.


26. Cf Powell, 111.

27. Brownlow, 283.


32. Cf Leonard L. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America (New York, Oxford University Press, 1970), 131-155, for the great number of Whigs among the "respectable citizens" who made up the anti-abolition mobs of the North.


34. As Arthur C. Cole pointed out, of course, many of the largest planters were to be found among the Whigs. However, it is also true that it was precisely these men who formed the bulk of the "traitors" in the Fifties.


39. Ibid., v.

40. Ibid., vi.

41. Ibid., vii.

42. Ibid., 10.

43. Ibid., 11.

44. Ibid., 12.

45. Ibid., 15.

46. Ibid., 50.

47. Ibid., 64.

48. Ibid., 65.

49. Foner, 226-260, contains a good discussion of Northern Old Whig-Republican responses to this situation.


51. Ibid., 76.

52. Ibid., 77.

53. Ibid., 78.

54. Ibid., 95.

55. Ibid., 99.

56. Ibid., 103-104.
57. Ibid, 105.

58. This is often taken as a "conservative" position, but it can also be a "radical" one. One reason for Marx's shift in his later works toward a more "deterministic" posture was his realization that, given the nature of our socialization, most people in a class society will tend to live in terms of surviving and succeeding within the given context of that society. A similar understanding, of course, informed the later work of Freud.


60. Quoted in Ralph W. Haskins, "Internecine Strife in Tennessee: Andrew Johnson Versus Parson Brownlow," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, V.24 N.4 (1965), 321. It should be pointed out that this statement appeared in the obituary Brownlow wrote for the dead Johnson.


63. Brownlow, A Political Register, 195.

64. Ibid, 242-243.

65. Ibid, 245.

66. Quoted in Anne Freemantle (ed), The Papal Encyclicals in Their Historical Context (New York, Mentor-Omega, 1963), 152.


68. William G. Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism, and Bogus Democracy, in the Light of Reason, History, and Scripture; in which Certain Demagogues of Tennessee, and Elsewhere, are Shown in their true Colors (Nashville, the Author, 1856).

69. Ibid, 4.

70. Ibid, 7.
71. One is reminded of Marx's statement,
The real difference between Byron and Shelley is this:
those who understand them and love them rejoice that Byron
died at thirty-six, because if he had lived he would have
become a reactionary bourgeois; they grieve that Shelley
died at twenty-one, because he was essentially a revolu-
tionist and he would always have been one of the advanced
guard of socialism.


73. Ibid, 10.

74. Ibid, 22-23.

75. Ibid, 27.

76. Ibid, 30.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid, 31-32.

79. Ibid, 32.

80. Ibid. 36.


82. Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism*, 44.

83. Ibid, 44-45.

84. Ibid, 52.

85. Ibid, 87.

86. Ibid, 114; note that Brownlow's source here was the "respectable" Thomas A.R. Nelson.

87. Ibid, 80.

88. Ibid, 178. Brownlow strongly denounced the Filibusters like the celebrated William Walker. Personal "imperialism," for Brownlow, equalled greed—however, a national imperialism
could, under certain conditions, equal mission. On the other hand, Brownlow had considered the Mexican War a completely unsavory affair.

89. That Brownlow was not a "fringe man" is a recurring theme in John Edgar Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics, 1845-1861" (New York, Columbia University PhD Dissertation, 1965).

90. Ibid, 135-136.


92. Ibid, 351.


95. Tricamo, 138.

96. Cf ibid, 134.


98. Cf ibid, 252-254.

99. Tricamo, 189.
In March, 1860, Brownlow was helping put together John Bell's last-ditch effort to save the conservative Union through electoral means. In March, 1862, he was beginning his whirlwind tour of Yankeedom, where he was "cheered wildly in almost every major city of the North, and read by countless thousands as well." After two years of real suffering, Brownlow and his family were now celebrated as heroes. They were made the subjects of semi-fictional biographies such as 

**Parson Brownlow and the Unionist of Tennessee** and **Portrait and Biography of Parson Brownlow**, of dime novels, and of such highly-fictional works as **Miss Martha Brownlow; or, the Heroine of Tennessee**, translated into German a year later! In this chapter, I will discuss Brownlow's influential and best-selling account of those two years, **Parson Brownlow's Book**, published in 1862. In this work, Brownlow told the story of his struggles to preserve and defend the Union in East Tennessee, of his subsequent persecutions and release. After this look at his book, I will go on to a brief discussion of the Parson's Southern and Northern experiences and their effects on the Parson's transition to Republicanism.

Brownlow made it clear at the beginning of the book that he was not simply a Tennesseean, but an East Tennesseean, and one who had finally seen his section lose in the struggle to determine the destiny of the state.

In many respects...we of that region do not wholly sympathize with the North any more than the extreme South. We deprecate alike the fanatical agitators of one section and the Disunion demagogues of the
other....Southern man and slave-holder that I am, if the South in her madness and folly will force the issue upon the country, of Slavery and no Union, or a Union and no Slavery, I am for the Union, though every other institution in the country perish. I am for sustaining this Union if it shall require "coercion" or "subjugation," or, what is worse, the annihilation of the rebel population of the land. These peculiarities in my position, as an East-Tennesseean, it will be seen, have contributed to mould the views which I have expressed.

He then introduced his Northern readers to his own personality and history through a brief autobiographical note. I have presented much of this material earlier in this thesis. However, one point, concerning his finances, is important:

I am known throughout the length and breadth of the land as the "Fighting Parson;" while I may say, without incurring the charge of egotism, that no man is more peaceable, as my neighbors will testify....always oppressed with security debts, few men in my section and of my limited means have given away more in the course of each year to charitable objects.

Brownlow went on to present a collection of articles and editorials from the Whig of the secession-crisis period, in which he took on the Fire-Eaters, "those traitors, political gamblers, and selfish demagogues who are seeking to build up a miserable Southern Confederacy, and under it to inaugurate a new reading of the Ten Commandments, so as to teach that the chief end of Man is Nigger!" That accusation had reflected the consciousness of the majority of East Tennesseans, among whom, as James Patton noted, "the popular leaders...were those who supported the Union." The feeling was bitter, and in 1860 the great majority of all Tennesseans voted for anti-secession candidates. As Patton wrote,
Tennessee cast most of its votes for

Bell. Slow and indecisive, he proved himself lacking in leadership in this crisis, which was doubtless the supreme event in his career....if John Bell, with his wide influence, his commanding personality, and his immense popularity, had dared to make a fight for the Union that was made by...Brownlow, the result of the secession agitation in Tennessee might have been very different.12

Bell capitulated to Cotton Aristocracy when Lincoln was elected, but Brownlow did not.

Mr. Lincoln is no doubt a patriotic man, and a sincere lover of his country. He is to-day, what he has always been, an OLD CLAY WHIG, differing in no respect—not even upon the subject of Slavery—from the Sage of Ashland. The great objection with us to his election is the sectional idea upon which he was run, the character of the partisans who supported him and will, it is to be feared, control his administration. But Lincoln is chosen President, and, whether with or without the consent and participation of the South, will be, and ought to be, inaugurated....13

To a correspondent who wrote soon after the election, discussing the "right of secession," Brownlow retorted, "I deny the right of secession altogether, though I admit the right of revolution when circumstances justify it."14 Hamilton could not have put it more succinctly, nor Clay, nor Lincoln. When the Republicans chose Lincoln, and when Bell began to make his peace with the Confederates, Brownlow was forced to realize that the only true Whigs left were now in the North, and were now Republicans. Later, as the revolutionary nature of the Confederacy became more apparent, he would have to realize, as did Lincoln, that the partisans, the Radicals, were the most helpful agents for carrying even a moderate Whig-Republican policy into the second half of the nineteenth century.15

Even before Lincoln was inaugurated, Governor Harris was calling
for a State Convention on the issue of secession. Brownlow responded with his own call to the people of Tennessee.

