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**William Bowen Campbell: The making of a Tennessee Unionist**

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WILLIAM BOWEN CAMPBELL: THE MAKING OF A  
TENNESSEE UNIONIST

Lowell Hagewood

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WILLIAM BOWEN CAMPBELL: THE MAKING OF A  
TENNESSEE UNIONIST

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ABSTRACT

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"William Bowen Campbell: The Making of a Tennessee Unionist" provides a microcosmic paradigm of the nature of Unionism in Middle Tennessee by exploring the political career of Campbell. How could Middle Tennessee have remained so decisively loyal to the Union for so long and have still succumbed to an eleventh-hour conversion to secession? Did the region's planters deceive the yeomanry with racism or conspiratorial anti-republican propaganda or both? On the other hand, was the region's secession inevitable but only delayed because of economic and geographical considerations which in no way undermined the commonality of racial interests all white Tennesseans shared?

The biographical information presented in this project is more interpretative than narrative with an emphasis on the protagonist's ideological make-up. Extensive use was made of the Campbell Family Papers, the messages and papers of Governor Campbell, and the papers of his political colleagues. Among the major works utilized in the

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historiographic portions of this study were those of William Cooper, Michael Holt, David Donald, Daniel Crofts, and Paul Bergeron.

Tennesseans were not predisposed toward the Confederacy by race, geography, or economics. In fact, Campbell's Unionist career gives evidence of the vitality of Tennessee's two-party system, the state's rivalries between its subdivisions, and the dominance of many state and local issues, all of which mitigated the worst effects of sectional tension. Nonetheless, the exploitation of the slavery issue by the state's "Southern rights" Democrats led to the February 9, 1861, referendum on the secession question. Campbell and other pro-slavery Unionists had canvassed the state denouncing secession by demonstrating the impracticality of slavery's protection outside the Union. Crushed in the February referendum, secessionists made tactical reconsiderations that Campbell and other Unionists were unprepared for. Assuming Lincoln would not try to coerce the seceded states into rejoining the Union, Campbell and his associates made no efforts to organize and prepare to use force to hold Tennessee in the Union. On the other hand, secessionists employed terror, intimidation, and reverse psychology after Sumter aimed at persuading Tennesseans that the "anti-republican" Lincoln Administration sought to establish a Northern "monarchy." Campbell's own monopolistic sense of republican virtue blinded him to

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the possibility that "cotton aristocrats" could also employ anti-republican, conspiratorial rhetoric to achieve their ends. Thus, although the states of the Upper South were united in their racial fears, this did not underlie secession, since such phobias could make one either loyal or disloyal to the Union. Conversely, a "war of compulsion" was inimical to Tennessee's eighteenth-century concept of patriotism and republicanism.

## DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Campbell Jenkins,  
whose life has taught me the  
value of persistence

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I owe the final processing of this manuscript to Ms. Wilma Grant, whose talent was only exceeded by her determination to complete this work.



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## INTRODUCTION

This addition to the literature of the antebellum South was inspired by seventeen years of instructional frustration in the classroom, battling stereotypical, but persistently popular views of the Old South and Civil War. To specialists of the period it is now clear that the Old South was not a monolith of opinion regarding the crucial issues that established its sectional identity, namely slavery and states' rights. Yet, given the choice between reading Carl Degler's The Other South or viewing Gone With The Wind, probably most adults, not to mention young people, would choose the latter. The result of such a choice is the type of security in stereotypes that educators often find impenetrable, perhaps because comparatively little attention has been focused on those individuals responsible for shaping and directing Unionist attitudes in this region. One such individual was William Bowen Campbell, the last Whig Governor of Tennessee. Although far overshadowed by the impact of such decisive Unionists in East Tennessee as William Brownlow and Andrew Johnson, Campbell's Unionism was also unconditional; an anomaly in Middle Tennessee since that region was heavily Democratic and voted overwhelmingly to secede from the Union in June 1861.

"William Bowen Campbell: The Making of a Tennessee Unionist," is an attempt to provide a microcosmic paradigm of the nature of Unionism in Middle Tennessee by exploring Campbell's political and military career. In particular, this study will concentrate on the period between the class at Fort Sumter in April 1861 and Tennessee's secession from the Union in June; a period J. Milton Henry has described as one of "revolution" in secessionist opinion in the state, especially in Middle Tennessee. Nearly all Middle Tennessee Unionists, most prominently John Bell and Gustavus Henry, publicly abandoned anti-secessionism after Fort Sumter. Campbell was one of the few who did not. However, he kept his opinions private at a time when other Whig leaders pleaded with him to use his prestige to hold Tennessee in the Union. Campbell's "private Unionism" has been severely criticized by historians such as Daniel Crofts but seldom analyzed for what it might reveal about the inner dynamics of anti-secessionism in Tennessee. If Unionism was so characteristic of Middle Tennessee prior to Fort Sumter, why did it evaporate so rapidly afterwards? Could it have really been as formidable as many have assumed? How could a secessionist minority so swiftly radicalize the state's "heartland" without either conspiratorial genius or grass roots support?

In search of answers to questions such as these, I have traced the sources of Campbell's Unionism, suggested possible reasons for its unconditional nature in the hostile political climate of Tennessee in 1861, and examined Campbell's abortive efforts to stem the secessionist tide. In conclusion I have used Campbell's Unionist career to test current interpretations regarding the nature of Unionism in the Upper South and disunion elsewhere.

## CHAPTER I

### THREE "ROADS TO SUMTER"?

. . . the slavery question became the sectional question, the sectional question became the slavery question and both became the territorial question.

David Potter, The Impending Crisis

It has been estimated that a book or article about the antebellum South and the Civil War has been published on the average of one each day since 1865. Obviously, the study of Southern history remains a complex mosaic about which the final word may never be written. Nonetheless, the most judicious attempts portray the South as rich in contradictions and hence not predisposed toward any one form of Southern nationalism. Consequently, what has emerged from this vast body of literature is a number of "souths" and thus a number of "roads to Sumter." This chapter will survey current scholarly opinion regarding the two most common paths to disunion and assess its significance by treating Tennessee as both a synthesis between and an important point of departure from those pathways.<sup>1</sup>

Most scholars agree that the "road to Sumter" the Deep South followed was substantially traveled in the first three months following Lincoln's election. To David Potter, black

slavery was not only the centerpiece of cultural differences between the North and South, but was also responsible for keeping the Deep South personal in its values, one-dimensional in its economy, and ultra-conservative in its politics. In recent years this "slavery-cultural" thesis has been so dominant that currently most of the commonly given reasons for the secession of the Lower South are related to it. For the purpose of this dissertation, these reasons can be summarized as the desire of the planter class to extend slavery to protect and perpetuate its hegemony, that class's fear of economic and political losses, and the racial phobias of most Southern whites.<sup>2</sup>

Focusing largely on the "profits of the plantation and the hubris of the planter," William L. Barney's research revealed that in Alabama and Mississippi the planter's defense of slavery's spread west was motivated more by economic perception than by political reality. In The Secessionist Impulse he argued that slaveholders genuinely believed slavery's extension to the territories was economically necessary, given the high prices of land and slaves. In The Ruling Race James Oakes further quantified Barney's conclusions by re-examining the exclusive nature of slaveholding. Oakes calculated that the percentage of families owning slaves declined from 36 percent in 1830 to 25 percent by 1860. On the eve of the Civil War, 88 percent of those who did own slaves owned under 20. Not only did

the planter class comprise a mere 12 percent of slaveowners, but only 2½ percent of planters owned more than 50 slaves. Barney's own quantitative analysis of secessionist leaders in Alabama and Mississippi proved them to be young, aspiring capitalists who were as worried about the scarcity of available cotton land as they were about the high prices of slaves. They believed both conditions could be ameliorated through expansion.<sup>3</sup>

William Cooper's The South and the Politics of Slavery 1828-56 was an insightful and provocative addition to earlier works on the Deep South that viewed slavery as the defining element in the South's political landscape. To Cooper, the primacy of the slavery issue in all national and local questions in the Deep South emerged as early as the mid-1820s. This author attributed the initial popularity of the Jacksonians in the South to the inordinate fear that incumbent John Quincy Adams would attempt to maintain his office by arraying free states against the slave states. To planters in the Deep South, Jacksonian conservatism heralded a return to "strict construction" of the Constitution and the opportunity to keep slavery permanent by keeping it local. Cooper did not significantly deviate from this hypothesis in spite of the fact that South Carolina was isolated in the 1833 Nullification Crisis. He ascribed the Deep South's failure to resist federal tariffs to South Carolina's political mishandling of the crisis rather than

to Southern ambivalence concerning the symbiotic relationship between slavery, the tariff, and federal power.<sup>4</sup>

Through impressive research, Cooper elucidated the massive fortress Southerners of all political persuasions built around slavery in the 1830s and 1840s. He forcefully demonstrated that the indissoluble link between perpetuating the Union and continuing slavery was forged much sooner than students of the Old South usually realized. Cooper's analysis of the 1836 presidential race underscored the evolutionary nature of the Southern Democratic strategy from promoting Martin Van Buren as an opponent of the National Bank to one equally against interference with slavery. Similarly, Cooper treated the Southern Whigs as the creation of proslavery editors from the Deep South who maximized anti-abolitionist rhetoric in both William Henry Harrison's and Hugh L. White's organizations. Rather than relegating the politics of slavery solely to ambition, Cooper opined that proslavery advocates sincerely feared that the restriction of slavery in the territories would be more than a symbolic denial of the institution's validity or an economic nightmare. He believed proslavery extremists saw restriction as a harbinger of permanent political inferiority. Such a portent could have only meant the eventual destruction of slavery to those most concerned with its survival: the planter elite of the "Cotton Belt."<sup>5</sup>



Cooper's determinative view of slavery was generally supported but significantly qualified by two of the most prolific scholars of Southern nationalism and the Civil War, William W. Freehling and David Herbert Donald. In 1990 Freehling published the first of what will be an exhaustive two-volume study of the strategy and tactics behind extreme states' rights. In his work, Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854, Freehling admitted having ascribed too great a role to slavery in the Nullification Crisis of 1833 in his seminal effort Prelude to Civil War. He charged Cooper with elevating the slavery issue to a paramount position at so early a stage in the South's political development as to ignore local issues in local campaigns. He concluded that extreme states' rights advocates of the Deep South were unsuccessful for years because there was still so much economic, social, and intellectual variety in the South. In this way he re-energized the "slavery-cultural" thesis by demonstrating the gradual, painful, and complex way in which slavery enmeshed itself with Southern culture.<sup>6</sup>

David Donald's scholarship suggested that Cooper's monolithic view of slavery was an oversimplification but still a convenient "shorthand" in referring to the "power elites" who eventually failed to reconcile minority rights with majority rule. In Liberty and Union Donald blamed this failure on the widely held, but myopic view, that slave societies would eventually perish without expansion. In

Donald's paradigm the national hysteria over slavery led to a general diffidence about constitutionalism and cursed the political machinery of the North and South with sectionalistic demagogues. The result was a new breed of political manipulators "indifferent to ideology and unconcerned with morality" that could not possibly reconcile majoritarianism with the rights of minorities in a democratic government. Donald maintained that secession fever in the Deep South was an insane but nevertheless "logical" product of national paranoia over slavery.<sup>7</sup>

Bertram Wyatt-Brown's Honor and Violence in the Old South was an ambitious but persuasive addition to the historiography of the antebellum South. To Wyatt-Brown, the disruptive character of slavery was not due to its economic and political impact on Southern society but to sociological factors such as race, the chief reason for the survival of the "peculiar institution." This author argued that racism and "honor" were mutually dependent and created in the planter aristocracy a motivation for secession and in the yeomanry a general deference to the patrician class. Wyatt-Brown suggested that "honor" is inherent in any culture where human slavery is practiced. In America the cost of black slavery was so prohibitive for most whites that the mere possession of a slave was an honor. Should a slave or anyone dishonor the master through disobedience or disrespect, the master felt obliged to punish the "guilty

party" through whatever means he deemed best regardless of how violent.<sup>8</sup>

Wyatt-Brown proposed that protecting the individual from public humiliation was the essential element and chief end of honor. Accordingly, valor, physical prowess, and veracity of will were the public traits typical of an "honorable gentleman." Wyatt-Brown offered proof through court records, newspaper accounts, personal narratives, and period literature to show that the fear of shame influenced the South's legal system, education, public services, social and sexual values. In contrast to Barney and Cooper, Wyatt-Brown redefined slavery's impact on the region in terms of "honor," since it existed long before "King Cotton" or extreme states' rights. He insisted that the static economic order of the South was not just a derivative of the mechanics of slavery but of "honor." The planter's obsession with matters of the "heart" and "spirit" smothered practicality and diversification by perceiving them as shameful materialism.<sup>9</sup>

The sociological explanation Wyatt-Brown espoused has received wide support from adherents of the "slavery-cultural" approach to Southern nationalism. Grady McWhiney, Bruce Collins, and Eugene Genovese have been cultivating this fertile field for years in portraying race as the great social unifier of white society. Race has become such an important component in the historiography of the antebellum

South that efforts have even been made to depict the Civil War as the South's effort to preserve a Herrenvolk republic of equal whites and unequal blacks. To be sure, Wyatt-Brown professed that secession emanated partly from the Southern belief that the best race would be shamed if inferior ones rose to a position of equality. Therefore, the politicizing of the slavery issue by Northern and Southern extremists convinced the latter that "Black Republicanism" would introduce social equality between the races, necessitating disunion as the only "honorable course."<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, there is no consensus among specialists about which facet of the Southern milieu slavery impacted the most. Nevertheless, by making recognition of the vital place of Southern slavery essential to any discussion of secession and creating a sophisticated way to observe the metamorphosis of Southern political and economic arrangements, historians have at least built one "road to Sumter."

The limitations of the "slavery-cultural" thesis become more apparent when the political experiences of all Southern slaveholding states are considered. To historians such as Michael Holt, slavery could not have played the determinative role in the nation's breakup; otherwise the death of the two-party system in the Deep South would have enveloped the entire section. Holt doubts that slavery was responsible for radicalizing politics even in the Deep South

since most Southern whites had little opportunity to share in a very expensive chattel system. He noted that Texas had less slave ownership than North Carolina; yet it seceded with the Deep South, while Kentucky never seceded although it had more slaveholders than Alabama. Exceptions such as these Holt credited to political rather than socioeconomic variables. He theorized that the disruption of the Union shows continuity with the ideology of the American Revolution: republicanism. Holt believed that late eighteenth and early nineteenth century republicans provided the new nation with a perceptual framework built on conspiratorial foundations. He cited many examples in the early national and antebellum periods in which crises were viewed by Northerners and Southerners as conspiracies against the Republic hatched by either "monarchists" or "radical Jacobins."<sup>11</sup> Holt was willing to accept such conspiratorial polemics as genuine rather than an excuse to extend or limit slavery.<sup>12</sup>

Holt and others have searched for reasons why politicians and voters in the Upper South had much more faith in the normal political process than those in the Lower South who believed that this process had already been vitiated after the election of 1860. Scholars such as William J. Evitts and Daniel Crofts argued that the answers to Holt's inquiries can be discovered in the variegated political experiences of slaveholding states. Using Maryland as his model, Evitts postulated that political

party competition there had not been paralyzed by sectional issues such as slavery but remained focused upon grass roots concerns. Reform efforts in that state had succeeded because of political realignment, not revolution. In other words, voters were still confident that their concerns were solvable without extreme measures. Maryland's experience was not dissimilar to Tennessee's, where internal improvements, education, transportation, and banking far overshadowed slavery for many years.<sup>13</sup>

Daniel Crofts examined the entire Upper South and reasoned that political party allegiance was the decisive factor in "maintaining Unionism in the Upper South." Lacking the extensive plantation economy of the Deep South, competitive political parties survived the sectional duels over slavery between the Mexican and Civil War. In his recent monograph, Reluctant Confederates, Crofts employed a variety of statistical techniques to illuminate the way Unionism transcended political party divisions and class differences. He concluded that the explosive nature of the slavery issue did not create nearly the high degree of cleavage between slaveholders and non-slaveholders over the secession question as other historians had previously believed. In Tennessee slave ownership and political party allegiance were probably less related than anywhere else in the Upper South. The sixth congressional district, which William B. Campbell represented during his first term in

Washington, had 36.3 percent of its population in chains and yet was solidly Whig, while the second district only had one-third as many slaves and was overwhelmingly Democratic.<sup>14</sup>

Paul Bergeron's statistical analysis of voter consistency in Tennessee likewise revealed virtually no connection between the percentage of slaveholders and the percentage of Tennesseans voting Democratic between 1835 and 1837. As a result, Democrats were no more able to defeat Whig John Bell with an abolitionist label than the Whigs were in trying to discredit Democrat Andrew Johnson with a disunionist one. Crofts asserted that the election returns of 1860 prove traditional party allegiances were still very strong in the Upper South perhaps because many in this region voted for "familiar and trusted party nominees as a way out of the sectional trauma." Conversely, "fire-eaters" of the Lower South did not risk political oblivion when advocating disunion because of the collapse of a competitive two-party system there in the late 1830s and 1840s.<sup>15</sup>

The vitality of the Upper South's two-party system largely attests to the historic origins of the Southern Whig party. In sharp contrast with earlier works that attempted to establish parallels between Southern Whiggery and sectionalism, more recent analyses present a more balanced view. Charles Sellers described the evolution of early American political parties as a continuum, that is, a

process enmeshed in the post-Revolutionary contradiction between opportunity and equality. Trapped between dichotomous interpretations of market capitalism, Federalists and Republicans were initially divided over Hamilton's notion of a "developmental capitalist state" and Jefferson's agrarian vision of small-scale capitalism. However, since both envisioned a republican political system with capitalist foundations, "ideological theft" was inevitable in the struggle between unlimited property rights under market conditions and government directed economic growth.<sup>16</sup>