The honest yeomanry of these border States, whose families live by their hard licks, four-fifths of whom own no negroes and never expect to own any, are to be drafted,--forced to leave their wives and children to toil and suffer, while they fight for those purse-proud aristocrats of the Cotton States, whose pecuniary abilities will allow them to hire substitutes!...The demagogues who denied to us before the late Presidential election that they were at all favorable to Secession, now make light of, and affect to despise, the dangers which are a few brief months ahead of us....We may as well live under the government of the William L. Garrisons of the North, as the William L. Yanceys of the South....If time were given to the North, she would do the South justice: therefore let these border States be guided by moderation.16

West Tennessee voted for the Convention, East Tennessee voted against, and enough Middle Tennesseans voted against to create a small majority to defeat the Convention. After the firing on Sumter, however, Middle Tennessee joined the West, and Tennessee voted to secede, the last state to do so.17

Sumter or no, however, most East Tennesseans had no intention of leaving the Union unless forced to do so. The plain folk, who comprised the bulk of the middle class of the mountains and the East Tennessee cities by this time, felt their interests and loyalties lay more with the damned Yankees than with the planters and their few haughty representatives in Knoxville and Chattanooga. Brownlow's people held firm, but his Whig-gish project had failed. His entire personal and public career had been one of upward mobility, of working to create a space for the plain-folk middle class to come into its own in a conservative, aristocratic South. When the War came, the plain folk and their small-to-middle businessmen and
industrialist leaders like Brownlow and Horace Maynard found themselves aligned with the country white trash against the minority of planters, larger industrialists following their immediate economic interests, and, with the crucial exception of Andy Johnson, the important Democrats of East Tennessee. As Patton put it:

The supporters of the Confederacy in East Tennessee were largely of the wealthy and aristocratic classes in the cities, while the Unionists came from the... classes in the rural and mountainous region, the war in that region assumed the character of a class struggle as well as a political and military contest. 18

This put East Tennessee in somewhat the same position as West Virginia, but with two important differences. Containing the crucial railroad supply-line between the Deep South and Virginia, East Tennessee was too essential to the Southern cause to be allowed to leave. Also, the mountains of East Tennessee are really long, narrow ridges, forming huge valleys that open on to both Alabama and Virginia; it would have been geographically and strategically almost impossible for the East Tennesseans successfully to defend themselves against Southern forces. And Confederate detachments were sent in, not to fight Yankees, but to "pacify" fellow Southerners. This was Jeff Davis' response to what Patton called

The valiant attempt on the part of the inhabitants of East Tennessee to remain in the Union. This opposition to the secession movement is known in the Confederate military records as "The Revolt of the Unionists in East Tennessee," and it brought down upon the people of that section the full force of the vengeance of the Confederate Government, causing terrible suffering and innumerable hardships. 19

Years later, Brownlow still talked of the cold, hunger, and atrocities of those days. It was only during those times of hardship that he, like many conservative Northerners, finally and fully realized that Southern "secession"
was a "revolution." He and his fellow East Tennesseans launched a counter-revolution within the South. They met at the Greeneville Convention, where Brownlow was made chairman of the all-powerful Business Committee, and declared their independence from Tennessee and the Confederacy.

The State of Franklin, which had appeared first as comedy, returned as tragedy. While the Convention could not enforce its declaration in the face of an occupying army, it gave a legalistic sanction to Brownlow's further editorializing and to the mountaineers' guerilla warfare.

Brownlow presented a great many of his editorials from this period in his book, especially the ones attacking the Democrats. He wanted to make it clear to Northerners that Democrats were still Democrats, members of the party in which the Secessionists had matured and flourished. To the end of ridiculing the Democrats, he reprinted a letter from the 1860 campaign, written in response to a joking reader who asked him if it were true that Brownlow might someday join the Democrats. The piece also has the distinction of being perhaps the purest example of Brownlow's personal and journalistic style:

MR. JORDAN CLARK:--I have your letter of the 30th ult., and hasten to let you know the precise time when I expect to come out and formally announce that I have joined the Democratic party. When the sun shines at midnight and the moon at mid-day; when man forgets to be selfish, or Democrats lose their inclination to steal; when nature stops on her onward march to rest, or all the water-courses in America flow up stream; when flowers lose their odor, and trees shed no leaves; when birds talk, and beasts of burden laugh; when damned spirits swap hell for heaven with the angels in light, and pay them the boot in mean whiskey; when impossibilities are in fashion, and no proposition is too absurd to be believed,—you may credit the report that I have joined the Democrats!
I join the Democrats! Never, so long as there are sects in churches, weeds in gardens, fleas in hog-pens, dirt in victuals, disputes in families, wars with nations, water in the ocean, bad men in America, or base women in France! No, Jordan Clark, you may hope, you may congratulate, you may reason, you may sneer, but that cannot be. The thrones of the Old World, may all fall and crumble into ruin,—the New World may commit the national suicide of dissolving this Union,—but all this, and more, must occur before I join the Democracy!

I join the Democracy! Jordan Clark, you know not what you say. When I join the Democracy, the Pope of Rome will join the Methodist Church. When Jordan Clark, of Arkansas, is President of the Republic of Great Britain by the universal suffrage of a contented people; when Queen Victoria consents to be divorced from Prince Albert by a county court in Kansas; when Congress obliges, by law, James Buchanan to marry a European princess; when the Pope leases the Capitol at Washington for his city residence; when Alexander of Russia and Napoleon of France are elected Senators in Congress from New Mexico; when good men cease to go to heaven, or bad men to hell; when this world is turned upside down; when proof is afforded, both clear and unquestionable, that there is no God; when men turn to ants, and ants to elephants,—I will change my political faith and come out on the side of Democracy!

Supposing that this full and frank letter will enable you to fix upon the period when I will come out a full-grown Democrat, and to communicate the same to all whom it may concern in Arkansas, I have the honor to be, &c,

W. G. BROWNLOW

Brownlow then turned to an account of various incidents of the pre-secession period, including his podium encounter with William Yancey. Yancey had tried to denounce him as a traitor to the South, but found the Knoxville crowd sympathetic to the Parson. Brownlow's next target was the whole state of South Carolina which had been enemy territory since the Nullification days. He gave a short history of the state, declaring it full of nothing but old Tories and seedy aristocrats.
Confederate pressure was put on Brownlow. In Parson Brownlow's Book, he presented a variety of letters threatening him, his family, and his property. Also, there were many letters asking that the writers' subscriptions be cancelled. Even before the eventual Confederate seizure of his presses, the editor was falling into bankruptcy as a result of his Unionism, for his refusal to "look through telescopes made of cottonstalks." During the three or four months following Secession, things grew worse. Some of his book's more dramatic illustrations present assaults, whippings, hangings, and other punishments visited on Unionists by the occupying Rebels. The Unionists responded in kind, Brownlow by speaking and writing, others by bridge-burning as a way of damaging Confederate supply-lines. Such sabotage was a capital offense, a lynching offense, and has been called the most dangerous military action of the War. Knowing that this activity was encouraged by Lincoln and directed by Union Army infiltrators, the Confederates redoubled their efforts and proceeded to terrorize the whole East Tennessee countryside.

Brownlow was out of town during one of these bridge-burning incidents; and both Judah P. Benjamin and the New York Times thought him possibly implicated, the latter approvingly. He claimed he was not. At any rate, the suspicion was a good excuse to lock up the troublesome editor and silence his paper. The last 200 pages of Parson Brownlow's Book, composed in a Knoxville jail, presented to receptive Northerners an account of Brownlow's Southern prison-experience.

In jail the realization struck him with full force that, all cultural pretensions aside, his cell represented the logical end of the "Old South" he had so long defended, that South had to pass before his
South could really begin to flourish. "New dominions must arise upon her ruins, a new race of men must people her soil." What else could he think of fellow Southerners who forced him to hide out in the Smokies, protected by Unionist mountaineers and hillbillies? Even hillbillies, the white trash, had proven to have more national honor than the planters. While hiding out he exchanged letters with his pursuers, and was under the impression he would be granted safe passage if he turned himself in. Instead, he was arrested. While in his cell, under guard, he was harassed by more representatives of the Old South: "The most insulting of these sentinels were those from the Cotton States, men heralded to the world as the 'flower of Southern youth' and the 'best blood' of the Confederacy." These guards made jokes about hanging Unionists, and made a great show of herding long-term prisoners into the vans bound for the prison in Mobile, Alabama. These "savage beasts" did their hanging outside the jail window, so that Brownlow and his fellow prisoners could see.

In sum, Brownlow had been forced to learn that the respectable planters were revolutionaries, with all the fall from respectability that implies, and that Black Republicanism was now the one force in America fighting for the principles and interests to which he had always been committed. Similarly, in jail, his essential humanity won out over what had become a rather abstracted and intolerant commitment to Methodism. He was reminded that a Methodist is a Christian first:

It affords me great pleasure to know that I have been able, out of my basket of provisions and coffee-pot, to furnish several very old men, and very sick, who could not eat what comes from the greasy inn. Two of them are Baptist ministers...[One of these ministers] was sent here for praying for the President of the United States.
And when Brownlow was arraigned for trial (not for burning bridges, after all, but for publishing "incendiary articles"), it was before a Methodist minister turned Confederate judge and fanatic, who "has advocated on the bench, in open court-martial, the sending of the Union masses of East Tennessee to Alabama and Mississippi, and working them in the field, under negro overseers, and the hanging of the Union leaders here!"³⁴

While in jail, Brownlow continued negotiating for a safe passage to the North: he felt that he had done all he could in Tennessee, and had no desire to spend the War in prison. Secretary Benjamin, realizing that an imprisoned Parson might create even more trouble than an exiled one, intervened in Brownlow's trial and granted safe passage. One Confederate newspaper gave both a warning of the free Brownlow's agitation-potential and one of the most insightful tributes Brownlow ever received in his long life:

He is, in few words, a diplomat of the first water. Brownlow rarely undertakes anything unless he sees his way entirely through the millstone. He covers over his really profound knowledge of human nature with an appearance of eccentricity and extravagance. If any of our readers indulge the idea that Brownlow is not 'smart,' in the full acceptation of that term, they should abolish the delusion at once and forever. Crafty, cunning, generous to his particular friends, benevolent and charitable to their faults, ungrateful and implacable to his enemies, we cannot refrain from saying that he is the best judge of human nature within the bounds of the Southern Confederacy. Brownlow has preached at every church and school-house, made stump speeches at every cross-road, and knows every man, woman, and child, and their fathers and grandfathers before them, in East Tennessee. As a Methodist circuit-rider, a political stump-speaker, a temperance-orator, and the editor of a newspaper, he has been...successful.... Let him but once reach the confines of Kentucky, with his knowledge of the geography and the population of East Tennessee, and our section will soon feel the effect
Brownlow considered himself lucky to get out when he did—his book cited numerous calls in the Tennessee press and Legislature for his hanging.

Early in 1862, Brownlow was passed through the lines to occupied Nashville. He was cheered when he told the Union soldiers there, "whenever you can get possession of my down-trodden country, I desire to return to my family and home. I have no idea of leaving there. I want to go back and aid in driving out others who have expelled me." He then moved to Cincinnati, where he received invitations to speak throughout the North—Lincoln even asked him personally to come to Washington. He was joined by General S.F. Carey and Kentucky's Lieutenant-Governor Fisk, with whom he travelled the North. Brownlow preached the evils of the Confederacy and the glory of the Union, the Moderate Republican Fisk sought Republican votes, and the Conservative Republican Carey pled for Union Army enlistment. Brownlow, on the rostrum with two Republicans! Their attitudes and speeches, together with Lincoln's cautious activism, helped further convince Brownlow that the Whig political and economic cause had become the Republican cause. The Cincinnati meeting passed a series of resolutions, including the following:

Resolved, That we recognize in the Rev. W.G. Brownlow the true patriot, the intrepid and unflinching defender of the Federal Constitution, as the representative of that band of true men in the South who, in the midst of an atrocious rebellion, still assert their ancient loyalty and devotion to the Union. Resolved, That he has fixed the true standard of patriotism for all in the
present crisis,—viz.: an unhesitating sacrifice of private interest, in the hope of an early peace, and, if necessary, of loved institutions, to the maintenance of the Constitution, without further compromises, and a vigorous prosecution of the war, until the authority of the Federal Government shall be fully established in every insurgent State, every armed rebel disarmed and every leader punished.37

During a two-month break in his tour schedule, Brownlow made the compilation-and-commentary which is Parson Brownlow's Book, "an unusual emotional journey into the sources of significant attitudes of the succeeding Reconstruction era."38 Thomas Alexander has given the best summary of the implications of the mass Northern popularity of the book, going so far as to suggest that it played a major role in preparing a racist North for the passage of the three Reconstruction Amendments:

If for the Northerner, Uncle Tom's Cabin had contributed to the conceptualization of slavery's intolerable characteristics, and John Brown had helped consume the smug firewall separating worship of the Constitution from hatred of the slavery it protected, then it may not be too much to say that Parson Brownlow served as an antidote to the natural tendency to forgive and forget and be generous to a defeated foe. He, as much as any one man, may have forestalled the victor's benevolent impulses until hard-bitten and long-visioned men could launch their project for winning the peace as well as the war; and one result may have been that while the lingering heat of war passions kept political conditions still malleable, the ruggedly resistant Constitution of the United States was prepared for the next century.39

Andrew Johnson was made Military Governor of Tennessee in 1863, and Brownlow returned to Nashville. Soon the Rebels were driven from East Tennessee, and he went home. While there, he actively encouraged support for Johnson, his enemy of long standing. After all, they were on the same side now, and even in the same party. The alliance was to last until Brownlow
succeeded Johnson as Governor and Johnson succeeded Lincoln as President. By that time, the old radical was a Conservative, and the old conservative was a Radical. For, despite David Donald's attempt to "politicize" Reconstruction, party labels did not stand for much in the "new" South. 40
NOTES


2. W.G. Brownlow, PARSON BROWNLOW and the Unionists of East Tennessee: with a SKETCH OF HIS LIFE. Comprising the Story of the Experiences and Sufferings of the Unionists of East Tennessee; the Parson's remarkable Adventures; Incidents of the Prison-Life of Himself and Coadjutors; Anecdotes of His Daughter; Editorials of the Knoxville Whig; Together with an interesting Account of Buell's Occupation of Tennessee (New York, Beadle and Company, 1862). Author unnamed, but probably Brownlow.

3. W.G. Brownlow, Portrait and Biography of PARSON BROWNLOW, the Tennessee Patriot. Together with His Last Editorial in the Knoxville Whig; also, His Recent Speeches, Rehearsing His Experiences with Secession, and His Prison Life (Indianapolis, Asher & Co., 1862). Author unnamed, but probably Brownlow.

4. Major W.D. Reynolds, Miss Martha Brownlow; or, the Heroine of Tennessee. A Truthful and Graphic Account of the Many Perils and Privations endured by Miss Martha Brownlow, the Lovely and Accomplished Daughter of the Celebrated Parson Brownlow, during her Residence with her Father in Knoxville (Philadelphia, Barclay and Co., probably 1862).


6. As this book, like all of Brownlow's, was drawn largely from the pages of the Whig, it may also give the reader a sense of the man's journalistic style.