Federalism's seminal victories were short-lived because of the centralism, elitism, and perceived corruption of the Hamiltonian "developmental capitalist state." To Sellers, Jefferson's "Revolution of 1800" was never a war against market capitalism as much as it was a political battle for the anti-elitist "high ground." While Jefferson succeeded for a generation in denying the federal government the power over market forces energized by commercial boom, states assumed this power, especially as the entrepreneurial wing of the Jeffersonian Republican party gained ascendancy. Thus, Sellers contended that even before the War of 1812 liberalized the Republican party, it had become Federalist in its "unabashed championship of enterprise and the bourgeoisie middle class ethic."<sup>17</sup>



Having become vulnerable to charges of elitism and statism, the National Republican party began to exhibit ideological divisions during the Panic of 1819. A conservative insurgency that began in New York ultimately climaxed in the creation of the Jacksonian Democratic party and its triumph in 1828. Characterizing the economic rhetoric of the 1828 presidential campaign as "undisguised National Republicanism and an unconstrained capitalist state versus democracy and small-scale capitalism," Sellers disagreed with scholars who maintain that the economic philippics during Jackson's presidency were of secondary importance. Instead, he interpreted Jackson's war with the National Bank and his financial policies as continuous with both early America's fear of capitalist abuse by government and Jackson's determination to dissolve the union between government and the market. In Sellers' opinion, this political showdown over the market revolution confirmed his earlier thesis that Northern and Southern people divided politically in the 1830s and 1840s over the same questions, the most important of which were economic. Thus, Andrew Jackson had re-energized defenders of Hamilton's developmental program and inadvertently created a new political faction that would eventually become the Whig party.<sup>18</sup>

Despite an initial lack of cohesion, the former Democrats and Republicans who made up the Whig party eventually developed an ideological purity that Carl Degler

believed transcended sectional differences for many years. In fact, Degler suggested that Whiggery was one of the most essential elements in forging Southern Unionism because its economic nationalism predisposed many Southerners toward Unionist perspectives. This is hardly a new contention. As early as 1914 Arthur Cole established this proposition in The Whig Party of the South. Unlike Cole, Degler did not find that Whiggery principally represented those planter aristocrats most dependent on the Whig program of internal improvements, paper money, and a strong National Bank. Using case studies and statistical references, Degler listed many examples of strong Whig support in urban and even back-country areas. Degler attributed this grass roots support for the Whig party to popular dissatisfaction with Democratic "cotton snobs" over state and local concerns, especially internal improvements.<sup>19</sup>

David Walker Howe's exegesis of Clay's "American System" credited Southern support for this program to the business and professional men of commercial areas, planters heavily involved in commerce, and underdeveloped regions, such as East Tennessee, that hoped for economic assistance to improve transportation. Thomas Brown added support to this view by proving that Whigs secured votes in the back-country with claims that industrialization would provide useful, productive, and well-paying jobs and could thus transform impoverished whites into an industrial middle

class. Anita Goodstein has suggested that the formidable strength of the Whig party in Nashville was due in large part to its broad-based appeal that included both established mercantile interests as well as mechanics and skilled workers.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever successes Whiggery achieved in fostering Southern Unionism and promoting social harmony were to be severely tested once slavery emerged on the national scene. Nonetheless, the impact that the slavery issue had on Whig slaveholders illustrates the unique way slavery actually worked against disunion. For example, there never was a Southern consensus that dissolution of the Union could be peaceful. Naturally, slaveholders in the Upper South were very concerned, since any war would geographically place them on the "front lines." Thus, defending the South's "peculiar institution" from abolitionists depended upon peace. Only within the Union could the slaveholder's minority status have any chance of constitutional protection. As one nervous Tennessee aristocrat observed after South Carolina's separation, "secession is the short cut to abolition." Consequently, although nearly all anti-slavery Southerners were Unionists, not all Unionists were opposed to slavery.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, the scholarship of Southern Unionism and Whiggery dovetail in a compelling way. Given the fact that only half of the Upper South seceded after the clash at

Sumter, it is clear that neither slavery nor race played the decisive role in every state. The historians of the Upper South mentioned previously all presented the upper slave-holding states as complex entities in which a multiplicity of political, economic, and social factors worked to support Unionism. However, this was Unionism of a conditional variety. If race and slavery did not program this region toward secession, they certainly exacerbated fears over the sectionalistic Republican party. In any case, Lincoln's April 15, 1861, "Call to Arms" forced the issue in the border states. Those that did secede quite naturally claimed their decisions were based on the political ideology of Republican freedom.

Republican theorists such as Holt and Crofts interpreted the Upper South's response to Lincoln's "Call to Arms" as a defense of self-government and liberty by late eighteenth-century standards. Not only was the rhetoric of secession steeped in the American Revolution, the pro-secessionist orators of the Upper South seemed to believe it. To Crofts, Lincoln "crossed the Rubicon" on April 15 by creating in the Upper South their worst nightmare: a union of compulsion. In Tennessee, conditional Unionist John Bell described his conversion to secession by declaring, "give me separation, give me disunion, give me anything in preference to a Union sustained only by power. . . ." Conversely, Bell's Whig colleague William Bowen Campbell also believed

republicanism was threatened by conspirators, but to him the "plotters were Southern "fire-eaters" who were scheming to establish the "slaveocracy" so feared by Northerners. In short, the eighteenth-century republican world view could be both dichotomous and consensual. On the one hand, aristocratic privileges were seen as the greatest threat to liberty. On the other hand, liberty was also seen as threatened by majoritarian republicanism. Holt accepted the political motivations of both secessionists and Unionists, because they had their origins in a common experience: the American Revolution.<sup>22</sup>

In a great many ways, Tennessee fits the republican paradigm Holt and Crofts particularly ascribed to the Upper South. Ralph Wooster's quantitative work on Tennessee's political landscape in the antebellum period attested to the absence of the anti-egalitarian tradition of patriarchal republicanism common in the Deep South. Tennessee, the first Southern state to have a popularly elected Governor, was one of the four Upper South states in the 1830s to adopt new state constitutions that removed property qualifications for holding office and created more elective offices. Gubernatorial power in Tennessee was limited by a two-year term and minimal patronage power. In Politicians, Planters, and Plain Folk, Wooster estimated that while a majority of state legislators (66 percent in 1860) were slaveowners, only 14 percent were planters. Hence, the majority of

Tennessee whites had an opportunity to participate in the state's political system, and at times during the antebellum period, the voter turnout exceeded 80 percent.<sup>23</sup>

Paul Bergeron believed Tennessee's high voter turnout to have been the result of an extremely competitive two-party system that originally evolved from non-ideological factors such as state sectionalism and personal rivalries. Entering state politics about the time this two-party development was crystallizing, young state representative William Bowen Campbell witnessed intense arguments over internal improvements, education, and banking. Later as Governor, Campbell painfully discovered that state sectionalism was more responsible for these debates than political ideology. Although the state's eastern and western sections generally supported a system of state-sponsored internal improvements, it was the more populous Middle Tennessee region that continually defeated these efforts. Finally, in 1838 the Tennessee legislature passed a compromise bill that provided for limited state aid for railroads and macadamized turnpikes. Since the bill only allowed the state to subscribe to one-third of the stock of any railroad, a heavy burden was placed on private entrepreneurs to make long-term investments. The section most capable of making such investments, wealthy Middle Tennessee, was also the least likely to do so because of its satisfaction with river transportation.<sup>24</sup>

A deepening national recession after 1837 and the fraudulent use of monies secured from state bonds temporarily eroded public interest in transportation improvements. As late as 1850 not a single mile of railroad was in operation within the state. However, East Tennessee Whigs, representing the section where transportation was the poorest, joined Democrats who supported a state-wide plan and succeeded in rallying great popular support for the program. Significantly, Democrats and Whigs overcame differences of opinion concerning the extent of government involvement because Tennessee Whigs were less adamant over federal direction than their colleagues elsewhere. With minimal ideological differences between Tennessee Democrats and Whigs, the sectional cataclysm of the 1850s and 1860s made it easier for them to come together over the nature of the Union.<sup>25</sup>

In March 1851, Whig leaders in Nashville nominated William Bowen Campbell for Governor and took the opportunity to answer Democratic charges that their party had no visible political principles. The Whig Convention drafted a document in which party leaders claimed always to have been the true political heirs of Jeffersonianism. More importantly, the Convention insisted that the Compromise of 1850 was a final settlement on the territorial question and that, "nullification, or forceable resistance to the Constitution and the laws of the land, is unsanctioned by

patriotism and incompatible with the preservation of the Union." A year later the Tennessee legislature passed a joint resolution very similar in wording to the Whig Convention Resolutions of 1851 and the Declaration of Independence. Beginning with the premise that the framers of the United States Constitution intended to create a perpetual union with limited powers rather than a confederacy, it concluded by recognizing dissolution only as a revolutionary right in the Lockean sense:

It is the right of the people of the states, whenever palpably, intolerably, and unconstitutionally oppressed by the government of the United States to resist illegal action by force if necessary, but this right is in its character, revolutionary . . . there is no cause at the present for the exercise of such a right.

Even when the southern wing of the Democratic party became more vocal in the Deep South and the territorial question dominated national politics, Whig and Democratic parties in Tennessee saw little reason to invoke the "right of revolution." However, this consensus began to weaken in the mid-1850s following the demise of the Whigs nationally and West Tennessee's defection to the Democratic camp. Although Tennessee Whigs ceased to be competitive on the gubernatorial level, the Whig reputation for nationalism continued to flourish, even in large slaveholding counties, through the American and Opposition parties. Clearly, the capstone of Tennessee's highly democratic political structure was its fiercely competitive two-party system that was able to



survive the onslaught of sectional tension damaged but viable.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, Tennessee's physiographic features made it one of the most heterogeneous states of the Upper South. Of the more than 103,000 farmers in the state in 1860, only 78 were planters and of this number only 47 had more than 100 slaves. Undeniably, much of the state's inter-regional rivalry was due to the distinctiveness of each section. Flanked by mountains and cursed with poor, thin soil, East Tennessee farms were the smallest, the most self-sufficient, and the most isolated. Although livestock, wheat, and cereals were produced in abundance, this region's constant frustration with transporting its commodities to market was only exceeded by its disgust with Middle Tennessee's intransigent attitude toward internal improvements. Compared to East Tennessee, where only three out of one hundred farmers were planters, one out of every ten white Middle Tennesseans living in the Central Basin owned more than twenty slaves. Comprising thirteen of Middle Tennessee's thirty-five counties, the Central Basin, or "heartland," possessed some of the richest, most productive soil in the state which annually yielded great quantities of cotton, tobacco, cereals, and wheat.<sup>27</sup>

While the northern part of West Tennessee was similar to Middle Tennessee in soil and crop production, the Mississippi River lowlands area provided the southern

portion of this section with the state's most extensive large-scale cotton production. Here the plantation economy of the Deep South, with all its social, political, and racial components, was writ large. One-third of this section's population were slaves by 1860. In fact, one out of every five farmers in Fayette and Haywood counties were planters. Memphis was the state's most populous city, the capital of the state's cotton industry, and the western terminus on the railroad to Charleston. Accordingly, it was Tennessee's strongest link to the Deep South.<sup>28</sup>

Freed from total dependency on a plantation style economy, manufacturing and commerce grew in the Middle and Eastern portions of Tennessee creating a unique bond with other border and northern states. Capital investment in manufacturing doubled between 1850 and 1860 in East and Middle Tennessee, as did the amount spent for raw materials and the sums received for finished goods. Copper-mining was the state's most valuable industry, followed by the production of pig iron and various iron products. Cotton goods, tobacco, leather goods, and bituminous coal were also produced. Tennessee led all Southern states in printing and showed a substantial increase in the professions between 1850 and 1860.<sup>29</sup>

With a variegated economy and the absence of extensive plantation slavery, whether Tennessee shared the class cleavages common in the Lower South has been the subject of

much scholarly debate. In Plain Folk of the Confederacy Frank Owsley depicted Tennessee society as remarkably free of class consciousness, especially among the landed majority. Owsley even discovered that the yeomanry, the poor, and the planters often shared the same geographic neighborhood, which he interpreted as evidence of social harmony. Owsley's study seemed to corroborate the work done on ante-bellum Tennessee society by Gustavus Dyer and John Trotwood Moore a generation earlier. Commissioned in 1915 by the Tennessee Historical Society to study Tennessee's Civil War population, these historians interviewed veterans and non-combatants with a sociological questionnaire. The more than 1,600 responses are one of the very few sources that are inclusive of the non-slaveholding yeomanry of Tennessee, since over 50 percent of the respondents did not own slaves. With the questionnaires revealing that over 80 percent were not even aware of class differences, Dyer and Moore testified to the absence of class strife in Tennessee.<sup>30</sup>

A half century later, Fred A. Bailey reviewed the questionnaire's methodology and noticed numerous weaknesses. Of those respondents who claimed that social harmony was the rule between gentry and plain folk, nearly all were from the economically and socially homogeneous regions. Furthermore, Bailey discovered that Dyer and Moore had failed to report the high degree of social segregation in the state. Bailey

detected a great deal of negative social relations between slave owners and non-slave owners over education. In Tennessee, as elsewhere in the Old South, school children were segregated into schools according to social standing. Bailey exploded the myth that the aristocracy helped the deserving poor receive a decent education out of a sense of "noblesse oblige." Indeed, some of the veterans from patrician backgrounds admitted that educational opportunities for the poor were very restricted. In Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation, he reasoned that Tennessee's poor bitterly realized that the dual school system based on wealth and privilege prevented social advancement by perpetuating economic inequities.<sup>31</sup>

The remarkably biased questions asked by Dyer and Moore pertinent to social conflict virtually forced the respondents to choose between class solidarity or dishonoring their parents with hints of social tension. In spite of this, Bailey found it interesting that over 20 percent of the former Confederates expressed the belief that there was significant resentment between whites of different classes in their communities, most prominently in the Memphis area and also in Middle Tennessee. Bailey concluded that Tennessee had been a very class-conscious society with an undercurrent of social conflict which created open dissension and undermined morale during the Civil War.<sup>32</sup>

The chief problem with both the "roads to Sumter" described in this chapter is that they are only generally applicable to Tennessee's extremities. For instance, West Tennessee, with its cotton economy and plutocratic social and political order, was naturally the earliest and most decisive region in its support for secession. Of the section's twenty-one counties, fourteen voted to secede in the state's first special election for a secession convention on February 9, 1861. By contrast, seventeen of Middle Tennessee's thirty-nine counties and only one of East Tennessee's thirty-four counties voted for separation during the February vote. Even so, the June 8, 1861, vote in West Tennessee was only slightly more decisive. Amazingly, Democratic Weakley County voted against disunion in June as did Henderson and Decatur counties. East Tennessee, a Whig stronghold with a self-sufficient yeomanry, generally exhibited the type of behavior typical of a region without a planter class. However, six counties, three of which had miniscule concentrations of slaves, voted to secede.<sup>33</sup>

Affluent, prosperous, and envied by both East and West Tennesseans, Middle Tennessee's population almost always decided political contests in the state as it did on February 9 and June 8, 1861. Trying to fit this region into a "slavery-cultural" scenario or an eighteenth-century republican world view is impractical since it possessed a complex mixture of characteristics endemic to both East and

West Tennessee. In Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-70, Stephan Ash described Middle Tennessee's "heartland" as a social microcosm of the Deep South surrounded by outlying counties that resembled the Upper South. In his opinion, the entire region should be understood as a "Third South," an "agricultural cornucopia" lacking a cotton-dominated economic and political base that needs to be treated discontinuously" with the rest of the Old South.<sup>34</sup>

The historiography of Southern secession therefore leaves many unanswered questions germane to the Tennessee experience. How could Middle Tennessee have remained so decisively loyal to the Union for so long and have still succumbed to an eleventh-hour conversion to secession? Did the region's planters deceive the yeomanry with racism or conspiratorial anti-republican propaganda or both? On the other hand, was the region's secession inevitable but only delayed because of economic and geographic considerations which in no way undermined the commonality of racial interests all white Tennesseans shared? If Middle Tennesseans were not preordained to side with the Confederacy, then why did the area's Union men fail so completely to galvanize Unionist sentiment in the region? The political career of William Bowen Campbell, a Tennessean who supported the South's racial hierarchy, its aristocratic heritage, and the Union, may possibly suggest a "third road

to Sumter" and provide another dimension to the complex and personal process by which individuals defined or shed their Unionism.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Bruce Catton, Reflections on the Civil War (New York: Berkley Books, 1982), 228.

<sup>2</sup>David Potter and Don E. Fehrenbacher, The Impending Crisis 1848-61 (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 3-30.

<sup>3</sup>William L. Barney, The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 4-5; James Oakes, The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 60-8.

<sup>4</sup>William J. Cooper, The South and the Politics of Slavery 1826-36 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 89, 90-6, 65.

<sup>6</sup>William W. Freehling, The Road to Disunion, vol. 1, Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 595-99; William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina 1816-36 (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>7</sup>David Herbert Donald, Liberty and Union (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978), 57-58, 46-48.

<sup>8</sup>Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 20, 29, 14-42.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 14-42, 45-51.

<sup>10</sup>Bruce Collins, White Society in the Antebellum South (London, 1985); Grady-McWhiney, Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988); Eugene Genovese, "Yeoman Farmers in a



Slaveholders Democracy," Agricultural History 49 (April 1975): 340-1; Freehling, Secessionist at Bay 1776-1854, 604; Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence, 20-9.

<sup>11</sup>Michael F. Holt, The Political Crises of the 1850s (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 227-28, 233-51.

<sup>12</sup>The historiography of early American politics is rich with works explaining the meaning and legacy of conspiratorial anti-republicanism, the prerequisite of which is to arrive at a definition for nineteenth-century republicanism. Richard Latner submits that any attempt to define republicanism as early Americans did must include "cultural, intellectual, moral, and utopian dimensions" because early Americans were convinced that a stable republic demanded internal unity, social solidarity, and public and private virtue. See Richard B. Latner, "The Nullification Crisis and Republican Subversion," Journal of Southern History 43 (February 1977): 19-38; John R. Howe minimized social and economic tension between America's first political parties and maximized the high degree of political consensus between them. He insisted that this consensus led to bitterness between Federalists and Republicans because it was based on the premise that republican governments were by their nature fragile and impermanent owing to their natural emphasis on civil liberties and economic individualism. He concluded that all political struggles in the Federalist period were seen as covert attempts to subvert the republican process by exploiting its fragile nature. See John R. Howe, "Republican Thought and the Political Violence in the 1790s," American Quarterly Review 19 (1967): 147-65. David Walker Howe continued this discussion in his work on the Jackson period by depicting Democrats as more likely than Whigs to charge "plutocratic elites" with republican subversion, whereas Whigs worried the most about ambitious demagogues taking advantage of the loss of an independent spirit among the people. See David Walker Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 76.

<sup>13</sup>William J. Evitts, A Matter of Allegiances: Maryland from 1850-61 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 192-6.

<sup>14</sup>Daniel W. Crofts, Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 62-3, 86; Paul Bergeron, Antebellum Politics in Tennessee, 1830-60 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982), 19-21.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-46 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 33-43.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 363; earlier studies that assigned sectional factors to the origins of Southern Whiggery are Arthur Cole, The Whig Party of the South (Washington: Peter Smith, 1915); Charles Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-48 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948); Herman Von Holst, The Constitutional and Political History of the United States, 8 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1876-92); John W. Burgess, The Middle Period, 1817-58 (New York: Scribner, 1905). Sellers's economic analysis of the development of the first American party system would be read with works that stress social and political factors. Joseph Charles's Origins of the American Party System (New York: Harper and Row, 1956) and John Miller's Toward a More Perfect Union, 1783-1800 (New York: Scribner, 1970) both showed that the passions created by the French Revolution and the image of monarchial Great Britain brought into question the Revolutionary triumph and as a result welded Federalists and Republicans together during and after the War of 1812. While New England Federalists were certain that war represented a conspiracy by the South and West to add a new agrarian empire to America at the expense of commercial interests, the War disgraced Federalists and helped produce a new spirit of national oneness. Paul Goodman in The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) interpreted the development of early American political parties as the product of social tension. He postulated that the competing economic and sectional loyalties should not be viewed as determinative, but rather as feeding into a social structure that fostered economic competition and growth.

<sup>18</sup>Sellers, The Market Revolution, 268. Robert Remini argued that concern over political corruption was the most decisive factor in creating the second American party system. By demonstrating that scandals in the Treasury and War Departments as well as the National Bank discredited Clay's "American System" with elitism and centralism, he combines the economic views of Sellers with the political ones of Thomas Brown in Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the Whig Party (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). See Robert V. Remini, The Election of Andrew Jackson (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1963) and Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-32

(New York: Harper and Row, 1981). The Market Revolution enlarged on Sellers's original economic interpretation. See Charles Sellers, "Who Were the Southern Whigs?," American Historical Review 59 (1954): 355-46. Thomas Brown agreed that Southern Whigs shared the same concerns about Jackson as Northern Whigs but that these concerns were fundamentally political rather than economic. In Politics and Statesmanship he lists these as fear of "unrestrained executive power," abhorrence of Jackson's perceived lawlessness, and revulsion against corrupt party influence" (157). Unlike their northern allies, Southern Whigs addressed these fears by gearing them to the "special sensibilities of their section," but concurred with Northern Whigs that these problems could and should be resolved through reconciliation by consensus-building rather than the class-conscious approach of Democrats (160). The ethno-cultural interpretation of political parties is, of course, at odds with both political and economic explanations of major events in the Jacksonian period. In Lee Benson's The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy (Princeton: Princeton University Press) and Ronald Formisano's The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-61 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), quantitative methods and behavioral techniques were applied to political history to conclude that religious and ethnic differences are the chief source of political cleavage.

<sup>19</sup>Carl Degler, The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth-Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 96-100, 109-110; Arthur Cole, The Whig Party of the South, (Washington: Peter Smith, 1914). Paul Bergeron and Ralph Wooster found Degler's conclusion to be true in Tennessee. See Bergeron, Antebellum Politics in Tennessee, 1830-60, 148-51, and Wooster, The People in Power: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Lower South 1850-60 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 120-1.

<sup>20</sup>Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs, 131-2; Brown, Politics and Statesmanship, 181; Anita S. Goodstein, Nashville 1780-1860: From Frontier to City (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1989), 158, 178.

<sup>21</sup>Degler, The Other South, 120; Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., The Papers of Andrew Johnson, vol. 4, 1860-1 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 74-5; Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 45.

<sup>22</sup>Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 45; Nashville Weekly Patriot, 24 January 1861; Campbell Family Papers, Manuscript

Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina; Holt, Political Crises of the 1850s, 243-44.

<sup>23</sup>Ralph A. Wooster, Politicians, Planters, and Plain Folk: Courthouse and State house in the Upper South 1850-60 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 118, 124, 40, 129; Wooster, The People in Power, 105.

<sup>24</sup>Bergeron, Antebellum Politics in Tennessee 1830-60, 37-42; Stanley J. Folmsbee, Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee 1796-1845 (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1939), 172; Phillip M. Hamer, Tennessee: A History 1673-1932, vol. 1 (New York: American Historical Society, 1933), 410-19.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>The True Whig, 21 March 1851; Tennessee, Public Acts, Tennessee General Assembly 1851-2, 1st Session 29th General Assembly, 719-21; Bergeron, Antebellum Politics in Tennessee 1830-60, 7.

<sup>27</sup>Mary E. R. Campbell, The Attitudes of Tennesseans Toward the Union 1847-61 (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 22; Stephan V. Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-70: War and Peace in the Upper South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 10-11; John E. Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics, 1845-61" (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1966), 5, 7.

<sup>28</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics, 1845-61," 5.

<sup>29</sup>Campbell, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union, 1847-61, 22-30.

<sup>30</sup>Frank Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949), 10-22; Fred A. Bailey, "Class Antagonism in Old South Tennessee: An Analysis of the Non-Combatant Responses to the Civil War Veterans' Questionnaires," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 65 (Winter 1986): 273. Much of Owsley's scholarship has withstood the test of time. Clement Eaton, "Class Differences in the Old South," Virginia Quarterly Review 33 (Summer 1957): 357-8; Eugene Genevose, "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholder's Democracy," Agricultural History 49 (April 1975): 341-2; Forrest MacDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation," Journal of Southern

History 41 (May 1975): 166; Bruce Collins, White Society in the Antebellum South (London: Holmes and Meier, 1985) all accept the social harmony paradigm.

<sup>31</sup>Fred A. Bailey, Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 62-70, 55-57.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 59-62, 76. Bailey's work drew many of the same conclusions about class consciousness and conflict in Tennessee that have been made in a more expansive way about the antebellum South. Those works include Emory Thomas, The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971); Paul D. Escott, After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Phillip S. Paludan, Victims: A True Story of the Civil War (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981); Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry 1850-1890 (New York: Harper and Row, 1984). For a brief but provocative assessment of class conflict in the South during the Civil War see Eric Foner, "The South's Inner Civil War," American Heritage 40 (March 1989): 47-56.

<sup>33</sup>Nashville Union and American, 3 March 1861.

<sup>34</sup>Ash, Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 9-10, 22.

## CHAPTER II

### BLOOD TIES

Virtue has the first claim to regard, well-founded friendship the second, and ties of blood if they are supported by the other two.

William B. Campbell,  
Papers

William Bowen Campbell's formative years demonstrate the inestimable influence family heritage had on the development of youth in the early nineteenth century. Born twenty-four years after the American Revolution ended to parents of distinguished colonial families, Campbell studied subjects he was not interested in, bypassed the career of his choice for public service, fought in wars he did not approve of, and, later in life, battled disunion, largely because of a moral devotion to his family's deep roots in the creation of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Campbell was born on February 1, 1807, on Mansker's Creek near Hendersonville, Tennessee, to David and Catherine Bowen Campbell. As much as he admired his hard-working but debt-ridden father, it was his mother whom he wrote and spoke of in sentimental terms in later life. From his mother, he learned at an early age of the great roles the Russell, Bowen, and Campbell families played in winning

American independence. Through his mother, Campbell was a great-grandson of General William Russell of Virginia. During the Revolution, Russell commanded a regiment at the battles of Germantown, Brandywine Creek, Monmouth, and Yorktown and emerged as one of Virginia's heroes of the war. Campbell's maternal grandfather, William Bowen, served under William Russell in the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, and rose to the rank of captain following the victory at Yorktown. During the War for Independence, Bowen became Russell's son-in-law by marrying his daughter, Mary Henley Russell in 1777.<sup>2</sup>

Through his father, Campbell's Revolutionary War heritage was also impressive. For example, no less than eight blood relatives had fought in the battle of King's Mountain. One of these was Campbell's grandfather, Captain David Campbell, who served under the command of General William Campbell. Campbell's father, David, was born in 1781 at Campbell's Station, the namesake settlement of his parents, near Knoxville, Tennessee. In 1806 the elder Campbell married the daughter of William Bowen and Mary Henley Russell, Catherine Bowen. Using his Revolutionary War land grants, William Bowen had left comfortable surroundings in Virginia for the unknown opportunities in the wilderness of the Tennessee Territory of North Carolina. Prevented by Indians from settling near the Round Lick area (now Smith County), Bowen instead chose a 640-acre land

grant along Mansker's Creek in what is now Sumner County because of its proximity to a fort, Mansker's Station. Finding the soil good, the hunting excellent, and the population sparse, he eventually built the first brick house in the area in the late 1780s. Not only was the brick home a comparative novelty on the frontier, it was remarkably well built, and today is owned and operated by the Goodlettsville American Revolution Bicentennial Commission.<sup>3</sup>

With a successful farm enterprise of 3,032 acres, Bowen gave his daughter and son-in-law enough land to build a house and begin a farm of their own. With the birth of their first child, William Bowen on February 1, 1807, David and Catherine Campbell began a long and ultimately unsuccessful quest for economic security. The financial trials of this family kept them not only monetarily obsequious to relatives but spiritually dependent as well. Historian Margaret Pilcher, the granddaughter of Catherine Bowen Campbell, has described her grandmother as imbued with the Revolutionary spirit of her ancestors. For better or for worse William Bowen Campbell would be the chief recipient of his mother's passion for patriotism and his father's search for financial support.<sup>4</sup>

As a farmer and later as a merchant, David Campbell rarely knew prosperity. Describing poverty as "nothing when we are out of debt," Campbell was able to sell tracts of his farm land to ease debts and keep his family fed. Although



his six children probably did not want for necessities, higher education was beyond the family's means. As his oldest son William approached manhood, David Campbell wrote his brother-in-law, David Campbell, future Governor of Virginia, to ask for aid in furthering his son's education. David Campbell's decision to finance his nephew's education was by far the most important decision made for William Bowen Campbell in his formative years.<sup>5</sup>

Without children of his own, David Campbell apparently saw in his young nephew an opportunity to create a public man in his own image. In fact, their youthful experiences and political maturation were amazingly similar. Like his nephew, David Campbell held family honor in the highest regard. Born in the third year of the American Revolution, he grew up in a prominent Virginia family renowned for military prowess and public service. His father, John Campbell, was unable to educate his son beyond common schools but appointed him instead to be a deputy in his office as County Court Clerk at Abingdon, Virginia. As a deputy, Campbell became fascinated with the profession of his family and used his position to study and observe lawyers first hand. In the late 1790s he accepted his uncle Archibald Roane's invitation to move to East Tennessee and formalize his studies in law. Roane, a future Governor of Tennessee, had already served as a member of Tennessee's

first Constitutional Convention and was currently a judge in the Tennessee Superior Court of Errors and Appeals.<sup>6</sup>

Before finishing his studies, David Campbell married and moved back to Abingdon where he became enmeshed in family and national politics. Conscious of his family's military record in the American Revolution and eager to prove himself worthy of such a legacy, Campbell used family ties and friendships to secure a major's rank in the United States Army when a "second war for Independence" commenced in 1812. David Campbell's war record was not as impressive as the psychological impact it had on him. Believing his and the nation's honor had been redeemed by the war, Campbell began his own political career in 1816 with an unsuccessful bid for the Virginia Senate. After he won election to the Senate in 1820, the justices of the county court chose him to succeed his late father in 1824 as County Court Clerk. Like the rest of his family, David Campbell was a Republican in the Jeffersonian tradition. Above all, he feared power's corrupting influence and maintained that an educated citizenry was the most indispensable way to prevent tyranny. Privately, he questioned Andrew Jackson's temperament and limited education and supported William Crawford in 1824. Appalled by corruption in the Republican party and excited by the prospect of a new conservative Democratic party, the Campbell family campaigned for Jackson in 1828. They were repaid for their

efforts by the appointment of David's brother, John Campbell, to the office of United States Secretary of the Treasury.<sup>7</sup>

During Jackson's presidency, David Campbell refused to believe reports that the President's political ambitions were at the core of the Bank War in the 1830s. Although he had supported the establishment of the Second National Bank in 1816, Campbell endorsed Jackson's 1832 veto of Bank recharter with the same sort of moral indignation that he displayed during the Nullification Crisis of 1833. To Campbell, both Nicholas Biddle and John C. Calhoun were detestable examples of unbridled avarice and political ambition. Campbell's loyalty to Jackson made him extremely popular in the southwestern part of his state and from this base of support he successfully campaigned for governor in 1836.<sup>8</sup>

During the banking crises of the mid- and late 1830s, David Campbell became troubled by the great expansion of executive power. His own experiences as a merchant after the War of 1812 convinced him of the need for sound currency and proper credit. Accordingly, he favored the establishment of a Second National Bank in 1816. In spite of the fact that Jackson destroyed the National Bank, Campbell supported "pet banking" because of the fiscal responsibility of Virginia state banks. Obviously unconcerned about abuses by other state banks, he was as stunned by Jackson's "specie

circular" order as he would be later when Martin Van Buren attempted to divorce the federal government from deposit banking altogether. In joining conservative Democratic insurgents, Campbell underestimated his state's fealty to "Old Hickory" and failed in an attempt to establish a third party of Democrats in 1840. Still admiring Jackson's nationalism but unable to support Van Buren's economic policies, he broke with the Democratic party entirely in 1840. Furthermore, Campbell had never been completely satisfied with the minimal interest Democrats usually showed in educational reform and internal improvements. Unsuccessfully, Campbell championed these as Governor. With the expiration of his term in 1840, he gravitated inexorably toward the Whig party, endorsing William Henry Harrison in the election of 1840.<sup>9</sup>

Judging from the volume and substance of the surviving correspondence between William Campbell and his uncle, their relationship could not have been closer had they been father and son. The 638 letters between them comprise by far the largest personal correspondence in the Campbell Family Papers. More importantly, the brooding personality, stern moralism, and political philosophy of William Campbell was directly shaped by the education his benefactor afforded him.