8. Ibid, 19.


11. Coulter, 134.


17. Coulter, 146-149.

18. Patton, 51-52. This statement by Patton should be read with some caution: his concept of "class" is not mine. Also, from the point of view of this thesis, the Secession struggle in Tennessee may not have been quite as clearly-defined as Patton suggests. However, that there was a struggle, and that it was fought generally along the lines Patton describes, cannot be denied.


22. Ibid, 67.


27. Patton, 60.

28. Ibid, 63.


33. Ibid, 325.
34. Ibid, 331.
35. Ibid, 342-345.
36. Ibid, 399.
37. Ibid, 425.
Brownlow had held on until all hope was gone. For thirty years he had waged an ideological struggle to help create a South which would have a place for his image of his people, his class and his region; and for thirty years he had defended that South against the Yankees. In the end, the other South, the South of the planters and of the larger Whig industrialists who saw the planters as leaders rather than equals, took a different route. In deciding against Union, that other South decided against Brownlow. Humiliated and defeated by his fellow Southerners, the Parson had gone North. There, he was treated like a hero. The two experiences, Southern and Northern, had taught the old "Federalist" two lessons that both many of his contemporaries and many historians have wanted to ignore. First, the Secessionists removed the ideological blinders from the Whiggish Brownlow, and proved to him the futility of his life-long, conservative project. He realized that the War was a revolution, a full-fledged nationalist war planned and carried out by a militant, confident and assured ruling class in full awareness of what it was doing. Secondly, the experience of Lincoln taught the Southern Brownlow that the Republican Party was the only viable, legitimate heir of the Whigs. Lincoln, of course, saw this point years earlier; Brownlow had to pass through the dissolution of the Know-Nothings and the defection of Bell before he could adopt this solution. On the other hand, Lincoln never fully accepted the revolutionary nature of the Confederacy: he fought a war against "internal rebellion," and Booth's bullet saved him the pain and frustration of trying to "reconstruct" a South full of, not
failed rebels, but failed revolutionaries. It was Lincoln's allies, the Radicals, who saw that the combined meaning of the first two lessons, the continued existence of hostile, revolutionary Southerners and of their Northern, Copperhead allies, and the real need for the continuance of Republicanism as the only way to win the peace, led to a third lesson—that a conciliatory policy as the strategy of the Northern, progressive counter-revolution would fail even to establish the minimum goal of creating a Republican Party in the South. As for the larger goal of bringing about desired changes in the real status of blacks, a more drastic Reconstruction was called for than Lincoln had forseen. Brownlow learned these lessons, and added another; for the native, as opposed to Yankee, industrialists to finally come into their own in this "new" South, the old class and regional bases of power there would have to be altered significantly. He would find himself defending blacks, local capitalists, and East Tennesseans during Reconstruction, and explaining his position in Whiggish language. His tenure as Governor was the story of a Lincoln who survived Booth, of a John Bell who remained Whig by donning Republican clothing.

When Brownlow went North, he found Lincoln; and in finding Lincoln, he found the Radicals. This might have seemed surprising to an earlier generation of historians, such as E. Merton Coulter, who have often tended to minimize a rather crucial point—there was a war going on. Many of the respectable, conservative people of the North, who had once been anti-abolitionist, were now among the Copperheads and Peace Democrats, or so it must have seemed to a Brownlow busily trying to build
up Northern solidarity and activism in the prosecution of the Union
effort. Many men who once might have been the old Brownlow's friends
and allies would now strike him as shirkers. And the respectable, con-
servative people of the South were now spilling blood at Chancellors-
ville, Gettysburg, and Shiloh Churchyard. In times like these, loyalty
was appreciated, even when it came from men Brownlow had lately branded
as sectional agitators and demagogues. At least, Lincoln and Sumner
could be sure they were on the same side. And if Sumner sometimes seemed
to oppose Lincoln, it was certain he was a loyal opponent. Brownlow,
who had seen the War at closer range than most businessmen, editors, and
politicians ever have to, was quite sensitive on the question of loyalty.
He could not help but notice, as David Donald puts it, that, "for all
the complaining, on election day it was the Sumners and the Stevenses
who voted for Lincoln, while Conservative Republicans like Browning
joined the Democrats in supporting McClellan." 3

After 1864, it became increasingly apparent to Brownlow that,
where Lincoln and the Radicals did disagree, he sided with the Radicals.
For instance, Lincoln rigidly insisted that the War was a rebellion,
because the Union could not be split; Thad Stevens took the Confederates
at their word and called it a revolution, because indeed, it had split. 4
While this was obviously a Constitutional issue of the greatest magnitude,
it was a moral and a political question as well. 5 The moral question of
the respective rights of Southern whites and blacks was always ambiguous;
but the political question was a bit more clear-cut. Lincoln, the old
nationalist, sincerely wanted the Republicans to be what the Whigs had
been, a national and nationalist party. 6 Seeing the great number of old
Whigs in the South, it seemed reasonable to him to consider them a base upon which to build a Southern Republicanism; and his concept of rebellion could have allowed for their early enfranchisement, for their active entry into Southern political life. In the long run, Lincoln's policy carried the day: many old Whigs played a role in the reconstruction of the South, played a larger role in its Redemption, and were to form the solid core of subsequent Southern Republicanism. Yet in the short run, many Radicals felt, men of more certain loyalty were needed to get things started; and given that there had been a revolution, the Whigs Lincoln pinned his hopes on, the John Bell types, were Confederate collaborators. Collaborators (Talleyrand is the classic example) will go where their interests lie, and the old Whigs sometimes made the connection between Whiggish interests and Republican power, but reliance on them for principled action remains at best a gamble. The Radicals, having a more adequate intuition of the situation in the South, advocated a thorough program of treating the South as it saw itself, as a conquered province—a program of political alienation, disenfranchisement, and confiscation. Lincoln balked.

Brownlow, who knew the traitorous old Whigs even better than he knew the Fire-Eating extremists, affirmed the Radical program. He was aware that, by definition, "loyal men" must constitute a minority in the South. He was willing to accept minority control of the rebuilding of the South as the price for having new dominions arise on her ruins, for new men to people her soil. He was willing to do whatever was necessary to make a fresh start, from using violence and coercion to changing his own fifty-year patterns of thought on basic questions like race. That
not only the Sumners but the Brownlows as well could support them helps account for the eventual ratification of the Reconstruction Amendments, which, as Kenneth Stampp writes, "could not have been adopted under any other circumstances, or at any other time, before or since." There is no reason to impute cynical motives to Brownlow's gubernatorial Radicalism. If there was no inconsistency in Lincoln's move from Northern Whiggism to Republicanism, then there was none in Brownlow's passage from Southern Whiggism to Radicalism: the times and the competitors, were rougher in his neck of the woods.

Andrew Johnson had exercised a vigorous military governorship over Tennessee. When he moved to Washington, the Union Convention of Tennessee overwhelmingly endorsed Brownlow for his civilian replacement, and charged the Parson to maintain equal vigor. After all, most of the men in the state were ex-Confederates: they were proud but failed revolutionaries. As Thomas Alexander describes the situation:

The expectation that subdued criminals would be chastened and humbled was shockingly unfulfilled because ex-Confederates merely considered that force, not right, had triumphed....Some ex-Confederates were equally unable to appreciate the feelings of the Unionists, and tended to consider them as traitors to their state....apparently the ex-Confederates expected matters to be as before the war except for the extinction of the institution of slavery and the practical elimination of secession as a theory of government. They felt no guilt and expected no punishment.