By 1825, the year that William Campbell arrived in Abingdon, David Campbell had already embarked on a personal

crusade to improve education in Virginia, beginning with his own family. He had helped his father support the education of his three younger brothers by sending them to schools in Tennessee, New Jersey, and Virginia. He was also the founder and trustee of Abingdon Academy, a private school for boys. To David Campbell, the education of his nephew William took on the dimensions of a holy crusade. Advised by his brother-in-law that William desperately needed guidance and advice, David Campbell set about creating the perfect environment for such counsel, alternating brief periods of personal instruction with the rigors of Abingdon Academy. Since there was little else to do at the academy but study, William worked hard but complained despondently that Abingdon was like a "foreign land, secluded as a monastery . . . where company was a novelty." Campbell's only source of comfort and encouragement came from his sisters' letters and from his father who exhorted him to patience, perseverance, and abstinence from the "gay society of the world."<sup>10</sup>

Despite the loneliness of his "dry study," William accepted the moral environment that his father hoped for and his uncle created. He became very conscious of youthful temptations and overcompensated by never going anywhere with women unless they were relatives. Campbell wrote his sisters for information about their social life, warned them to be chaste, and to "avoid the lurching rock, on which have

been wrecked the fortunes and prospects of many flourishing youths." He scolded his sisters for everything from poor spelling to failing to be more open and frank with him about their own personal lives. He carried this burgeoning sensitivity toward moral achievement and piety to Winchester, Virginia, in the winter of 1828 when his uncle sent him to the law school of the distinguished Henry St. George Tucker.<sup>11</sup>

Although Tucker was one of the preeminent antebellum Southern jurists, Campbell was not as impressed with his new mentor's lectures as he was appalled by the caliber of students Tucker taught. Grumbling to his uncle that he had never met a more "disagreeable set of young men in his life," he berated the class's mock courts as juvenile, "full of noise and dissipation" and totally unconcerned with law. His uncle admonished him for judging too severely and encouraged him to view the class as the "sort of material politicians must encounter in the theater of public life." Nevertheless, William was ready to abandon law for business after only two months in Winchester.<sup>12</sup>

Coeval with William Campbell's disillusionment at Winchester was his uncle's trip to Andrew Jackson's inauguration in Washington. A recent convert to Jackson's campaign, David Campbell returned from the inauguration exuberant about the prospects for renewed honesty and frugality in government. Actually, he had doubted the

Jacksonians' class conscious election tactics, but the heroic stature, personal magnetism, and Jeffersonian views of the "Old General" quieted his fears. While William never met Jackson on any of three presidential visits to David Campbell's home, his uncle's enthusiasm for Democratic politics was soon transferred to William. No less vital was the fact that William was coming to view politics in terms of moral absolutes. Like his uncle, he associated John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay with corruption. Secondly, he opined that Jackson was morally obliged to repay the Campbells for their public support in the election. Thirdly, his experiences at Abingdon and Winchester dramatized the primary lesson his mother had taught him as a youth, namely that his family constituted a "moral nobility" and was obligated out of a sense of patriotism to play a leadership role in society. The foundations upon which Campbell's moral and political framework were being built would soon be reinforced by the realities of law and politics.<sup>13</sup>

After finishing his legal studies, and with the financial help of his uncle, Campbell returned to Tennessee in the spring of 1829 in search of a suitable location to begin his law practice. Finding the competition very keen in Nashville, Franklin, and Gallatin, he chose Carthage in Smith County. Campbell's rejuvenated enthusiasm for law and politics was dampened almost immediately once he realized

that politiking for business was inevitable. The patrician flavor of Abingdon and Winchester, his uncle's disdain for mass politics, and family pressures to be totally above reproach bred in Campbell a social sense of aristocracy. Consequently, he considered politiking for anything to be "low and common." Campbell's failure to generate much business in Carthage created crushing feelings of inadequacy and uselessness which were further aggravated by his father's financial worries and his failure immediately to prove to his mother his leadership potential. Eight months after beginning his law practice, however, Campbell was appointed agent of the Bank of Tennessee for Smith County by its board of directors. Six months later he persuaded his uncle to use his influence when the post of Attorney General for the Fifth District suddenly became vacant. Winning by two votes in the Legislature, Campbell was elected Attorney General on October 18, 1831. For the moment, his quest for financial security and political worth was fulfilled.<sup>14</sup>

Campbell's four-year career as Attorney General coincided with his uncle's becoming increasingly concerned with national and Virginia gubernatorial politics. Once again David Campbell's "passion for politics" was transmitted to his nephew. Although neither man was comfortable with public electioneering in the "age of the common man," both began to cultivate the art, albeit clumsily. At a crowded and enthusiastic 4th of July celebration in Rome,



Tennessee, in the early 1830s, the speaker's platform on which William Campbell was speaking suddenly collapsed. Campbell wrote his aunt of the incident, proudly stating he got up, finished the speech without reference to the incident, and was applauded loudly.<sup>15</sup> As his confidence grew, he even seemed to behave as a populist, explaining to his uncle that ". . . I attempt to excite the feelings of my audience by wild, ranting declamation, and . . . the people say it is a fine speech and they holler hurrah for Campbell. . . ."16

David Campbell was not especially impressed with his nephew's newly acquired "common touch." More than ever he viewed public education as the only cure for demagogery. Upon his election as Virginia's Governor, he made public education his chief priority. Likewise, his nephew commented on how ignorant the Tennessee electorate seemed to be in electing men "so ordinary, so common, so rough" as David Crockett. More frightening to Campbell than Crockett's popularity was the possibility that extreme Jacksonian reformers might dominate the 1834-35 Tennessee Constitutional Convention. Campbell favored a new Tennessee Constitution that would provide for an equitable system of taxation and increase the accountability of revenue officers. As a lawyer and Attorney General he was also concerned about corruption within the Tennessee judiciary. He feared extensive democratic reforms because "they would

bring everything down to the simplest democracy--the most demogogical days of Greece and Rome. . . ." In short, both William and David Campbell were conservative Jacksonians primarily impressed with "Old Hickory's" nationalism and promise to restore political probity to government.<sup>17</sup>

William described the more egalitarian Jacksonians, such as the "locofocos," as "Jacobinical" enemies of the Republic in the sense that once

all offices, including judgeships are elective and for short duration we would have no check, no conflicting interests . . . and there is no telling to what extremity the state may be carried.<sup>18</sup>

Although his uncle advised him to run for the United States Congress in 1835, Campbell decided instead to try to represent Smith County in the Twenty-first General Assembly since that body would establish the political structures for the implementation of the new state Constitution. His choice coincided with his decision to marry Fanny Owen of Carthage. During their engagement, Campbell won election to the Tennessee Legislature and one month after their September 10, 1835, wedding, he began his term as a state legislator.<sup>19</sup>

Campbell's career as a state legislator was short but crucial to his ideological development. Referred to by a political opponent as one who could be counted on for "magnanimity" and a "high sense of justice," Campbell was also very active in all one hundred forty-one meetings of

the legislature. His trepidations about majoritarian democracy proved unfounded. Most of the legislation passed by the General Assembly to implement the new Constitution he found no difficulty in supporting. The conservative General Assembly accepted Campbell's proposal to make Nashville the site of a supreme court. Additionally, he championed proposals to establish chancery and circuit courts and reorganize the county courts. Campbell also proposed and the legislature passed a bill prescribing the duties and defining the jurisdiction of justices of the peace. In fiscal matters, he sponsored a bill, passed in June 1836, establishing the office of Comptroller of the Treasury and delineating the method to be used in assessing property for taxation purposes.<sup>20</sup>

During Campbell's tenure as a state legislator, he became increasingly disillusioned with the Democratic party, especially on the national level. He had always referred to the Jacksonian Democrats as Republicans because of their supposed attachment to a strict interpretation of the Constitution. He agreed with his uncle that there were no constitutionally implied powers "except such as are plainly required to carry into execution an expressed power." Thus, the Campbells could be opposed to the expansive constitutional view of Webster and Clay as well as to Calhoun's nominally conservative "concurrent majority" for precisely

the same reason. They concluded that Clay's "American System" gave to the federal government unconstitutional powers and, in their opinion, Calhoun's doctrines gave the state powers it did not lawfully possess, such as nullification. David and William hated both "extremes" arguing that they negated constitutionally representative government. In their view, the liberal and nationalistic program of the National Republican party had debased true republicanism by centralizing federal power in a "Federalist fashion." Through executive patronage, National Bank loans, and specific protective tariffs, the chief beneficiaries of this anti-republican course were rich creditors and dishonest bureaucrats. To the Campbells, Calhoun's doctrines of nullification and secession were equally destructive of freedom. In their estimation, "state sovereignty" enabled a state to usurp the power to "abrogate the Eternal compact." Clearly, the Campbells understood that a literal interpretation of the Constitution best safeguarded the rights and liberties of Americans. Anything else was inimical to republicanism. Originally, both men saw in President Jackson an alternative to liberal National Republicans as well as the advocates of state sovereignty.<sup>21</sup> Writing to his uncle in 1834, William Campbell surmised that nullification was not as deadly by itself as it was when in league with "federalism and the giant monster, the Bank, arrayed

side by side, to put down the Administration of our government upon the principles of Jefferson. . . ."22

In the course of Jackson's second term William, uncharacteristically, moved ahead of his uncle in breaking with the Democratic party. Campbell joined the majority of Tennessee legislators in support of an 1835 House resolution citing the "growth and probable consequent abuse of executive patronage as one of the most imminent dangers which threaten to undermine and overthrow our constitution and liberties. . . ."23 Later in his term, Campbell refused to support a House resolution which endorsed the United States Senate's repeal of its censure of Jackson for removal of government deposits from the National Bank in 1833. Campbell suggested to his uncle that Jackson had been seduced by his own legend and was subsequently ignoring tripartite government. He also accused Jackson of "party dictatorship" when he entered the 1836 election in support of Van Buren. Despite his benefactor's letters imploring him not to align with the emerging Whig party, Campbell voted with the majority of Tennessee legislators when they nominated Hugh Lawson White for President on October 16, 1835.<sup>24</sup>

Bored with the legislature and frustrated with Democratic party politics, William Campbell expected the Second Seminole War to be a welcome release. Following the War Department's request for 2,500 volunteers, Governor

Cannon received bipartisan support in the legislature when a resolution was passed on February 13, 1836, authorizing him to raise the needed troops. Nine days later Campbell resigned his seat, returned to Smith County to raise a company of volunteers, and was elected its captain on June 18, 1836. Campbell left Carthage for military service at a time when his wife was in poor health. Seemingly troubled by his decision to place patriotism and family heritage over immediate family needs, he wrote his wife constantly during the war. Their correspondence reveals his misgivings about the war but also his determination to achieve military distinction.<sup>25</sup>

Campbell's company was part of nine others formed into the Second Regiment of Tennessee Mounted Volunteers. Under the regimental command of Campbell's future political rival, Colonel William Trousdale of Sumner County, this group left Fayetteville, Tennessee, for Alabama on July 4, 1836, and joined with the First Tennessee Mounted Volunteers to form a brigade led by General Robert Armstrong. Alabama's swamps, Creek Indians, and shortages of supplies slowed Armstrong's advance, prompting Campbell to write his uncle often for military advice. In response, his uncle continued his usual fatherly advice, mainly, however, on such subjects as tenting, mode of drill, guard duty, pickets, cleanliness, and even cooking. By mid-October the Tennessee volunteers had lost nearly all of their horses in interminable swamps

engaging an almost invisible guerrilla enemy. In one of his more poignant letters home, Campbell lamented "why the government did not suffer the savages to enjoy unmolested this poor country." Surviving on a steady diet of "green beef" and with little prospect of living off the land, soldiers such as Henry Hollingsworth sent open letters to Middle Tennessee newspapers blasting the failure of Governor Keith Call of Florida to supply the troops with new horses and fresh provisions. Predictably, General Armstrong became increasingly unpopular with regimental and company commanders who criticized his "lack of energy" and "timidity." Following the suicide of a morose regular Army colonel, company commanders, including Campbell, drafted several resolutions of protest refusing to comply with any orders to march into battle on foot. The matter was decided for them when the brigade was forced by circumstances to pursue Indians moving into the Withlacooche River and fight two successive battles with them at Wahoo Swamp in late November 1836. Two months later the six-month enlistment time for Campbell and his men expired.<sup>26</sup>

Although he had fought in three battles during the campaign and been praised by his regimental commander, William Trousdale, for preventing his men from deserting under fire, Campbell left Florida disappointed. Throughout the war, Campbell had worried that his name would "probably not appear in any general report," and that he would most

likely not be able to rise above the rank of captain. When the latter fear materialized, he blamed it on his commander-in-chief, Andrew Jackson. From the outset of the campaign, Campbell had hoped to receive from the President an appointment higher than captain. Moreover, he still expected Jackson to repay his family for their support in the Van Buren campaign with a minor office informally promised to his father. Neither the promotion he sought nor the office his father desired were forthcoming. Granting that he had supported White for the presidency in 1836, Campbell refused to accept this decision as a justification for Jackson's "betrayal." In his judgment, the Campbell family heritage and republicanism were symbiotic and sacred. He insisted that his choice to support White had been made as much from political principle as his enlistment in the war was to honor his family. Campbell was sure that Jackson's motives were ignoble compared to his, since to him they appeared to be based on party loyalty and political vengeance.<sup>27</sup>

To Campbell, Andrew Jackson had joined the forces of evil in the morality play of which politics was an inevitable part. From his perspective, his decision following the War to run for Congress as a Whig was a moral imperative. By taking such a course, his chances to defend his family, his honor, and his Republic from "party dictatorship" would obviously be greater. Despite his



bitterness, Campbell felt "useful" for the first time in his life.<sup>28</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Walker Howe believed that most Whigs shared this reverence for the past because it strengthened the bonds of Union, provided models of moral excellence, and exposed the pitfalls that representative government faced with a class-conscious citizenry. William Bowen Campbell's political career is compatible with Howe's description in many ways. See David Walker Howe, The Political Culture of American Whigs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 75.

<sup>2</sup>Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robinson, eds., Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives and the Tennessee Historical Commission, 1975), vol. 1, 1796-1861, 1477-78; "Biographical Sketch of William Bowen Campbell," Tennessee Historical Society, 4; Margaret Campbell Pilcher, Historical Sketches of the Campbell, Pilcher, and Kindred Families (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce, 1911), 288-9.

<sup>3</sup>"Biographical Sketch of William Bowen Campbell," THS, 2; Amy Cato Sowell, The Journey and Sojourn of the William Bowen Family of Mansker's Creek (Goodlettsville: Bowen-Campbell House Association, 1989), 6.

<sup>4</sup>Sowell, Journey and Sojourn, 12, 19; Pilcher, Historical Sketches, 144.

<sup>5</sup>David Campbell to William B. Campbell, July 3, 1825; Campbell Family Papers (cited hereafter as CFP): David Campbell to David Campbell, August 29, 1825, CFP.

<sup>6</sup>Norma Ann Mitchell, "The Political Career of Governor David Campbell of Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1967), 2-6.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, iii-iv, 32-33. David Campbell, a future leader in the Virginia Whig party, was typical of Whigs nationally in his support of expanding educational opportunities. Thomas Brown avers that Whigs understood

education as a means of combating and preventing the rigid stratification of social class by increasing the chances of upward social and economic mobility. Frequent Democratic opposition to education reforms was interpreted by Whigs as proof of the opposition's recklessness and perfidy in the promotion of class antagonisms for political gain. See Thomas Brown, Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the Whig Party (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 185.

<sup>8</sup>Mitchell, "The Political Career of Governor David Campbell of Virginia," iv.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 20-22, iv-v.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., David Campbell to David Campbell, August 29, 1825, CFP; William Campbell to Lavinia Campbell, June 23, 1828, CFP; William to Mary Campbell, January 11, 1828, CFP; David Campbell to William Campbell, August 23, 1825, CFP; Ibid., August 28, 1826, CFP.

<sup>11</sup>William Campbell to Lavinia Campbell, June 29, 1827, CFP; William Campbell to Mary Campbell, August 23, 1826, CFP; William Campbell to Margaret Campbell, August 23, 1826, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, December 29, 1828, CFP.

<sup>12</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, January 24, 1829, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, February 1, 1829, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, February 27, 1829, CFP.

<sup>13</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, February 1, 1829, CFP. The Campbells were typical of many conservative Republicans who abandoned the Adams-Clay faction of the party over corruption of government largess. See Robert V. Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom 1822-32 (New York: Harper and Row, 1982). William Campbell's burgeoning sense of "noblesse oblige" was not based on inherited wealth and privilege but still had much in common with the ideology of Whiggery described so thoughtfully by David Walker Howe and Thomas Brown. Howe wrote that Whigs practiced the art of deference to the community's social and economic elite, which they usually dominated. He observed that this was a conscious effort to mute social conflict and offset the egalitarian tendencies of the masses, both of which would bring an end to social order. Howe concluded with the hypothesis that a successful

Whig program of national development (National Bank, tariffs, and internal improvements) would elevate the intellectual and moral level of society by promoting such values as thrift, sobriety, and public responsibility. See Howe, The Political Culture of American Whigs, 20, 73, 101. Thomas Brown reasoned that Whigs understood these values to be the benefits of a diversified and dynamic commercial society. In this way, the future could be optimistically anticipated because it was properly anchored to time-honored values. See Brown, Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the Whig Party, 170.

<sup>14</sup>David Campbell to William Campbell, December 11, 1829, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, January 14, 1830, CFP; William Campbell to Mary Campbell, May 25, 1829, CFP; William to David Campbell, May 30, 1830, CFP; Nicholas Hobson to William Campbell, January 25, 1830, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, January 25, 1830, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, August 29, 1831, CFP; David Campbell to William Campbell, September 6, 1831, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, October 19, 1831, CFP. William Campbell's attitude toward mass politics was shared by many Tennessee Whigs, in particular, Gustavus Henry, a Clarksville Whig and former gubernatorial candidate. Lewright Sikes ascribes this characteristic to Henry's sense of "statesmanship." See Lewright B. Sikes, "Gustavus Adolphus Henry: Champion of Lost Causes," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 51 (1991): 173, 181. In general, Whigs shared the view that statesmanship and partisanship were antithetical. In their judgment, partisanship meant more than party loyalty but also included sectional interests and populist showmanship. Thomas Brown noted that Southern Whigs worked especially hard at the image of statesmanship because of the pressures of sectionalists to serve Southern, not national interests. See Brown, Politics and Statesmanship, 169.

<sup>15</sup>William Campbell to Mary Campbell, July 13, 1830, CFP.

<sup>16</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, July 15, 1835, CFP.

<sup>17</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, May 10, 1834, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, August 6, 1833, CFP; William to David Campbell, February 10, 1838, CFP.

<sup>18</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, August 8, 1833, CFP.

<sup>19</sup>David Campbell to William Campbell, January 29, 1835, CFP; McBride and Robinson, Biographical Directory of Tennessee General Assembly, vol. 1, 1847.

<sup>20</sup>"Biographical Sketch of William Campbell," 9; Tennessee, House Journals (1835), 351; Tennessee, Public Acts (1835), 32-28; Tennessee, House Journals (1835), 244; Tennessee, House Journals (1835), 313.