These ex-Confederates were hardly likely to accept "Brownlow rule, which was the domination of East Tennessee Republicanism." East Tennessee Republicanism: Brownlow was not alone in his realization that conciliation would neither satisfy Unionists nor Rebels nor make for an effective
government. He was backed by his own people, by East Tennessee prewar Whigs like Horace Maynard, and had no need for reliance on carpetbaggers: as James Patton concludes, "This was not a 'carpet-bag' legislature, as it has been frequently viewed, but rather a native Republican or 'scalawag' body, elected on a general ticket." One may like or dislike such Radicalism but one cannot deny it was a native, home-grown product.

Thanks to the researches of Allen Trelease, we have begun to get an adequate picture of the scalawags of East Tennessee and the rest of the South. They tended to fall into two groups, both made up largely of old Whigs, the die-hard Brownlow type and the sell-out Bell type (although John Bell died around this time, he remains a fitting symbol of this second type of Whiggism). As has been noted, Lincoln encouraged the activity of the latter factions; he, and later Johnson, allowed them to form the ruling group in most of the Southern states in 1864-1866. As Trelease notes, "only in Tennessee did the mountain Unionists (also Whigs primarily) sufficiently coincide with this group, or were they sufficiently numerous to take over themselves the process of Reconstruction." These "mountain Unionists" were farmers and small industrialists and businessmen, like Brownlow; and, like Brownlow, there was little inconsistency in their move to Republicanism. The Republicans offered a chance of fulfilling the old East Tennessee demands for a higher tariff, for internal improvements and more railroads: "They held a natural appeal for people living in areas of relatively unprofitable agriculture but blessed with abundant supplies of power, labor, and mineral resources." On the other hand, most of those from the state's other two regions, even those who called themselves Unionists, declined to wear the Repub-
lican label. They chose to call themselves Conservative, which was usually simply a code-word for Democrat, Thomas Alexander tells of a plot with Northern Democrats, in which

The old-line Whigs and Douglas Democrats were to revive the Whig party in the South, establish a short platform of principles upon which all conservative men could stand, and draw off the Conservatives from the Republican party. If the movement fell short of national success, it would nevertheless split Republicanism and bury Radical policies under a national Democratic victory. These plans were almost certainly known to Thaddeus Stevens and other Radical leaders.\(^\text{15}\)

Most of this faction were avowedly Conservative or Democrat by 1869. \(^\text{16}\)

This, then, was the Unionist and semi-Unionist coalition over which Brownlow and the Radicals were able to exercise minimal control for four short years.

Given the difficulty simply of keeping the peace in a state filled with guerilla remnants of the revolution, and with a government filled with ex-collaborators, it is remarkable that Brownlow had any time or energy to devote to something like a program. However, he did. In the area of economics, he used state funds for railroads as a long-range solution, and relied on the Army for short-term maintenance: "On January 21 the Knoxville Whig predicted that a great financial depression would result, in the coming spring and summer, if the army and the paymasters were withdrawn from Tennessee."\(^\text{17}\) Still a good Methodist minister, Brownlow took an interest in encouraging loyal, and if need be, Northern Methodist ministers to spread the word in Tennessee. He had joined the Northern Methodists during the War, and encouraged their spread in Tennessee.\(^\text{18}\) In doing this, he was following the Northern
Church's injunction to its ministers to go South and preach "the duties of citizenship and the...blessings of Christianity." While it is remarkable that Brownlow was able to devote time to Tennessee's political, economic, and religious life given the difficult political situation alone, it becomes even more so when one realizes that he had to govern on his back most of the time. The illness that was to last ten more years, probably Parkinson's Disease, had already hit the sixty-year-old man. Most of the day-to-day activities of "Brownlow dictatorship" had to be carried on by other, younger Radicals. It is a tribute to the loyalty he could command that the policies they carried out were his policies.

The two most explosive issues facing the Brownlow government were black enfranchisement and Rebel disenfranchisement. The latter had already begun under Johnson, but it was Brownlow who first had to deal with the organized freedmen, demanding political rights. They also required basic protection: "in May, 1866, a serious race riot occurred in Memphis, resulting in a large number of deaths." Most of the dead were black, killed because they were walking outside of "Niggertown." Most of the killers were returned Confederate veterans of the type who were still fighting guerilla warfare in the rural areas, the type who were soon to form the Ku Klux Klan. It spoke badly for a claim to re-established harmony, and made enough of a stir to cause the creation of a special Congressional investigating committee.

However, at the beginning at least, Brownlow was faced with a more immediate problem: the State of Franklin reared its head once more. The East Tennessee Radicals met in convention in Knoxville, and delivered
an ultimatum: either the Legislature disenfranchise the Conservatives, or "Franklin" would apply to Washington for re-entry into the Union as a separate state. The idea was not so very far-fetched. Congress might very well have been happy to create another West Virginia, and obtain for itself two more loyal Senators. Also, as Tennessee had not yet been re-admitted to the Union, the national Radicals could have in this way rewarded the loyal East Tennesseeans and left the Middle and West for further, military reconstruction. However, out of a desire to protect what few Middle and West Tennessee Radicals there were, and a lingering sense of state-pride, Brownlow did not endorse the scheme. He had always favored the demanded disenfranchisement, at any rate. With this new challenge, the remaining reluctant members of the legislature also got the message. They passed a comprehensive franchise bill, designed to exclude as many Democrats, Conservatives, and ex-Confederates as possible. The new law provided for loyalty oaths and other selection-tests, and established punishments for examiners who failed to implement them scrupulously. The potential rebellion in East Tennessee faded away.

It was quickly replaced by the return of the question of the black vote: Congress proposed the Fourteenth Amendment. Tennessee blacks, who had gone directly from bondage to independence without suffering under stultifying Black Codes, quickly mobilized in its support, raising demonstrations and petitions; Brownlow also supported it. Brownlow's support is often interpreted as a cynical ploy to win Tennessee's quick re-entry into the Union, but this does not necessarily follow. The fact that Brownlow was anxious to get Tennessee Radical Unionists into a Radical
Congress which he supported can easily be seen as a matter of principle, just as principle can also account for conservative Southern Governors' diffidence concerning sending their men to the Republican fleshpot on the Potomac. Of course, in the case of these other governors, there was also their partnership with Northern Democracy.

Immediately after the National Union Convention, which dramatized the possibility of Northern co-operation in opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment, President Johnson proclaimed the end of insurrection. President Johnson exerted leadership in the defeat of the Fourteenth Amendment up to February 1867.

Brownlow could also be accused of wanting to destroy Johnson; in his eyes, the Democrats were collaborators in the illegitimate Southern revolution, only the Radicals consistently offered principled opposition both to the revolutionaries and their allies, and Johnson was going back to the Democrats. These were not unfounded assumptions. Brownlow took his stand:

I announce to you that if Andy Johnson is to lead the way to reconstruction with the Democratic Party at his back, I go the other way. I go with the Congress of the United States, the so-called radicals, I do not fear to side with them. The name of radical has no terrors for me. I have been known as a "damned blue-light whig" and a "damned lunatic," and I take it cheap if they will now let me off by calling me a "damn radical."

Whatever one's interpretation, Brownlow chose in favor of the black franchise, thus completing another step in his political education. As had Lincoln earlier, Brownlow at first had gone only from pro-slavery to acceptance of the idea of limited black franchise. He now found himself even more impressed by loyalty than by color. Blacks would vote against the Rebels; and besides, granting them the franchise was a way
of returning symbolically to the days before the planter aristocrats completely ran the state. Before the days of Nat Turner, free blacks had voted in Tennessee.

We have but one more law to pass, and that is a law enfranchising the negroes, and we will do it... We have two reasons for doing this: it is necessary for sixty or seventy thousand votes to kick the beam to weigh down the balance against rebellion. The second reason is because it is proper, just, and we will simply be returning to where we were in 1833. The negroes used to vote in Tennessee. Brownlow repeatedly stressed that a loyal black deserved more political rights than a disloyal white. Tennessee granted the franchise before Congress passed the Amendment. Tennessee was soon re-admitted into the Union: "last out, first in."