<sup>21</sup>David Campbell to William Campbell, December 25, 1835, CFP.

<sup>22</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, May 10, 1834, CFP.

<sup>23</sup>Tennessee, House Journals (1835), 68.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. (1836), 626; William Campbell to David Campbell, October 6, 1835, CFP; Tennessee, House Journals (1835), 68. William Campbell followed much the same path out of the Democratic party as other Tennessee legislators, especially those who became leaders of Tennessee's Whig party, which won control of the Tennessee House of Representatives in 1835 and defeated Jackson's choice for governor, William Carroll, in the gubernatorial race. One of the founders of the Whig party in Tennessee, Ephriam Foster, was elected Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives during William Campbell's first term and was a major influence on him. For a fine biographical sketch of Foster, see John Trotwood Moore, ed., Tennessee: The Volunteer State 1769-1923, vol. 2 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1928). Campbell was also impressed with Meredith Gentry, the most powerful orator in the Tennessee House of Representatives from 1835-9. Gentry would soon join Campbell's friend Balie Peyton, of Sumner County, in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Whig. Campbell maintained a lasting friendship with Peyton who, unlike Campbell, earned a national reputation as a dynamic public speaker. Peyton's contributions to Unionism in Middle Tennessee are detailed in Walter Durham, Rebellion Revisited: A History of Sumner County, Tennessee, from 1861-70 (Gallatin: Sumner County Museum Association, 1982). All of these men were Democrats who defected because of Jackson's perceived usurpations of executive power. Robert

Corlew narrates the birth of the Tennessee Whigs in his incisive and superbly written study, Tennessee: A Short History. Corlew points out there were grievances of various kinds against Jackson long before the Bank War and the rise of Van Buren. These two events created open revolt in the Democratic party which was intensified by Tennessee's long tradition, political factionalism and strong personalities. In short, Andrew Jackson lost the support of Hugh Lawson White and John Bell because their prior support was a matter of political expediency, not true commitment. See Corlew, Tennessee: A Short History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 178-96. By contrast, Gustavus Henry never supported Andrew Jackson and as early as 1828 associated Jackson with military despotism. See Lewright B. Sikes, "Gustavus Henry: Champion of Lost Causes," 174. Thomas Brown expounds upon the political origins of the Whig party in Politics and Statesmanship. For an economic interpretation of Whig party origins see Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Sellers, "Who Were the Southern Whigs?," American Historical Review 59 (January 1954): 335-46; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1945; Bray Hammond, Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to Civil War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951). The most provocative ethno-cultural interpretations of this period are Lee Benson, The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) and Ronald Formisano, The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-61 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). Both offered numerous case studies of various ethnic and religious groups of this era to support the view that religious differences were the most important determinants in political affiliations. Formisano noted that in Michigan the people who most regularly voted Whig originated from New England, the "moral conscience of the nation." This school of thought is judiciously analyzed by Richard L. McCormick in "Ethno-Cultural Interpretations of Nineteenth-Century American Voting Behavior," Political Science Quarterly 89 (June 1974): 351-75. McCormick found many weaknesses to this "grass-roots" approach to political history, most importantly, the ethno-culturalist's myopic treatment of the sources of economic policies and the leaders who formed them.

<sup>25</sup>Tennessee, Public Acts (1836), 205; Tennesseans in the Seminole War, Name Index, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

<sup>26</sup>David Campbell to William Campbell, August 4, 7. 16, 20, 1836, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, August

31, 1836, CFP; William Campbell to Fanny Campbell, August 17, 1836, CFP; Stanley F. Horn, "Tennessee Volunteers in the Seminole Campaign of 1836: The Diary of Henry Hollingsworth," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 1 (September 1942): 360-1; Ibid., 363; Ibid., 2, 71-2, 177-78. The most comprehensive general account of the Second Seminole War is John K. Mahon, The History of the 2nd Seminole War 1835-42 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967). Indian policy during the Age of Jackson is explored more fully in Ronald N. Satz, American Indian Policy in the Jackson Era (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975); Grant Forman, Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes (New York: Harper and Row, 1953); and Robert Remini, The Legacy of Andrew Jackson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

<sup>27</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, December 9, 1836, CFP; Mitchell, "Political Career of David Campbell," 102-3; William Campbell to David Campbell, June 19, 1836, CFP; David Campbell to William Campbell, July 22, 1836, CFP.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

### CHAPTER III

#### USEFULNESS?

I cannot discover any great good that I have done or any important service rendered to the human family . . . perhaps the day is not yet passed when some noble deed or generous action may fall my lot that will extirpate a life of uselessness. . . .

William B. Campbell,  
Papers

William Campbell's political career between the Seminole and Mexican Wars was enigmatic at best. To be sure, he won three successive terms to the United States House of Representatives beginning in 1837 and could have won a fourth had he not voluntarily retired in 1843. Nonetheless, the more Campbell tried to accomplish politically, the less he felt appreciated. Feelings of uselessness, self-doubt, and finally anguish reappeared early and often in this phase of his career and were only alleviated with the outbreak of war in 1846. Ideologically, Campbell could not have been more content. Despite his uncle's initial opposition, he made the political transition from a Jacksonian to a Whig nationalist with relative intellectual ease. Predisposed toward an aristocratically nationalist view by family tradition, he felt extreme pressure to be



totally above reproach. On the eve of Campbell's first election to Congress, Balie Peyton, his colleague and confidant, described him as the most honest, brave, and candid man he had ever known and a friend worth having. In that same letter to Henry A. Wise, a future Governor of Virginia, Peyton went on to describe his friend as "quick, high tempered, very sensitive, and wholly destitute of all the arts of a politician, because of an oversensitivity to what he may look upon as a slight."<sup>1</sup>

The "moral nobility" to which Campbell believed his family belonged naturally created the hypersensitivity Peyton described and, more importantly, led to the crystallization of Campbell's attitudes toward antebellum politics and society in the 1830s and 1840s.

Unlike his opponent for Congress in 1837, William Trousdale, Campbell did not emerge from the Seminole War as a hero or friend of Andrew Jackson. Believing that his opposition to Jackson was politically consistent with republicanism and morally consistent with his family's values, he assumed that the President's support of Trousdale was based on spite. As a result, Campbell felt especially gratified to learn he had defeated the popular Sumner countian for the Sixth United States Congressional district seat in August 1837. Moreover, he interpreted his success as a victory over "Jacksonian party dictatorship."<sup>2</sup>

But the victory had been a costly one. For the first time in his life, Campbell was at odds with his uncle over political matters, not communicating with him for months. While this alienation was only temporary, Campbell now felt isolated. The righteous indignation he had felt entering the campaign for Congress was soon replaced by a fatalistic sense of remorse. He shared his innermost thoughts with his wife and a new cadre of Whig friends, confiding to one of these that, "I regret that I have suffered myself to be forced into [the race for Congress]. . . . I do not doubt but that I shall regret my course for many a day to come."<sup>3</sup>

Campbell's Whig colleagues filled the political void left by the estrangement from his uncle. Campbell wrote to Robert L. Caruthers that despite his circumstances he would "sustain the character of my state . . . and leave nothing neglected which industry and application can effect."<sup>4</sup> He also made important friendships with a disparate collection of disgruntled Jacksonians who shared Campbell's disdain for "party dictatorship." The vindictive nature of the battles John Bell and Balie Peyton would wage with Van Buren Democrats over banking would help Campbell refine his own political beliefs and severely test his confidence in the "moral purity" of the Whig opposition.

The political path Campbell charted in his transformation from the Democratic to the Whig party was a short one. After all, he had been a conservative Jacksonian and was

consequently outraged by alleged Democratic party violations of their promise to "retrench and reform." His initial disillusionment with Jackson for unconstitutionally removing deposits from the National Bank, increasing executive patronage, and intervening in the 1836 presidential election was supplemented by Democratic methods used in silencing debate over Whig efforts to recharter a new Bank. Campbell and friend Abraham Caruthers viewed Tennessee's 1838 bank bill as a Democratic attempt to end Whig agitation for a National Bank by giving the people money "aplenty to stop their mouths on the subject." Campbell opined that constitutionally limited representative government was the delicate balance between the extremes of Federalism and "locofocoism," both of which, in his opinion, would lead to dictatorship. After having previously pictured Jackson as Jefferson's legitimate political heir, he was now convinced that the former had vulgarized the legacy of the latter in determining "to keep out the light" and prevent discussion of a new Bank.<sup>5</sup>

Certain that deposit banking would increase executive patronage power, Campbell joined Congress's Whig opposition as a junior partner in an effort to recharter a new Bank. When Martin Van Buren unveiled his Administration's aims to create a Sub-Treasury system, Campbell ignored his uncle's advice to give the President the benefit of the doubt. Instead, he claimed such a system was reminiscent of the

Hamiltonian tradition. Furthermore, the Sub-Treasury plan was a gross violation of the Constitution because it would make "the people directly dependent upon the government for good and sound currency and would fasten upon us a system which would undermine and usurp the liberty of our country."<sup>6</sup> Just as Campbell depicted Democratic tactics as having emanated from the Federalist legacy, he condemned the ideas upon which they were based as compatible with another anti-republican philosophy--"locofocoism." In his judgment, Van Buren's attempt to remove government from banking altogether was not only an attempt to destroy all banks, but was a surrender to the agrarian radical scheme of metallic currency. Thus, the structure Campbell believed best suited to compliment the necessary balance between monarchist-style mercantilism and agrarian radicalism was a reformed National Bank.<sup>7</sup>

Campbell's conversion to other Whig principles was equally rapid. As a state legislator, he had witnessed bitterly sectionalistic debates regarding transportation improvements. Although he seldom participated in such debates, he found the discussions about railroads to be especially interesting. Corresponding with his uncle shortly before the Seminole War, he wrote of his support for two railroad projects, one from New Orleans to the Atlantic, and the other from Charleston to Cincinnati, describing them as important enough to "be to our country

what the labor-saving machinery for manufactured cotton has been to England."<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, the state legislature passed the State Aid Bill authorizing the government to subscribe to one-third of the stock of any railroad or macadamized turnpike company when two-thirds of the stock had been bought by individuals or other companies. Controversy between the state's Democratic and Whig parties on this issue centered on the point at which the state should become involved. Since Jacksonians opposed federally sponsored internal improvements, Democrats urged a state-wide plan in which the government did not have to wait until one-third of the stock had been purchased privately to begin public subscription. At first, Whigs opposed such a course as fiscally dangerous, since premature state subscriptions could mean financial loss for the state. To Campbell, the Constitution clearly vested in the federal government a responsibility to promote trade which internal improvements would definitely help. Therefore, a more energetic federal transportation policy would be constitutionally sound and also practical for an underdeveloped state like Tennessee.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Whig party was active in Middle Tennessee, especially around the commercially-minded Nashville area, it was still a minority party. Moreover, the Middle Tennessee district Campbell represented was generally content with its close proximity to Tennessee's fine river system. As a result, Campbell was not hard

pressed by constituents to sponsor transportation improvement projects. Campbell was not happy with Middle Tennessee's obstinance on this question. Not only did he believe that local sectionalism was harmful to the state as a whole, he also realized that it deprived him personally of economic advancement. Still financially dependent on his uncle, Campbell saw his usual economic worries intensify as their relationship became politically strained. Indeed, with the birth of his first child, William, in 1839, Campbell's concern with financial security became an obsession. Unable to ask his father for assistance, Campbell had seriously considered travelling to Mississippi in 1836 to examine a promising investment in cotton farming. He was dissuaded from this venture when lawyer-friend Robert Caruthers explained how he could make a profit by joining him and several friends in bidding for a contract to build roads. The ambitious Caruthers estimated that Campbell's position in the Congress could enable him and his friends to further the project.<sup>10</sup>

Although Whigs in East Tennessee were the first in their party to embrace the Democratic position on transportation improvements, Middle Tennessee did not modify its stance until the early 1850s. Correctly assuming that banking and transportation issues would require a long-term commitment and certain his own Congressional career would not last long, Campbell chose to focus much of his time and

energies on "retrenchment." Clearly, his support for reduction in government expenses required even less ideological adjustment than the ones concerning banking and internal improvements. Whether Democrat or Whig, Campbell was a political conservative. He had applauded Andrew Jackson's initiatives in reducing the Navy and as a member of the Committee for Military Affairs hoped to continue this course. Campbell's experience in the Seminole War convinced him of the dangers of Presidential patronage power in military affairs and of the virtues of the citizen-soldier. Since the Constitution established the President as Commander-In-Chief, Campbell surmised that the safest course for republicanism was for the Chief Executive to preside over no more than a small standing army. As foreign relations with Great Britain worsened in the late 1830s, Campbell opposed war because of the certain passage of a new military bill and the inevitable increase in Presidential patronage.<sup>11</sup> In Jeffersonian fashion he also concluded that overfunded government was the shortest route to corruption. With the nation at peace, Campbell charged the military with "having little to do . . . but spend their time squandering the liberal salaries allowed them by the government."<sup>12</sup>

Campbell also hoped that by eliminating outdated military fortifications and reducing the size of the army and navy, the savings realized could be used to retire the national debt. During his first term he found it incredible

that the government showed a surplus in 1836, but was 12,000,000 dollars in debt by 1837. Equally suspicious to him were those who talked like conservative reformers but tended to vote with the liberal leaders of the Whig party. Slowly, Campbell was coming to realize that Whigs were just as capable of using "retrenchment" for political propaganda as were Democrats.<sup>13</sup>

Reelected over Democrat William Trousdale in 1839 and again in 1841, Campbell continued his championship of "retrenchment." Although his uncle had begun to align with the Whigs and had become a supporter of Henry Clay, Campbell feared the formidable Kentuckian's liberalism and prestige in the party. Campbell refused his uncle's request to accompany Clay in Virginia when he visited Richmond and was relieved when the more conservative William Henry Harrison won the nomination in 1840. He also worked with Democrat Cave Johnson in support of an amendment to the Army Appropriations Bill to reduce funding for the Army by \$305,700.<sup>14</sup>

Campbell's greatest disappointment in his retrenchment campaign came when many Whigs and Democrats gave only token support to a major effort to reduce government expenses. Proposed in 1842, the bill promised to reduce the pay and mileage allowances of all federal employees by 25 percent. Although Campbell unsuccessfully proposed amending the bill to include a graduated pay reduction according to a set



scale rather than a rigidly equal percentage for all departments, his defeat did not end his support for the measure. The opposition the bill received from supposed advocates of retrenchment prompted Campbell to give his only lengthy address in Congress. Campbell used his support for the measure as an opportunity to lecture his colleagues about the politics of ambition and hypocrisy and suggest that their perfidy was but another symptom of the general decline of public morality. On the one hand, he lambasted Democrats, the original proponents of retrenchment, not only for inconsistency but also for a lack of sympathy for the distress their irresponsible banking policies of the past six years had caused. In this sense, Campbell viewed the reduction bill as a way to relieve some of the burdens of the people by reducing their taxes. On the other hand, he could not understand why conservative Whigs were fumbling the political opportunity to establish their party as both the true champion of the people and of republicanism. In the final analysis, the partisan battle over the bill forced Campbell to distance himself from both parties.<sup>15</sup>

While most of Campbell's energies as a Congressman went toward non-sectional issues, sectional ones drove him out of national politics, sharpened his pessimistic view of man, and heightened his own sense of inferiority. Campbell was already well aware of the explosiveness of the slavery question before he went to Washington. As a state

legislator, he had endorsed more stringent laws regulating the behavior of free blacks, punishing those who assisted runaways, and preventing the publication or circulation of seditious pamphlets and papers. Campbell also was in agreement with resolutions passed by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1836 that defined slavery as a domestic institution beyond the jurisdiction of the federal government and warned that "fanatics" organizing abolitionist societies hoped to "sever the bonds of Union." Accordingly, the Legislature called on non-slaveholding states to prevent the formation of abolitionist societies and restrict their literature because of its incendiary intent.<sup>16</sup>

Campbell kept his personal views about slavery and the slavery issue largely private. He considered slavery to be a personal relationship between master and servant rather than a public issue of debate. Partly out of respect for his family heritage, he did not accept the contention that slavery was immoral. Campbell saw no inconsistency between his ancestors' love of freedom and independence and their ownership of slaves. In fact, he associated his ancestors' slaveholding with their desire to establish a republic. He wrote his uncle often about the subject and absorbed from him a type of "Christian" paternalism regarding the treatment of slaves. David Campbell wrote sermons testifying that Jesus' exhortation to love "thy neighbor as thyself" was applicable to master-slave relations.

It is our duty to seek every possible way to improve the moral character of those over whom we have charge and neither by the slightest word or example to lead them down the paths of sin and destruction . . . in place of being vulgar and immodest toward God's creatures, we would make every effort to render them pure in heart and life that they might see God.<sup>17</sup>

Campbell argued that the three duties of man, loving God, neighbor, and self applied to masters and slaves equally in the sense that, "those who serve us [are to do so] faithfully and honestly [as] therefore we would serve our Masters, not with eyeservice, as men pleasure, but singleness of heart as unto God."<sup>18</sup>

As Governor of Virginia, David Campbell acted upon his religious beliefs in writing instructions for slave patrols. He forbade them to execute their own punishment, jail slaves without arrest warrants, or search a slave owner's home without warrant. Forbidding his own slaves to drink or be issued passes on the Sabbath, he also insisted that they receive religious instruction. Above all, David Campbell believed in order and stability enforced by a class of natural, but moral, leaders. Slavery not only kept order but provided a Heaven-sent opportunity for both races to exercise their faith in God through good works.<sup>19</sup>

In a well-regulated community . . . the execution of the laws respecting slaves [is to be done] in such a manner as not to annoy society and the domestic quiet of families but . . . give general satisfaction to all the orderly portion of such a community.<sup>20</sup>

David Campbell did not accept slavery as indispensable to the Southern economy. In fact, he predicted that slavery

would gradually expire owing to the republican habits of the Southern people. Nonetheless, Campbell feared abolitionists were succeeding in upsetting the "domestic quiet" typical of a "well-regulated" slaveholding community. Complaining to his nephew in 1836 that America was on the verge of a sectional volcano, he was sure that funds were being collected by "Northern fanatics" to destroy the South by slave insurrection. Significantly, he did not expect anti-slavery extremists to succeed because of the "republican virtue" still typical of the non-slaveholding majority.<sup>21</sup> Predicting that plain folk in non-slaveholding states

properly appreciate the value of the Union of states . . . I as a citizen of the South feel disposed to rest this question with them alone for the present, under the firm persuasion, that they will soon see this subject in its proper light . . . and will be convinced of the necessity of putting it down.<sup>22</sup>

David Campbell seemed to have a special trust in Northern people because of the spread of public education in that region. It is no coincidence that his emerging interest in public education rather than mere private academies was concurrent with the growth of abolitionism. He surmised that the meager gains abolitionists were winning in the North were due to a thoughtful and discerning general public. Conversely, he had much less confidence in the Southern people. Certain that the future of slavery and finally the Union would be decided by the South, he became increasingly alarmed at the growing number of pro-slavery

demagogues who might inspire an "inflexible Southern defense of slavery." Since an educated public was the best defense against extremism and demagoguery, he began a three-year battle with the Virginia legislature during his term as Governor to establish a general and compulsory system of public education. When the legislature defeated his education efforts in 1839, Campbell was forced to rely on "republican virtue" as the last line of defense against militant pro-slavery.<sup>23</sup>

William Campbell's experience with abolitionism in Congress convinced him that there was little "republican virtue" left in antebellum society. Since the Constitution granted the federal government no power to restrict slavery in the states, he chafed during the House debates on the subject. In 1837 he voted with the majority in tabling the presentation of a petition by John Quincy Adams abolishing slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia.<sup>24</sup> In 1838 he supported a resolution Congress passed condemning petitions advocating the restriction of slavery in the territories as "part of a plan of operations set on foot to affect the institution of slavery in the several states and thus indirectly destroy the institution of slavery."<sup>25</sup> Believing slavery to be a constitutionally moot point, Campbell saw no reason why it should be debated in any form in Congress and therefore supported the "gag rule." As a constitutionalist, he chose to ignore the issue publicly and

believed a rigid defense of slavery was as unnecessary as it was potentially disruptive.<sup>26</sup>

As the nation began to polarize over the issue in the 1830s and early 1840s, Campbell withdrew more and more into the world of his ancestors who accepted the Constitution in its literal form as sacred. He found it virtually incomprehensible that the present generation did not revere it with the same moral fervor as the "generation of '76." Understanding that society itself rather than slavery alone was at the root of the sectional discord, Campbell offered political, moral, and religious explanations.<sup>27</sup>

Politically, Campbell concluded that the current demise of republican spirit was largely the result of his own "locofoco Jacobinical" era that had so infatuated the public with the idea of universal equality that the temptation to demogoguery could no longer be resisted. As a result, he viewed the slavery issue as a struggle for political power by ambitious politicians disguised as populists but whose real aim was the subversion of the Republic. He observed that many abolitionists as well as pro-slavery advocates were frustrated politicians seeking to advance their careers by any means possible. By duping the masses into accepting slavery as a legitimate constitutional question, sectional leaders cynically sought to destroy the Constitution by disunion and war. During his first term in Congress, Campbell grew to fear John C. Calhoun's influence

upon younger generations of Southerners. He referred to Calhoun as the most "unprincipled, reckless Roman of them all," who defended slavery and the South to create a Southern nation he could rule. For the next two decades Campbell would never deviate from his pessimistic assessment of Southern sectionalists.<sup>28</sup>

To William Campbell, Northern sectionalists were also power hungry but the "Christian" abolitionists among them were perhaps the most dangerous. Just as mass politics had "legitimized mob rule," he averred that the Second Great Awakening had helped justify it religiously through Christian "perfectionism." Although both were deeply religious, neither Campbell nor his uncle accepted a philosophy that to them was much less benign than its egalitarian rhetoric implied. They concurred that "perfectionism" created a climate of moral absolutism, which could destroy all hope of compromise. David Campbell described the danger as one in which "the Christian no longer believes that in politics he is a man of imperfections . . . he is therefore perfect and more than that he would, if he could, have everything his own way."<sup>29</sup>

Long before the Civil War, William Campbell had come to view the national political and social topography as deeply scared. Writing to his uncle in 1838, he remarked that there was "little of the patriotism of '76 which activates our great leading men. . . . Mean ambition to gain

power or place is the incentive now with all."<sup>30</sup> The lack of a disposition by either political party to retrench and return to constitutionalism, the deliberate inflammation of sectional passions by unscrupulous politicians, and the excesses of democracy and Christian "perfectionism" had led to a decline in public morality and civic virtue. Thus, cruelty to slaves and the "free sex" experiments in New York's Oneida commune were two sides of the same coin. Although seemingly unrelated, both were the products of a society rejecting the finest political, moral, and religious elements of the past. As the only member of the Campbell family still in national or state office, William felt all of the responsibility but none of the pride in being a member of one of the Revolution's "first families," because of the self-imposed humiliation at failing in any way to arrest the nation's deterioration. In 1843 Campbell voluntarily retired from politics and returned to his law practice and newly built home in Carthage.<sup>31</sup>

In the third year of Campbell's self-imposed political exile the Mexican War began. As with the Seminole War ten years before, family honor outweighed William Campbell's personal misgivings about the war's origins. Actually, he had opposed President James K. Polk's expansionistic policies as unnecessarily belligerent. Nevertheless, when the President requested 2,800 Tennessee volunteers following



the May 1846 declaration of war, Campbell immediately left his wife and five children for military service.<sup>32</sup>

During the war, Campbell, like so many of his Whig contemporaries, was able to separate his misgivings about the Administration's machinations that led to war from the opportunity that the conflict presented for the advance of republicanism. As a nationalist, he had never thought deeply about international relations. As a United States Congressman, his main concern during the disputes between the United States and England in the late 1830s had been the Van Buren Administration's desire for a new military bill because such a measure would increase executive patronage power. He shared his uncle's disdain for foreign immigrants and later would accuse Democrats of using them for political purposes. Campbell's experiences in the war convinced him of the "savagery and vicious character" of Mexicans. Attributing their shortcomings to political despotism, he hoped that an American triumph would prove the superiority of republican institutions. Once home from the war, this self-appointed "apostle of democracy" would realize more fully the dangerous consequences of the war and because of his new fame be presented with opportunities to reenter politics and make a positive difference.<sup>33</sup>

Campbell's participation in the Mexican War gave him the finest military reputation in the state. The First Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers that he was elected to

command was mustered into service on June 3, 1846, in Nashville. The regiment was ordered to join General Zachary Taylor's forces in Northern Mexico on June 17 by way of New Orleans. A month later the force arrived at Camp Camargo where Taylor was organizing his forces preparatory to an advance on Monterrey.<sup>34</sup>

At the battle of Monterrey, Taylor's regular army troops failed to seize three forts on the outskirts of the city and were replaced with Tennessee and Mississippi volunteers. Ordered to advance by divisional commander Colonel John Quitman, Campbell's regiment was caught between the first two forts and suffered high losses until Campbell dismounted, ordered a charge toward the first fort, and captured it with only a few men. Moments later Campbell charged and seized the second fort and its artillery. With only one hundred men left out of the original three hundred fifty, Campbell's regiment was unable to take the third fort but had successfully cleared the way for another regiment to do so. General Taylor called the action decisive and gave the Tennessee and Mississippi Volunteers the appropriate credit. Benjamin Franklin Cheatham, a captain in the First Regiment, lauded Campbell's gallantry, but blamed the immense losses on Commander Quitman. Likewise, Campbell was furious with what he considered the sacrifice of the Tennessee Volunteers by "political opportunists" like Quitman. No sooner had Tennessee newspapers labeled the

First Tennessee the "Bloody First" and made famous Campbell's order "follow me, boys," than Colonel Jefferson Davis claimed his Mississippi Rifles had initiated the attack and captured the first fort.<sup>35</sup> Although Davis's claim was never substantiated, Campbell characterized him as one of the many officers "out here on a political tour to gain reputation to give them importance when they return home."<sup>36</sup>

Even before Monterrey, and certainly afterwards, Campbell's sense of party partisanship sharpened considerably. At the War's outset he complained that all his field officers were Democrats and were "somewhat jealous of any character he might acquire."<sup>37</sup> As a result, he was quite proud of his election as regimental commander, observing that he "beat a major general and a Democrat by 169 votes."<sup>38</sup> Like many other Whigs, he assumed Polk's interference in the War was due to the political persuasions of his top two commanders, General-in-Chief Winfield Scott and General Zachary Taylor. Hoping for a United States Army command, Campbell suspected that his promotion from colonel to brevet brigadier of the Volunteers was Polk's way of spiting him. In 1837 Campbell had joined John Bell and his cabal of Whigs in opposing Polk for the Speakership of the House of Representatives. As his estimation of General Taylor grew, Campbell wrote that he would support him for President in preference to any Democrat although the General

was "nothing but an army man." While he professed to an encouraging John Bell that he had no interest in being a future gubernatorial candidate, he certainly demonstrated great interest in defending the reputation of his commanding officers, especially when they were Whigs.<sup>39</sup>

Shortly after the Monterrey campaign, the First Tennessee Regiment was reinforced by the Second Tennessee and regrouped into the Tennessee Brigade with Campbell in command. Having seized Victoria, Mexico, without a fight on December 30, 1846, the Brigade left with several others to join General Winfield Scott's Vera Cruz campaign. Landing at Vera Cruz with 10,000 others on March 9, 1847, the "Bloody First" was now the senior Volunteer regiment and would accompany Scott in the most brilliant campaign of the War. Four days after the Vera Cruz landings, the "First" built an important battery only 500 yards from the city and remained undiscovered until its effective fire had made the first breach in the city's walls. Later, as Scott's forces advanced toward Mexico City City, General Gideon Pillow was wounded during the battle of Cerro Gordo, and Campbell assumed front-line command. After the engagement, General Scott commended Campbell for vigorously trying to prevent a deteriorating situation in his sector from collapsing completely. Following the victory at Cerro Gordo, the battered "First" was ordered back to Vera Cruz where their enlistment time expired.<sup>40</sup>

With the end of the War, Campbell hoped to return to his law practice and pursue business interests. He failed in both attempts because of the bitter post-war debates over sectional issues in Tennessee that brought him back into the political arena.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Balie Payton to Henry A. Wise, August 15, 1837, Henry A. Wise Papers.

<sup>2</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, June 19, 1836, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, August 5, 1837, CFP.

<sup>3</sup>William Campbell to Robert L. Caruthers, September 15, 1837, Robert L. Caruthers Papers.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. By 1839 William Campbell was being regularly invited to Whig dinners and banquets. At these occasions he met anti-Jackson men representative of Whiggery's aristocratic reputation. Abraham Caruthers was a distinguished professor. Campbell was much better acquainted with his brother, Robert L. Caruthers, who like Campbell, began his law practice in Carthage and was elected to Congress as a Whig in 1841. He was the co-founder of Cumberland Law School and was the first President of the Board of Trustees of Cumberland University.

<sup>5</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, April 18, 1835, CFP; David Campbell to William Campbell, December 25, 1835, CFP; Abraham Caruthers to William Campbell, January 28, 1838, CFP; William Campbell to Adam Fergusson, October 5, 1837, Fergusson Family Papers.

<sup>6</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, October 13, 1837, CFP.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.; William Campbell to David Campbell, September 23, 1837, CFP. Campbell's position on the removal of government deposits from the Bank, deposit banking, and the Sub-Treasury plan closely followed his Whig colleagues in Tennessee and elsewhere. Thomas Brown surveyed the accounts of Northern and Southern Whigs and concluded that their main concern was political corruption. Whigs feared "pet banking" greatly expanded the Democratic Party's influence

over all banks (78 percent of "pet banks" were pro-Democratic). Similarly, Whigs were appalled by Van Buren's Sub-Treasury system because it gave the Chief Executive direct power over federal monies and thus made the government the servant of selfish partisan interests. Certain that Van Buren would use these monies to silence critics, undermine banks owned by opponents, and pay federal employees in specie or federal notes, Brown submits that Whigs construed the Sub-Treasury as an anti-Republican plot. See Thomas Brown, Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the Whig Party, 163-4. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Charles Sellers saw the economic factors as the most decisive in the banking crises of the 1830s and 1840s. In The Market Revolution, Sellers identified the Sub-Treasurery plan with Locofocoism's radical, laissez-faire doctrines. He considered this form of unregulated capitalism to be the root principle of the Democratic Party because it would not allow the independent treasury to deal "in exchange" and separate the federal government from banking altogether. See Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution, 356. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., pointed to class conflict in portraying the Jacksonians as leading a liberal attack on the plutocratic control of political and economic arrangements that National Republicans, and later Whigs, supported. See Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little Brown, and Company, 1945). Bray Hammond preferred not to view banking battles as struggles between the haves and have-nots but between two sets of competing capitalists with one seeking to remove government from economic direction and the other believing that government should not abandon its responsibility for the public good. See Bray Hammond, Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). Robert Remini approached banking in the Jacksonian era from a more synthetic viewpoint, combining the socioeconomic and political factors with a colorful narrative of the personal antagonisms between leading figures of the time. See Robert Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-45 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); Andrew Jackson and the Bank War (New York: Norton, 1967). When Campbell's position on banking and finance is considered, Brown's political thesis regarding the Bank and Sub-Treasury war is clearly the strongest. In any case, William J. Cooper's description of the origins of Southern Whigs obviously overlooks non-sectional political and economic factors in favor of slavery. See William J. Cooper, The South and the Politics of Slavery 1828-36 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

<sup>8</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, February 8, 1836, CFP.

<sup>9</sup>Robert E. Corlew, Tennessee: A Short History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 201-3; Stanley J. Folmsbee, Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee 1796-1845 (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1939), 172. Authoritative sources for internal improvements in Tennessee are: Philip M. Hamer, Tennessee: A History 1673-1932, vol. 1 (New York: American Historical Society, 1933); Thomas Bailey, "Engine and Iron: A Story of Branchline Railroading in Middle Tennessee," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 28 (Fall 1969): 252-68; Jesse C. Burt, "The Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad 1854-72: The Era of Transition," East Tennessee Historical Society Publication 23 (1951): 58-76. Paul Bergeron uses the internal improvements issue in Tennessee to illustrate how narrow the ideological cleavage between Whigs and Democrats in the state actually was. See Paul Bergeron, Antebellum Politics in Tennessee 1830-60 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982). Nationally, there were great differences between the two parties over this issue. Herbert Erskovitz and William Shade proved that there were genuine ideological differences in the two parties by examining voting patterns of Democrats and Whigs in such geographically diverse states over issues involving transportation, banking, incorporation, and humanitarian issues. See Herbert Erskovitz and William Shade, "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in State Legislatures," Journal of American History 58 (1971): 591-621. These differences are explored in greater detail by Brown, Howe, Current, and Sellers with a general consensus that although Southern Whigs often popularized their programs for federal- and state-directed internal improvements with sectionalistic language, the ultimate objective was economic nationalism. Internal improvements had considerable appeal in the South because of Whiggish business and professional men in commercial areas, commercially-minded planters, and underdeveloped regions.

<sup>10</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, January 1, 1836, CFP; Robert L. Caruthers to William Campbell, January 28, 1838, CFP. It is no surprise that most of Tennessee's leading Whigs had strong commercial ties. The influential, if not devious, John Bell was a producer of coal and iron, a speculator in underdeveloped lands, and one of the most prominent spokesmen for railroads. Ephraim Foster was Nashville's most successful commercial lawyer and a bank director. Hugh Lawson White was a bank president as well as a lawyer and judge. Others with whom Campbell was acquainted were Robertson Topp, a Memphis planter, hotel owner, and pioneer railroad man, and George C. Dibrell, a Sparta merchant and president of the Sparta branch of the



Bank of Tennessee. William Campbell was involved in numerous commercial ventures, but was never of the Whig economic elite.

<sup>11</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, March 1, 1839, CFP.

<sup>12</sup>Congress, House, Hon. William B. Campbell of Tennessee speaking on the Reduction of Salaries Bill, 27th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Globe (27 July 1842), vol. 11, 783. David Walker Howe reasoned that Whig positions on defense and foreign relations reflected their concern for maintaining federalism or a balanced, mixed system of government. As stated earlier, Whigs such as Campbell were certain that the greatest danger to federal republicanism came from a strong Chief Executive. In foreign affairs the President's military and war-making powers required constant vigilance. Therefore, not only were conciliatory relations with other nations needed to maintain peace, but of greater concern to Whigs was the prospect of a President exercising his military powers in war time. See David Walker Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs, 140-5.

<sup>13</sup>William Campbell to Robert L. Caruthers, September 15, 1837, Robert L. Caruthers Papers.

<sup>14</sup>David Campbell to William Campbell, February 11, 23, 1840, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, December 9, 1839, CFP; Congress, House, 26th Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Globe (1840), vol. 8, 531.