The Conservatives stood with Johnson in opposition to the Amendment, and against Brownlow on the franchise question. Nonetheless, when black voting was an accomplished fact, they tried to move in, to turn black votes against the Radicals. They even began to criticize Brownlow for moving too slowly on black-relief legislation. While some black leaders joined the Conservatives in order to play off the white men's parties against each other to black advantage, most realized that this was not the time or place for that tactic. They remained Radicals, and the Conservatives soon turned on them again: as Patton notes, "It soon became evident that the negroes would support the Radical candidates almost without exception...The Conservatives were greatly disappointed at this development, and they made some efforts to intimidate the negroes." Their efforts gave Brownlow further evidence of continued rebellion, which he took as further proof of his foresight in maintaining and strengthening
the state militia. He put a law through the legislature guaranteeing military protection for those who went to the polls to vote. 29

Armed with black enfranchisement and Rebel disenfranchise-ment, Brownlow took to the polls for the 1867 election. Or, rather, he was pushed to the polls: old, tired, and sick, he had informed his party that he had no desire to serve again, that he had now given it the tools with which to reconstruct Tennessee. His party, however, both in defiance of the Conservatives and out of loyalty to their leader, drafted him. Brownlow, having spent forty years as a sound party man, was not one to buck the party. He accepted the draft and hit the campaign trail, often so sick that the old orator's speeches had to be read for him.

The Conservatives fought the election on Brownlow's personality, opposing their "love of order" to his "anarchy."

Brownlow, the wayward, the impulsive, the vacilli-ting, the intolerant, the vindictive, the reckless advocate in turn of every extreme, enfeebled by disease, overflowing with excitement, and totally indifferent to the demands of justice, and the con-stitutional demands thrown around the Executive—of all men least fitted for the delicate and res-ponsible trust confided to his hands, is unfortu-nately commissioned as Governor. 30

Thus was founded the particular form of that Southern myth which forms the core of so much history-writing, including Coulter's biography of Brownlow: Lincoln was right, after all, the Rebels were merely bad boys and not revolutionaries. Therefore, presumably, losing was punishment enough; and any further measures were merely proof of Radical intran-sigence and extremism. All the old Rebels now wished was to get on with the business of living: "All the Rebels hoped for or expected," ran their 1867 campaign-line, "was the protection of law." That is, they
hoped for the chance to win power and return to their pre-War alliance with Northern Democracy. Since these people, these ex-Confederate Democrats and their new, "non-ideological" Conservative Republican allies, saw themselves as the best men of the state, they could not help but see Brownlow as a rabble-rousing demagogue:

It is a struggle for existence as a community; one of life or death; of civil liberty or military despotism; of honesty or corruption; of civilization or barbarism; whether the state shall be governed by its moral worth and intelligence, or by a despicable oligarchy, composed of a lean minority of the worst men in the State.

The Conservatives, and their later historical apologists, did have a point: it was precisely the most educated, most talented, and most sophisticated of the old Southern ruling class who had incited and led the War for Southern Independence. Having lost the War, they and their conservative Yankee allies were now trying to win the peace. The Unionists had to do what they could with the best they could get.

The Radical Horace Maynard campaigned on the charge of opportunism. Having lost an armed struggle, he declared, these old soldiers now wanted their opponents' use of arms to simply fade away. The difficulty with their position, he felt, was that they were lying as to their pacifism: armed bands of their guerillas were constantly roaming the countryside harassing, and even murdering, black and white Republicans.

They were opposed to a standing army. That part of the declaration really came strangely from men who had, in 1861, been in favor of and assisted in raising fifty regiments to send to all portions of the State for the simple purpose of overawing the people when the question of voting the State into the confederacy was decided....the step taken by
the State authorities toward the raising of a loyal militia was inaugurated none too soon. Reports from various portions of the State show that there is great need of a force for the protection of the lives and properties of Union and loyal people there.

What neither the Conservatives nor their descendants would ever admit is that it was the Brownlows of the Reconstruction South, acting over Conservative resistance, who made possible that basic stability without which a business peace is impossible. This was one of Brownlow's key campaign issues in 1867. Sick and feeble, he gave in Nashville "a speech, which I am physically unable to deliver," which had to be read for him. In it, he recapitulated his nomination-acceptance speech to the State Convention. He stressed that the decision to run had not been his: "I thought you could better serve the interests of the State and of the Republican party, than by nominating me for Governor, in the present condition of my health. In making that statement I was sincere. You have differed with me." And so, run he would. Nevertheless, he was sensitive to the incessant charges of Brownlow dictatorship. The one thing that eased his mind was that he had no faith in the integrity of his accusers: "I expect to be charged with dictation, usurpation, a violation of the constitution—with lying, perjury, stealing, forgery, and counterfeiting! And by whom? By rebel demagogues on the stump, and by rebel newspaper men." If he had anyone to apologize to, Brownlow felt, it was Tennessee's blacks.

It is urged against me now that I have all my life long been a pro-slavery man, and my debate with Mr. Pryne in Philadelphia is largely quoted from to prove me the advocate of the institution.
I was challenged by Mr. Pryne, as the debate shows, to defend the South, and I done so, with an ability creditable to me, although I was on the wrong side of the subject!

There seems to be little reason to attribute this statement to simple vote-mongering. The blacks had only one party for which they could reasonably vote, the Radicals; the only other choice would be to stay at home. In either case, thanks to Rebel disenfranchisement, Brownlow would have had a better than even chance of winning. He wanted the black vote, of course: "I shall look to you....loyal men of the state, irrespective of color, to back me in the approaching bitter canvass, and to sustain me at the ballot box...I had sooner be elected by dark-skin loyalists than to be elected by the votes of fair-skin traitors."

The race issue also suggested the more general question of political consistency. Brownlow emphatically declared that, not only was he utterly consistent, but that his Conservative opponent, Emerson Etheridge, was equally so.

I am charged with inconsistency, in that I am, as an OLD LINE WHIG, advocating the principles of the Republican Party. A Republican Congress has inaugurated HENRY CLAY'S AMERICAN SYSTEM—a system that I have advocated for the last thirty years. A protective tariff, the construction of the great Pacific Railroad, the improvement of rivers and harbors, the establishment of a national currency, &c., fill Mr. Clay's bill fully, and gives the country what I have all the time contended for. With what show of consistency can Union men of any stripe now come out and act with the Rebel-Democratic party? The Democracy of the South inaugurated the rebellion, and the Democracy of the North aided, abetted, encouraged and sustained the rebellion. The Democratic leaders resolved in their Chicago Convention, in 1864, that the war for the Union was a
failure, and Mr. Etheridge joined them in the support of their ticket—encouraging and supporting desertions from the Union army....Emerson Etheridge, who advised the people of Tennessee, on the stump, as late as 1865, to overthrow the State Government by force—to shoot down the tax collectors and negroes—asserted that the negroes were as much slaves as they ever were....

The real issue, Brownlow felt, was his record as Governor. He had taken over a state under military occupation, nearly destroyed by the many battles fought on its soil, and full of armed bands of hostile guerillas. In two years, he had made it the first state to be allowed back into the Union, had put the railroads back into operation, and established the bases for internal civilian government. He was certainly the most immediately successful of the Reconstruction governors.