<sup>15</sup>Congressional Globe (27 July 1842), vol. 11, 782-5. David Walker Howe presented Whiggery as conservative in its chief objectives but liberal in the means used to attain these. He delineated Whiggery's conservative ends as the protection of property, maintenance of social order, and the preservation of a distinct cultural heritage. Of course, Howe believed that Clay's "American System" was the best expression of Whig methods in securing these ends. See Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs, 210. Campbell clearly adhered to the conservative aspect of Whiggery. Whigs understood that the proper republican society was a commonwealth of interrelated interests that should be harmonized socially and economically by government. Clay's "American System" of a National Bank, tariffs, and internal improvements was designed to direct the economic life of the nation, foster its intellectual well-being, expand individual opportunity, and, presumably,

improve its moral character through material progress. Campbell, however, was never an enthusiastic supporter of Clay's "American System" because of its emphasis on federal power. While this was partly due to his concern over slavery, this issue alone was not critical in shaping his political conservatism. The correspondence with his uncle reveals that both men were more worried about political corruption and the end of social order. Richard N. Current considered both of these concerns related and concluded that the Whig allegiance to constitutional supremacy was genuine. In Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism he surmised that Whigs believed in popular sovereignty but only in the sense that the Constitution best represented the people's will and "people must express their will through the procedures they had already approved." Consequently, they associated democracy with mob rule, Democrats with "Jacobins," and both with despotism. Campbell was not always convinced a strong federal authority, with its centralizing effects, could mute social conflict through social, moral, and educational reform without itself overstepping its constitutional bounds. See Richard N. Current, Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1955), 149.

<sup>16</sup>Tennessee, Public Acts (1836), 145, 92, 167; Tennessee, House Journals (1836), 462-3.

<sup>17</sup>David Campbell, "Writings on Slavery," CFP.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>David Campbell, "Instructions for Slave Patrols," CFP.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. David Campbell could not be categorized as an "old dominion" planter but his conservative attitudes toward slavery and slave expansion certainly were. James Oakes referred to "old dominion" planters as "masters of tradition" because they opposed slavery's expansion west, despised Jacksonian egalitarianism, and, above all, supported the Union. Most of these men became conservative Southern Whigs. See James Oakes, The Ruling Race, 197-200. However, unlike old planters, Campbell never acquiesced to the extreme states' rights doctrines of younger slaveholders. The Whig emphasis on social harmony and paternalism buttressed Campbell's support of slavery as a temporary labor system. As he moved toward the economic nationalism of leading Whigs such as Clay, he adopted much

of the Kentuckian's views on slavery, which are highlighted in Carl Degler's The Other South (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). Neither man believed slavery to be superior to free labor and both assumed that for national economic development to take place, the slave labor system of the South would eventually have to end. Henry Clay was much more active in the American Colonization Society than Campbell, but both understood that the national interest in maintaining sectional harmony outweighed pro- or anti-slavery interests. An excellent documentary overview of the demise of Southern gradualism and the rise of pro-slavery is Eric L. McKittrick, ed., Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) and John L. Thomas, ed., Slavery Attacked: The Abolitionist Crusade (Englewood Cliffs: Princeton University Press, 1963). Works that focus on anti-slavery in the Upper South are Theodore Whitefield, Slavery Agitation in Virginia 1828-32 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1930); J. C. Robert, The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1941); Asa E. Martin, "The Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennessee," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 1 (1915): 20-40, Betty Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); David L. Smiley, The Lion of Whitehall: The Life of Cassius Clay (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1969); Merton L. Dillon, Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966); P. J. Staudenraus, The American Colonization Movement 1816-95 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961). Immediate abolitionists greatly frightened the Campbells. The principles and tactics of radical abolitionists are thoroughly examined in such works as Perry Lewis, Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Anti-Slavery Thought (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); Aileen S. Kraditor, Means and Ends in Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-50 (New York: Pantheon, 1969); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1969); Ronald G. Walters, The Anti-Slavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830 (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); C. S. Griffin, The Ferment of Reform, 1830-60 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

<sup>21</sup>Campbell, "Political Career of Governor David Campbell," 81; David Campbell to William Campbell, February 21, 1837, CFP.

<sup>22</sup>David Campbell, "Writings on Abolitionist Societies," CFP.

<sup>23</sup>Mitchell, "Political Career of Governor David Campbell," 81.

<sup>24</sup>Nashville Daily American, 15 July 1851, pp. 1-3.

<sup>25</sup>Congressional Globe (11 December 1838), vol. 6, 77.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, January 3, 1837, CFP. As early as 1838 William Campbell wrote to his uncle that the congressional philippics over abolition were an effort by the "Van Buren Party and nullifiers to disturb the question of abolition." See William Campbell to David Campbell, December 14, 1838, CFP. However, in context with the rest of the correspondence between these two men, slavery did not become their chief concern until after the Mexican War. William J. Cooper's effort to make slavery the central concern of Southern Whigs in the early 1830s is not applicable to the Campbells or their closest colleagues. See Cooper, The South and the Politics of Slavery 1828-36 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

<sup>29</sup>David Campbell to William Campbell, November 15 1850, CFP. The Campbells's fear of "Christian abolitionism" is a vivid example of a key difference between Northern and Southern Whigs. Howe devoted considerable attention in his work to the Whig emphasis on "responsibility" and "duty" and their notion that the community should be expected to set an example of virtue and enforce it. See David Walker Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs, 20. There never was a consensus among Northern and Southern Whigs on the means necessary to achieve this type of moral excellence. Southern Whigs, such as the Campbells, did not draw from the Second Great Awakening the principle of national salvation through moral regeneration as many Northern Whigs did. Although David Campbell was very active in educational reform and William Campbell favored increasing fees for liquor licenses by 1,350 percent in the state legislature, both men looked at humanitarian issues as local matters. This was due primarily to the Campbells's respect for constitutionalism, social order, and concern over slavery. Herbert Erskovitz and William Shade also noted that the differences between Democratic and Whig voting patterns over such issues as temperance, abolition of

capital punishment, and prison and education reform likewise applied to Northern and Southern Whigs. See Erskovitz and Shade, "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in State Legislatures," Journal of American History 58 (December 1971): 591-621.

<sup>30</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, May 10, 1838, CFP. Campbell's pessimism is underscored by the work of David Donald. Donald persuasively argued that demagogic politicians in the antebellum period were the logical products of a society in decline. His scenario included the fads, fashions, and crazes of the time that he is convinced fed into the sectional paranoia, thereby enabling ambitious, cynical politicians to propagandize the slavery issue completely out of proportion. See David Donald, Liberty and Union (Boston: Harper and Row, 1983).

<sup>31</sup>"Biographical Sketch of William B. Campbell," CFP.

<sup>32</sup>John Edgar Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics, 1845-61" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966), 411.

<sup>33</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, March 1, 1839, CFP; David Campbell to William Campbell, May 23, 1837, CFP; David Campbell to William Campbell, July 16, 1849, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, July 11, 1846, CFP. In his insightful account of the Mexican War's impact on the American mind, Robert Johannsen used a plethora of first-hand accounts to describe the war hysteria that commenced when news of Taylor's first victories reached the United States. In To the Halls of the Montezumas, he attributed the "war fever" to popular prejudices against "despotic" Mexican culture, a desire to rise above the prevalent trend of commercialism and sectionalism, and the link most Americans still shared with their revolutionary past. He concluded that the emotional temptation to divorce the war from its causes not only silenced many pre-war critics of Polk's foreign policy but also converted those eager to prove the superiority of republican institutions. See Robert Johannsen, To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 26-30, 49, 51, 261. Those Whigs like Campbell who opposed the Polk Administration but supported the war are described in greater detail by Frederick Merk and Frank Friedel in Dissent in Three American Wars (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970)

and John Schroeder, Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).

<sup>34</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, June 4, 1846, CFP; John Blount Robertson, Reminiscences of a Campaign in Mexico by a Member of the Bloody First (Nashville: John York and Col, 1849), 72, 99.

<sup>93</sup>Mexican War Correspondence, author unknown, September 25, 1846, Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA); Benjamin Franklin Cheatham Papers, TSLA; Robertson, Reminiscences of a Campaign in Mexico by a Member of the Bloody First, 167.

<sup>36</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, November 9, 1846, CFP.

<sup>37</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, July 3, 1846, CFP.

<sup>38</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, June 4, 1846, CFP.

<sup>39</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, December 7, 1846, CFP; William Campbell to David Campbell, April 25, 1847, CFP; John Bell to William Campbell, October 31, 1846, CFP.

<sup>40</sup>William Campbell to David Campbell, March 20, 1847, CFP; Republican Banner and Nashville Whig, 9 July 1851; Robertson, Reminiscences of a Campaign in Mexico by a Member of the Bloody First, 247. Military histories of the Mexican War have become infrequent in the last two decades. The most recent, So Far From God by John S. Eisenhower, described in detail the three major battles Campbell fought, and is focused more on the actions of the regulars than volunteers. See John S. Eisenhower, So Far From God: The United States' War with Mexico 1846-8 (New York: Random House, 1989). Older histories of the Mexican War are more detailed than Eisenhower's monograph but less dispassionate. See Justin H. Smith, The War with Mexico, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1919) and G. L. Rives, The United States and Mexico 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1913). For the personal experiences of Tennesseans who fought in the Mexican War,

see George C. Furber, The Twelve Months Volunteer  
(Cincinnati: J. A. and V. P. James, 1850).

## CHAPTER IV

### ASCENT AND DESCENT

He that follows after fame, after  
this world's applause, will soon  
find nothing to compensate him for  
his troubles and sacrifices.

William B. Campbell, Papers

The Mexican War changed William Campbell's political career by the way it impacted the nation's sectional harmony. He had fully intended for his 1843 retirement from elective politics to be permanent. His self-righteousness and hypersensitivity had merged with an ideological rigidity that even he was coming to recognize as political liabilities. However, Campbell's devotion to his family heritage had always been inseparably linked to military glory, which was just as strong a temptation to him in 1846 as it had been ten years before during the Seminole War. Once he had been "bloodied" at Monterrey, Tennessee newspapers began enthusiastically to suggest his candidacy for the canvass of 1847. Practically overnight Campbell had become what he had earlier conceded he could never be: a popular hero. The temptation to return to politics was made equally irresistible by public acclaim, Whig partisans, and, most importantly, the "sectional volcano" his uncle feared



was ready to explode. Campbell's final venture into politics, which climaxed in the governorship, alienated him from other Whigs and, as a result, limited his effectiveness as a spokesman for the Union in the late 1850s and early 1860s.<sup>1</sup>

When General Campbell began receiving letters from John Bell during the Mexican War concerning the 1847 gubernatorial race, he had no desire to reenter elective politics in any capacity. Although he was as much a Whig partisan as Bell, Campbell was being publicized by newspapers as a conservative Whig nationalist who placed patriotism and principle above party politics. Consequently, Campbell was hesitant to capitalize on his battlefield achievements for political gain. But after years of self-pity over "minor" achievements, Campbell finally felt worthy of his ancestral heritage. Wishing to stay close to his growing family and trying to avoid actively campaigning for any elective office, he let it be known that he desired a judgeship. Following his return to Tennessee, Campbell was unanimously elected by the Tennessee Legislature to the 4th Judicial Circuit in September 1847 and was commissioned by Governor Aaron C. Brown on October 8, 1847.<sup>2</sup>

During his three years on the bench, the proliferation of letters Campbell received from Whig stalwarts regarding a future bid for the state house both tempted and angered

him. He learned that John Bell's letters to him in 1847 were written more for selfish reasons than anything else. Shortly after the triumph at Monterrey, Bell had written Campbell predicting that his martial image could elect him governor without even campaigning. Nonetheless, Bell discouraged him from contemplating a gubernatorial campaign out of respect for Neill S. Brown, Gustavus A. Henry, and Meredith P. Gentry, men who Bell believed had enemies who favored a Campbell candidacy. Instead, Bell urged Campbell to cement his political friendship with these three by not seeking the governorship. In reality, Bell desired election to the United States Senate and knew that victory would depend on the support of East Tennessee since the outgoing senator was from that region. Accordingly, Bell worked with Thomas A. R. Nelson in supporting an East Tennessean for the governorship and intimated to Campbell that a decision by him not to enter the contest could be rewarded with a federal office if Zachary Taylor was elected President in 1848. The situation became yet more complicated when Campbell received a letter from Meredith Gentry who pledged his support to him should he decide to enter the race. However, Gentry accused others of supporting Campbell for the state house as a way of keeping him out of the United States Congress. The fact was that Campbell was popular enough to win either a United States Senate seat or the state house but was discouraged from doing so by Whig

political intrigue. That he was not really interested in any elective office was not as important as his growing awareness of Whig manipulation and deceit that he usually associated with Democrats, sectionalists, and abolitionists.<sup>3</sup>

By the late 1840s the political equipoise between Whig and Democratic parties was remarkable. Whig candidates for President carried Tennessee in every election from 1836 to 1852. Whigs controlled the state house from 1835 to 1839 and the majority of the state's United States Congressional seats, but did not always keep a majority in both houses of the General Assembly during this same period. When the Whig party regained the governorship in 1847, Democrats won six of the state's eleven congressional seats. The electoral margin between the two parties was often so narrow (Henry Clay carried Tennessee in the 1844 Presidential election by 113 votes) that victory usually signified which party had, for the moment, succeeded in controlling its factionalism and strong personal rivalries.<sup>4</sup>

Although the parties frequently found common ground regarding state concerns such as banking and internal improvements, there were still noticeable differences. To William Campbell and other observers, the differences regarding sectional issues were growing wider and were, consequently, dangerous. The Mexican War, territorial acquisitions, and slavery's extension dominated the

canvasses of 1847 and 1849 as well as the Presidential election of 1848. Campbell was appalled when Democrats attempted to link Tennessee Whig support for Millard Fillmore and the Compromise of 1850 to a Whig plan to protect abolitionists eager to violate the Fugitive Slave Laws.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the return of sectional tension in 1850, Campbell finally yielded to pressure from Whig leaders to accept the nomination for governor, even though he did not believe that by accepting the nomination he could end internecine strife within the Whig party. Indeed, his nomination and eventual victory ultimately convinced him that the selfish ambitions of Whig leaders and the national trauma over slavery would be the ruin of the party.<sup>6</sup>

Campbell was particularly wary of his old political rival, William Trousdale, who made slavery's extension the principal issue in his 1849 gubernatorial victory. Campbell was further incensed when as Governor Trousdale began to favor the new "Southern rights" faction of the Democratic party, criticized compromise bills in Congress regarding slavery's extension, and supported Mississippi's call for a Southern Convention to meet in Nashville to discuss the California crisis. Certain that Governor Trousdale would run for reelection in 1851, Campbell began seriously to consider challenging him after realizing that Tennessee's Whig party would self-destruct if he did not.<sup>7</sup>

The inner dynamics of the canvass of 1851 are indicative of why Campbell would be Tennessee's last Whig governor. Indeed, he bitterly concluded that he was nominated because the primary Whig contenders were certain of defeat, if not by the Democrats, by intraparty strife. The national decline of public morality and civic virtue that Campbell had found so discouraging as a United States Congressman was more apparent to him among Tennessee Whigs. With his own position secure as a United States Senator, John Bell encouraged Campbell to pursue the state house with the same vigor that he had shown earlier in opposition. In Campbell's opinion, Bell's panegyric letters were laden with hypocrisy and deceit. Shortly before the election he privately described Bell as Tennessee's "most cold-hearted, selfish, and artful scoundrel," and following the gubernatorial race the two men seldom corresponded except over national matters.<sup>8</sup>

To Campbell, the list of "Whig scoundrels" seemed endless, as their pleas for his gubernatorial candidacy increased. Nashville editor Felix Zollicoffer urged Campbell to seek the governorship in order to overthrow the John Bell faction that he believed had deprived him of a government printing contract. Zollicoffer, whose influential Tri-Weekly Republican Banner endorsed Campbell for governor, hoped the "hero of Monterrey" would repay the favor by supporting former governor James "Lean Jimmy" Jones

for United States Senator. Likewise, Gustavus Henry also needed Campbell's support since he planned to run for the United States Senate in 1851. Knoxville editor William G. Brownlow hoped a fellow East Tennessean, Thomas A. R. Nelson, could win a Senate seat if his Knoxville Whig endorsed Campbell. Campbell was also in the unique position of having the endorsement of both of the strongest Whig factional leaders in the state, John Bell and Ephraim Foster, who were bitter enemies. Rather than viewing their support as an opportunity to restore harmony and end party in-fighting, he interpreted their exhortations as further evidence of a morally deficient party that turned to him as the "only Whig fool hardy enough . . . to lead the forlorn hope." Unlike Gustavus Henry, Campbell could never intellectually reconcile the "political game" with "statesmanship" and "compromise."<sup>9</sup>

For Campbell the lesser of two evils, accepting the Whig nomination and losing, or Whig defeat with another nominee appeared to be his only alternative, since many of the state's "Southern rights" Democrats insisted on making the Compromise of 1850 the paramount issue in the campaign. Despite the opposition of prominent Democrats Cave Johnson and A. O. P. Nicholson, the Democratic-controlled lower house of the state legislature supported Trousdale's request that Nashville host a Southern Convention to discuss the California problem. With a Whig, Zachary Taylor, in the

White House, with a Whig Senate in Tennessee, and with a gubernatorial contest in the offing, Democrats like Trousdale excoriated the state's Whigs, insinuating that they shared the views of most vocal anti-slavery Northern Whigs, like William H. Seward.<sup>10</sup>