Two years ago this body of men assembled in the Capitol, and took charge of what little was left of the State and her records. The State was prostrated, her archives gone South, her money squandered, and her credit utterly ruined. War was still raging, courts were nowhere held with safety, and justice was administered within only a few fortified posts, protected with bayonets. County governments were broken up, and peace officers could do nothing. Our schools and academics were closed, as they had been during the four years of war and anarchy which previously reigned. Our grand system of railroads was in ruins, while the military authorities were such as were necessary to their success. Guerillas prowled without restraint over the whole State, and our farmers were liable any night to lose their last horses and their only hope of raising bread. The Legislature, by its judicious legislation, has placed the State on her feet again, enabled the treasury to meet all demands, and put the railroads in running order, and enabled them to meet the interest of their loans. The credit of the State is restored, and the State herself is restored to the Union. The courts are everywhere open for the transaction of business. The farming operations of the country are going on finely, and our schools are opening in every county. In a word,
it has been the proud privilege of this Legislature to restore this noble old Commonwealth to prosperity and business, and to her ancient position in the Federal Union.

Brownlow was re-elected, on this record, in 1867. Historians have often expressed surprise at the moderation of the record and the goals, given the rhetoric and methods of the Brownlow administration. As for the goals, it should be kept in mind that Brownlow was always a moderate, even conservative, urban Southerner, but one willing to make his peace with necessary progressive reforms. The rhetoric ("damned and hell-bound Rebels!") should surprise no one familiar with Southern stump-oratory and with Brownlow's forty years as a master of that medium. If Brownlow's methods seem extreme, it may be because we have forgotten how extreme was the resistance to his attempt to reconstruct Tennessee and to aid in the reconstruction of the South.

Brownlow was re-elected in 1867. In 1869, the Conservative, took over the State. They had made a separate peace with the railroad interests, who aided in the backroom dealings through which they were able to split the Radicals. The old planters became agents of Yankee railwaymen and industrialists in a state where Brownlow had hoped to establish an independent industrial base. They had argued successfully to that large sector of Northern Republicanism more interested in profit than principle that they were safer allies than Brownlow's Radicals. They openly declared themselves Southern Democrats, and won local political power by implicitly acknowledging the perpetual economic dominance of Northern Republicanism. By 1876, this coalition strengthened, their position was secure enough to allow them to act as crucial power-brokers
in the Compromise.  

Brownlow and the Union Army had put down this old ruling class, but they could hardly be expected to have destroyed it. However, the decision of this class to place themselves in dependence to Northern capital cannot alone explain something as concrete as their rapid return to political power within the federal system if they had so recently fought. In Marxian terms, a "concrete agent" was required for this. That agent was the Ku Klux Klan, and Brownlow's struggle with the night-riders was the major civil and political task of his second administration: "The Klan became in effect a terrorist arm of the Democratic party."  

The Klan has been presented variously, in history and legend, as the last gasp of the old aristocracy and the first breath of a newly-conscious white trash, as anti-Republican and anti-black. It was all of these. Earlier historians have often been taken in by "gentlemen's" disclaimers of any contact with the "trashy Klan types." However, as Allen Trelease has pointed out, "Negro suffrage, the main political impetus to Klan activity, was the law of the land after 1867, and the Democrats could hardly justify the Klan as a device for overthrowing it without convicting itself of rebellion."  

It is very significant that the leader of those "trashy" night-riders was Nathan Bedford Forrest, one of the last of the self-made (as opposed to birth-right) gentlemen of the antebellum South: "Nathan Bedford Forrest...made a fortune in slave-trading...he was highly respected by his fellow citizens, elected mayor of Memphis, and became a feared Confederate military figure."  

He was feared because he was the greatest guerilla fighter of the War, indeed, one of the greatest in history.  

Forrest later claimed that the Klan was founded only in response to Brownlow's creation of the state militia, as a defensive
measure. However, Brownlow had formed the militia to deal with the already-existing bands of Confederate guerillas, including some of Forrest's old forces, who refused to act as though the War were over. When these men came into the Klan, they were merely centralizing and continuing what had previously been scattered, disorganized violence. In Forrest, they had a leader of great organizing skill and tactical genius. It was anything but fanatical rhetoric when the Tennessee Radicals complained that, three years after Appomattox, they were still faced with an armed rebellion led by Confederates in complicity with the Democrats. Armed hostility, which did not end in Tennessee until the Conservative victory of 1869, was a major reason for that victory. Indeed, the Klan kept armed struggle alive in the South until 1876. Seen in this light, the South's eventual surrender was a very conditional one.

And, seen in this context, Reconstruction was an abortive, if well-intentioned social experiment, conceived by a North which had little realization of or taste for the magnitude of the task. It was carried out under military occupation by a North whose politicians and businessmen, after a rapprochement with their erstwhile enemies, had little reason for continuing to support the Radicals. This has become almost an American commonplace: MacArthur was to do a somewhat better job in Japan than Grant did in the South, but in both cases, the defeated were to do much more than merely "rise again." Brownlow understood the situation quite clearly—the need for minority rule, for legal recognition of the new status and role of the ex-slaves, and for military occupation. But, as in 1860, he found himself increasingly alone in his stand against the Southern revolution. With only Brownlow
to worry about, the planters, having decisively lost all hope of having
their own nation, had only to make judicious use of the Klan's terror
and the Democrats' plotting to win back their old position as a basic
and dominant unit of the Nation.
NOTES


2. I am fully aware of the historiographical difficulties involved in discussing the Radicals. Many contemporary historians would argue that no such cohesive political group even existed. Indeed, it is possible that, aside from Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, no other politician can be definitively identified as a "Radical." Be that as it may, that is a question of concrete politics—and this thesis is essentially an essay on ideology. The idea of Radicalism was crucially important to the "politics of Reconstruction," played a fundamental role in Governor Brownlow's ideology and self-definition, and has been a major theme in American historiography. It is indispensable for an understanding of Brownlow. As Carl Becker once said of the "German Mark," its non-existence as a historical fact made it no less significant as a historiographical one.

3. Donald, 114.


6. Stampp, 32.


8. Ibid, 42-43.

9. Ibid, 12.


11. James Welch Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 83ff. Although Patton's work is almost thirty years older than Alexander's (above), I rely in this chapter almost exclusively on Patton. Alexander acknowledges the high quality of
Patton's work; indeed, the only essential difference between the two books lies in Patton's somewhat broader social context, which seemed more useful for the purposes of this thesis.


16. Trelease, 463.

17. Patton, 212.


23. Cf Patton, 117.

24. Joseph P. James, "Southern Reactions to the Proposal of the Fourteenth Amendment," *Journal of Southern History*, V.22 N.4 (November, 1956), 483, 496-497. I am fully aware that the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship, and the Fifteenth granted the vote. However, Southerners knew that the first led to the second; and Brownlow was anxious to hasten the reconstruction process.

25. Quoted in Patton, 131.

26. Brownlow, in *ibid*, 132

27. Ibid, 134.

28. Ibid, 139.
29. Ibid, 140.

30. These campaign-statements by the Conservative, John Baxter, and the ones by Horace Maynard and Brownlow, which follow, are all from May, 1967 issues of the Nashville Union and Dispatch; precise dates do not appear on the photocopies in my possession.


33. Ibid.


35. Much of my knowledge of Forrest comes from a friend, Mr. James M. Shull, who has done extensive research into Southern military history in general, and into Forrest in particular.
CONCLUSION: BROWNLOW, TENNESSEE, THE SOUTH AND THE NATION

In 1869, Brownlow moved from the State House to the U.S. Senate, where he served as a loyal Stalwart until 1875. Given his age and infirmity, he took no active part in party or legislative politics during his senatorial years. He retired to Knoxville, where he lived long enough to write Andrew Johnson's obituary, and died in the summer of 1877. Although he had been praised by thousands in his lifetime, his passing was barely noted. Except for Coulter's biography, his existence has been barely noted by subsequent generations of American scholars. And even Coulter finds this reasonable: it was Brownlow's fate to "leave nothing behind... he built his structure on the sand."¹

Yet, this is not true. Brownlow as Governor laid the foundation for the New South in Tennessee. He rebuilt the railroads, and encouraged investment in Tennessee's iron and coal fields. He attempted to start a native textile industry in the state, in the hope of someday having Tennessee mills process Tennessee cotton. The old nativist encouraged the immigration of skilled foreign labor into his state and region. He permanently established Republicanism in East Tennessee, and put the East on the road to its eventual political and economic dominance of the state. If he had had his way, his East Tennessee Radicals would have retained control of the state and its economy continuously from 1865 on. That East Tennessee today is an industrial region almost completely dependent upon Northern capital and Northern decisions is not due to Brownlow's lack of effort to have it otherwise.

Nor is Coulter's assessment true of Brownlow the man. Brownlow was no fanatic, but he did whatever he did with a will. Most circuit-
riders remained anonymous outside their circuits, but not the Fighting Parson. Very few Southern editors, in the days before the Hodding Carters and Ralph McGills, earned national reputations through their writings. Brownlow was a "personality," but he won his fame through doing his job and defending his principles, which must be counted as an achievement. He was a man of strict but not inflexible principles: on the questions of race, party, and religion, he showed a real capacity for growth and self-criticism. The War was the ultimate trial of his principles and his courage, and he more than passed that test. He fought most of his life. Yet, Brownlow was not personally a fighter: all evidence indicates he was a loving husband, a gentle father, and a good neighbor. Exactly the opposite of so many nineteenth-century characters, he was a public bastard and a private saint. He was a good, tough person.

Still, on the whole, Brownlow was a failure—again, publicly rather than personally. In personal terms, his career was an outstanding success. From orphan boy to carpenter, to minister, to manufacturer, to editor, to lecturing war-hero, to Governor, to Senator—his was a classic Horatio Alger story. But, with the exception of three years in the iron business, Brownlow's public role in all these personae was that of the ideologue. His assigned task as circuit-rider had been not merely to minister to his flocks, but to defend Methodism. His function as editor was to defend and explain Whiggism. Northern cities invited him to attack the Confederacy. His role as Governor was essentially the defense of a potential Southern Republicanism. As a palsied, old Senator, he was displayed as a Republican showpiece. Brownlow's one real job was that of ideologue. And he failed. It was not that he lacked the intellec-
tual tools for the task. George Fitzhugh, far better equipped intellec-
tually, failed at a similar task.² It was that Brownlow was an apologist
for a group that failed to face reality until too late, a group that I
have variously described as Southern, urban, middle-class, industrialist,
and respectable.

Most of these characteristics were already common to some
degree in the North, and had Brownlow been a Northerner, we would find
little unusual about him. But Brownlow was a Southern boy. He was an
East Tennessean who achieved success outside the plantation-system.
Unlike most of his fellow proto-bourgeois, most of whom were narrowly
engaged in trade or industry, he made his mark in an area that let him
remain fairly free of the planters—the newspaper business. As an edi-
tor, the Southerner Brownlow was also practically bound to be an urban-
ite. As a serious Methodist, he had long been committed to middle-
class respectability. And as a defender of his region's mineral inter-
ests, he was another small, implicitly bourgeois step removed from the
aristocratic, agrarian planters. Brownlow understood that the interests
of his class were not ultimately identical with those of the planters.
As Robert Starobin has shown, however, both sides assumed a general
harmony of interests.³ Brownlow long assumed this harmony: after all,
the Whigs were the party of both the industrialists and the larger
planters. The Whiggish Brownlow believed that the interests of East
Tennessee and of Alabama were reconcilable; he also believed that the
interests of Alabama and Massachusetts were reconcilable. Brownlow
stubbornly defended this proposition for thirty-five years, for long
after he believed it to be an unquestionable fact. For, if it were not
true, he felt, it ought to be true. For thirty-five years Brownlow sought a way to defend the interests of his Southern class. His class, in the meantime, went on making its money.

In the end, Brownlow's project failed. The South left the Union. And most of his colleagues went with it, all those men who had for years supported his editorial claims that the non-planter South could not long survive outside the Union. Brownlow then attempted to incite a rebellion against the Confederacy, and that was only a partial success. As Governor, he saw a chance to do what he had never dreamed of before the War, a chance to place his region and its interests in a position of dominance in his Southern state. In the short run, and due to the fact that the leaders of the Old Cause chose to rise again as Redeemers rather than go down nobly as failed revolutionaries, this last project also failed. In the long run, East Tennessee has remained both bourgeois and Republican from his day to ours. However, Brownlow's real desire was to find a way to carry Jefferson's happy, yeoman Republic into an urban, industrial setting. I find no reason to share the sneers of later historians at Brownlow's inevitable failure in this, his true and noble project.
NOTES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


William G. Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism, and Bogus Democracy, in the Light of Reason, History, and Scripture; in which Certain Demagogues of Tennessee, and Elsewhere, are Shown in their true Colors* (Nashville, The Author, 1856).

, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined; or, Its False Spokes Extracted, and an Exhibition of Elder Graves, its Builder, in a Series of Chapters* (Nashville, for the Author, 1856).

, *Helps to the Study of Presbyterianism or, an Unsophisticated Exposition of Calvinism, with Hopkinsian Modifications and Policy, with a View to a more easy Interpretation of the Same. To Which is Added a Brief Account of the Life and Travels of the Author, Interspersed with Anecdotes* (Knoxvill, F.S. Heiskell, 1834).

, *The "Little Iron Wheel" Enlarged; or, Elder Graves, its Builder, Daguerreotyped, by way of an Appendix. To which are added Some Personal Explanations* (n.l., n.p., 1857).

, Miscellaneous papers (by and about), 1848-1867 (Tennessee State Archives: Manuscripts Division).

, Official papers, 1865-1869 (Tennessee State Archives: Archives and Records Management).

, *PARSON BROWNLOW and the Unionists of East Tennessee: with a SKETCH OF HIS LIFE. Comprising the Story of the Experiences and Sufferings of the Unionists of East Tennessee; the Parson's Remarkable Adventures; Incidents of the Prison-Life of Himself and Coadjutors; Anecdotes of His Daughter;*
Editorials of the Knoxville Whig; Together with an Interesting Account of Buell's Occupation of Tennessee (New York, Beadle & Company, 1862). Author unnamed, but probably Brownlow.

A Political Register, Setting Forth the Principles of the Whig and Locofoco Parties in the United States, with the Life and Public Services of Henry Clay. Also an Appendix Personal to the Author; and a General Index (Jonesborough, "The Whig," 1844).

Portrait and Biography of PARSON BROWNLOW, The Tennessee Patriot. Together with His Last Editorial in the Knoxville Whig; also, His Recent Speeches, Rehearsing His Experiences with Secession, and His Prison Life (Indianapolis, Asher & Co., 1862). Author unnamed, but probably Brownlow.

A SERMON ON SLAVERY: A Vindication of the Methodist Church, South: Her position Stated (Knoxville, Kinsloe & Rice, 1857).


Betsey Beelor Creekmore, Knoxville (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1967).


Nancy Marlene Haley, "'Cry aloud and spare not': The Formative Years of Brownlow's Whig, 1839-1841" (Knoxville, University of Tennessee MA Thesis, 1966).


Eric L. McKitrick, Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1965).


Ralph Ernest Morrow, Northern Methodism and Reconstruction (East Lansing, MSU Press, 1956).

Frank L. Owsley, Review of Coulter's Brownlow, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, V.24 N.3 (December, 1937), 403-405.


Walter Brownlow Posey, "The Influence of Slavery upon the Methodist Church in the Early South and Southwest," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, V.17 N.4 (March, 1931), 530-542.


Milton Bryan Powell, "The Abolitionist Controversy in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840-1864" (Iowa City, University of Iowa PhD Dissertation, 1963).


Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, Little, Brown 1945).

James W. Silver, Confederate Morale and Church Propaganda (Gloucester, Peter Smith, 1964).


**The Tribune Almanac and Political Register, 1856-1877.**