During the campaign, the Democratic press fulminated that local Whigs had been deliberating with the abolitionists and "free-soilers," men who by "their conduct would excite the slaves of individuals then sitting by their side, to open rebellion, rapine and murder." Only one month into the campaign the Nashville Daily American warned that Northern anti-slavery Whigs would interpret a gubernatorial victory by Campbell as proof that the state favored "agitation on the slavery question." Conversely, a Democratic win would not only force Northern Whigs to think the South in earnest when it protested violations of the Fugitive Slave Law but might purge the state of Whigs not willing to consider "Southern rights."<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting on Tennessee's continuing attraction to the Union as well as the vitality of its competitive two-party system, Democrats were careful to present their cause as both Southern and American. They submitted that a Whig triumph in Tennessee's governor's race would signal Northern Whigs to push harder on slavery and thus lead to disunion. Similarly, they credited their opposition to the Wilmot

Proviso from 1846 to 1850 with preventing its passage and thus preserving the Union.<sup>12</sup>

For a brief time Campbell relished the role that he now believed he had to play as guardian of the Union. The influence of his family and education in creating his conservative republican principles had prepared his intellect if not always his personality for the task. He realized that Trousdale was attempting to be on both sides of the sectional question by requesting the legislature to host a Southern Convention at the urging of Mississippi "fire-eaters" and then exploiting the eventual Whig defeat of his request in the Senate to maintain that his Unionism had remained constant and true. Campbell accused Trousdale of sophistry by seeking to radicalize the state under the guise of Unionism by condemning all of Clay's compromise measures (except for the Fugitive Slave Law) as harmful to Southern interests and belatedly claiming support for them in the national interest.<sup>13</sup>

During the public debates between the two candidates, Campbell often began with the slavery question as a way of explaining the nature of the Union. Although his arguments lacked originality, they struck a very responsive chord in the "Volunteer State." Tracing the current turmoil over the slavery question to South Carolina, Campbell insisted that the leaders of the 1833 Nullification Crisis had never been interested in justice regarding the tariff, but had rather



sought control of the federal government. In his judgment, South Carolina's "plot" had been thwarted in 1833 because of the rest of the nation's deep love for constitutionalism, which prevented extremism by majoritarian Democrats or "monarchical Federalists" by clearly defining the rights and powers of the states and the federal government. Corrupted by their immense power in their own state, South Carolina's leaders aimed to extend their hegemony over the entire South by politicizing the slavery question and cloaking it in the libertarian rhetoric of "Southern rights."<sup>14</sup>

Campbell professed that constitutional rights did not inhere in America's sections but in the entire nation and were therefore best protected within the national constitutional framework. If South Carolinians had really considered themselves oppressed, Campbell maintained that they should have sought redress through the courts rather than by attempting to usurp power to nullify federal law and secede from the Union. In the first debate with Governor Trousdale in Springfield, Tennessee, Campbell put constitutionalism and "Southern rights" to the test to show their antithetical character. He reminded Tennesseans that California's decision to enter the Union as a free state was the type of decision that had been defended for years by Southerners as a state's right. Moreover, he warned that to deny this right to people not wanting slavery in their state

was not only hypocritical but oppressive. He challenged his audience to consider that

it would be oppressive for Congress to say to them (California) that you shall have slaves . . . our government is one of compromises and we must respect the local feelings of the people of every state. We must let them decide for themselves, just as we claim the right to decide for ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

Answering Trousdale's allegations that Northern people would never uphold the Fugitive Slave Law, Campbell retorted that the act might be resisted by "low mobs" of abolitionist extremists but not by the masses of Northern people who were just as anxious to end treasonous, disunionist language as were most of their Southern kinsmen. Even if it became clear in the future that the Fugitive Slave Act was being violated, he asked why should redress consist of anything different than would be the case over any other criminal act? Why should a state secede over criminal activity outside its own borders when the machinery of the federal government was perfectly capable and constitutionally obligated to arrest those who would violate any law of the United States? In short, Campbell was merely reminding Tennesseans of the type of constitutional logic that had been espoused in the state by Democrats and Whigs for years and instilled in him as a youth:

if states are to fly off from the Union, on every occasion, when they think their own state interests are particularly effected or injured by any measure of the General government, we should soon have the Union divided up into almost as many separate governments as there are states. . . .<sup>16</sup>

With both candidates fighting for the Unionist image and agreeing on many local issues as well, the canvass of 1851 ultimately turned on the military reputation and personality of each candidate. The pro-Democratic Nashville Daily American charged Campbell with "arraying himself as a great military man" who in reality had nowhere the "experience in the field" as the "War Horse of Sumner County." Taking advantage of the fact that Trousdale had fought in three wars to Campbell's two, and eighteen battles to Campbell's seven, the paper portrayed Campbell as having inflated his military role at the battle of Monterrey to reap the political benefits later. The Republican Banner and Nashville Whig responded by quoting letters written after the battle of Monterrey by participants Franklin Cheatham and Balie Peyton who praised Campbell's courage and military leadership. The Republican Banner began an offensive of its own by printing extracts of letters written by soldiers and officers in the Tennessee Brigade to prove how much more action Campbell saw in the Seminole War than Trousdale.<sup>17</sup>

The sixty-four stop speaking tour and debate between the two candidates was interrupted after one month when Campbell contracted dysentery in McMinnville. When Thomas A. R. Nelson replaced Campbell on the tour, Democratic papers charged that Campbell would "probably stay sick until he was out of Middle Tennessee's slaveholding region"

because of the "drubbing he took during the Lexington, Tennessee, debate." Actually the opposite was true. His illness was not only legitimate but very severe. Rallying to charges by Knoxville Whig editor William Brownlow that the Democratic attack on their candidate's health was "cheap and degrading," Whigs used testimony by the physicians attending Campbell to prove he was acutely ill. Whigs took delight in the fact that both the attending physicians were Democrats! The Democrats never recovered from this embarrassment or Nelson's excellent oratory, losing a very close Governor's race, 63,333 to 61,673, and both houses of the General Assembly.<sup>18</sup>

From the outset of his term as Governor, William Campbell never intended to seek reelection. He opined that he had been nominated by selfish motives of leaders in his own party and had just barely survived a brutal campaign because of Democratic "Southern rights" extremists. More importantly, he had witnessed first-hand the emotional impact sectionalistic propaganda had upon the voters. Accordingly, as governor, Campbell determined to push an aggressive Whig agenda to return the state to its grass roots concerns over internal improvements and education and away from divisive sectional issues. In this sense, the legislative success of his program was of less importance to him than the controversial, but distracting, debate it would arouse. His pessimism about the campaign was balanced with

the fact that even his Democratic enemies acknowledged the attraction of his martial image, the nationalism it inspired, and his populist appeal. Although he would never deviate from his conservative Whig principles, Campbell no longer felt the need, and certainly not the desire, to identify as closely with his political party as he had in the past. In his estimation Tennessee's greatest challenges in the future would be sectional tension and he concluded that a popular, charismatic, nationalist could do more for unionism than a party partisan could. Ultimately, this conclusion would be one of Campbell's greatest miscalculations.<sup>19</sup>

Two days after Campbell's election he wrote to Ephraim Foster, a friend and a prominent Nashville Whig, soliciting his advice during the next two years. In spite of having been warned by his uncle to pursue an independent course because of the unpredictability of Tennessee's Whig party, Campbell understood that the only way to redirect debate in the state away from sectionalism and toward local concerns was through an aggressive and somewhat partisan agenda. Even though the political differences between Whigs and Democrats over the state's key social and economic issues were much smaller than before, Campbell intended to promote an exclusively Whig program of action and would identify his party as the most dynamic and progressive, thereby forcing Democrats to endorse much of his program out of

political expediency or stake out clear alternatives to the rest. In this way, Campbell intended to move the state forward economically, establish closer ties to its less radical Upper South neighbors, and solidify its devotion to the Union by avoiding the issues likely to do the opposite. Predictably, Campbell's first legislative message was a comparative assessment of the state's underdeveloped condition in which he cited Tennessee's population growth to be not only 15 percent behind the national average but also less than that of Georgia. Despite Tennessee's strategic location for commercial intercourse and unlimited potential in agriculture, mining, water power, timber and staple crops, Campbell reminded the people of his state that other states had much fewer natural resources yet outproduced Tennessee because of their advancements in transportation, which attracted both capital and skilled labor. He estimated that just one railroad between Louisville and Nashville would "introduce thousands of sturdy and skilled laborers from the teeming thoroughfares of the North and West."<sup>20</sup>

During the campaign, internal improvements had been the most important state-wide issue. Campbell denigrated recent Democratic efforts to establish state-supported internal improvements since they usually led to useless stalemate between Whigs and Democrats. Actually both parties were afraid that state aid would incur debt and

financial loss, so they often deadlocked over whether the state should wait until one-fourth or one-third of private stockholders had paid in on their subscriptions for stock in transportation companies before state subscription began. The most recent effort, the 1838 Bank and Improvement Act, had been repealed in 1840 partly because Whig Governor Newton Cannon believed the state subsidized too liberally. During the canvass, Campbell urged the state to work more closely with private enterprise by allowing them to develop the road in preparation for the placing of rails and fixtures and then call upon the state for aid, even if it meant lending the state's credit. In the General Assembly Campbell's recommendations concerning internal improvements were included in the most liberal state aid bill to date. The bill was designed to allow the State to issue bonds to aid in the construction of railroad lines after the construction company had disclosed its stock subscription status, and after it had proved that at least thirty miles were actually ready for the laying of rails, and that no prior lien upon the road existed. The law also contained numerous safeguards against state financial loss, most notably one giving the governor the power to seize and operate the road if interest on the bonds was not paid fifteen days before actually due. Since the company did not have to begin repaying the loan until five years after completion, the new governor was soon receiving letters from

railroad men anxious to report the status of their company so as to receive bonds.<sup>21</sup>

By making internal improvements his chief concern, Campbell managed to insure that eight million dollars, 60 percent of the construction costs, would be spent on railroad building in Tennessee. By the end of 1854, work was completed on the Nashville and Chattanooga line, Tennessee's first railroad system. By the end of the decade this line boasted many "feeders" and new lines such as the Memphis and Charleston, East Tennessee and Virginia, and Louisville and Nashville were all in operation.<sup>22</sup>

Campbell was much less successful in obtaining legislative action on his second priority, education. He did succeed in re-energizing debate on the subject and forcing both political parties to sharpen their views. Appalled by sectionalistic distortions of slavery and state's rights issues in the 1851 canvass, Campbell was more convinced than ever that education was the surest way to perpetuate liberty and equality. His uncle implored him to make education his chief priority and was puzzled by popular indifference in Tennessee toward the existence of a system of common schools. His nephew charged in his inaugural that public cynicism over education was due to insincere politicians eager to use the issue for political capital. As a matter of fact, the 1850 census revealed illiteracy in Tennessee had increased since 1840 with 77,522 illiterate



citizens over twenty years of age out of a population of 316,409. This gave the state the second highest illiteracy rate in the South next to North Carolina.<sup>23</sup>

Before the establishment of the Bank of Tennessee in 1838, the state had unsuccessfully attempted to establish a system of public education through the distribution of public monies received from land sales. In 1838 the Common School Fund for the distribution of these monies had been made a part of the capital of the Bank, and the dividends it made annually apportioned among counties. This system was an embarrassing failure. Two weeks after Campbell's first major legislative message, it was disclosed that after the annual distribution of funds to counties for education there remained only \$15.81 left in the entire state treasury. Curiously enough, Tennessee's private academies received substantially more state aid than its public schools although their enrollment was considerably less.<sup>24</sup>

Campbell viewed a tax-supported system of common schools to be a class-conscious approach designed by Democrats to create tension between social and economic classes. He also believed a tax increase to fund education fiscally unwise. The result, of course, was a continuation of the status quo regarding public schools. In fact, the most serious legislative effort to establish a system of public schools was vigorously, but unsuccessfully, proposed by Democrat Edwin Polk. Campbell's partisan approach to

Tennessee's education problem was a complete failure legislatively and created opportunities for some of the state's Democrats to create more public awareness of the need to endorse tax-supported public schools.<sup>25</sup>

Campbell's efforts to establish his party as populist were further illustrated in his handling of judicial reform. Never comfortable with mass politics, Campbell had always been skeptical of the political pressures that would naturally be placed on judges directly elected by the people. Paradoxically, candidate Campbell supported democratic judicial reform. His apparent change of heart resulted in his successful initiative as governor to amend Tennessee's constitution to change the indirect election mode of judges and attorney generals in the legislature to a direct one. Critics knowledgeable about his long-established conservatism and aristocratic manner were surprised when in his first legislative message he professed that:

our government consists in reliance upon the virtue and intelligence of our people. Who will doubt, that they who have so long been the safe depositories of higher powers will exercise, with reference to these offices, that wisdom and purity and patriotism which have been the characteristics and the glory of the American people.<sup>26</sup>

Actually both William and David Campbell had always appreciated the simple patriotism of the common man and prayed that with material progress and education it would survive the guile and ambitions of sectionalistic

"conspirators." With the nation and its political parties dividing over regional issues, Campbell was trying to maintain a difficult balancing act between his Whiggish "politics of deference" and populism.<sup>27</sup>

This balancing act was also evident in Campbell's efforts as governor to further social and moral reform. For years Democrats had promoted an image of Whigs as "social experimenters with the people's liberty," especially in the area of temperance. In the past, Campbell had been interested in prohibition on the state level, yet as governor he chose aspects of social reform less controversial but still certain to provoke debate. Campbell was also a strong believer in criminal rehabilitation. He favored additional attention being given to a true juvenile justice system rather than the usual practice of dismissing juvenile first offenders. Near the end of his term, he attempted to establish a social agenda for the future by encouraging the legislature to fund a correction center for juvenile first offenders complete with instruction in useful trades and other methods of rehabilitation. Campbell also proposed that the legislature pass a bill appropriating funds for a state lunatic asylum.<sup>28</sup>

Campbell's wish to preside over the reapportionment of Tennessee legislative districts and his desire to do so along Whig lines without himself appearing a captive of "party partisanship" depended upon fulfillment of the work

of legislators like Gustavus Henry and John Netherland. Spearheading the effort by the redistricting committee for dividing the state into congressional, senatorial, and representative districts, these two men benefited from having a Whig governor, a Whig legislature, and Democratic leadership much less skillful than theirs. The reapportioned districts that resulted from their work were very favorable to the Whig party. Henry's efforts, however, were not rewarded by Campbell in the Senate election later in the year. Campbell demonstrated once again his lack of political acumen first noted by friend Balie Peyton during his freshman term as a United States Congressman. Basically distrustful of all Whig leaders unable to measure up to his unrealistic moral standards, he remained neutral in the United States Senate race despite the expectations by Whigs in each of the state's grand divisions that he endorse their candidate. Believing all three of the top contenders, James Jones, Gustavus Henry, and Thomas A. R. Nelson, to be equally selfish, Campbell simply ignored them all and endorsed no one. The nomination battle between them left many bruised feelings that became evident later in the 1852 Presidential race.<sup>29</sup>

Also important to the outcome of the Senate race was Campbell's own sense of party spirit that his post-war image forced him to try to conceal. Privately he was convinced that East Tennessee was responsible for the election of a

Democrat as State Comptroller. Equally treacherous to Campbell was East Tennessee's drift toward the popular Democrat Andrew Johnson.<sup>30</sup> Although Nelson had been invaluable to Campbell's gubernatorial campaign, his motives had seemed more self-serving than genuine. Knoxville Whig editor William Brownlow was furious with Campbell for not showing more gratitude toward Nelson. Sarcastically, Brownlow's paper rhymed,

Ah! Nelson, thou most luckless bard!  
 Thy doom fixed, thy fortune hard!  
 Oft did'st thou mingle in the fray,  
 And raise the flag for Monterrey,  
 But not his weight you're doomed to bear,  
 Who honors with you will not share!  
 Yet ever cherish love of duty,  
 Nor say despairing, "et tu brute!"<sup>31</sup>

The Whig-dominated legislature left its mark on banking in the state for many years to come by enacting new legislation in 1851 patterned after the Free Banking System of New York. The Free Banking Law of 1851 authorized the government to regulate the business of banking by empowering banks covered under the act to issue paper currency after first transferring state bonds to the State Comptroller. One of the new "free banks" created was the Wilson County-based bank of Middle Tennessee. Campbell assumed management of this bank in the fall of 1857.<sup>32</sup>

Pleased with his party's reorganization of Tennessee banking, Campbell was less satisfied with its response to his call for resolutions endorsing the Compromise of 1850.

On February 28, 1852, the General Assembly passed a bipartisan resolution condemning secession as unconstitutional and pledging support for the Compromise as a final settlement. Campbell considered the victory for Unionism incomplete because it was not unconditional. Instead, the resolution compared secession to the Lockean right of revolution while stating that presently there was no cause to exercise such a right. However, the legislature warned northern states that:

a repeal or failure to enforce the provision of the Fugitive Slave Bill . . . will tend to a train of deplorable consequences, from which a dissolution of the Union will be the most probable result.<sup>33</sup>

While he shared the legislature's concern over "fanatics" and abolitionists of the North, Campbell was equally troubled that such warnings would not serve to deter Northern agitators as much as they would encourage Southern alarmists.<sup>34</sup>

Campbell's decision to decline nomination for a second term was anti-climatic to his closest friends. He had never been interested in a second term and delivered his parting message to the General Assembly just five days after it convened on October 3, 1853. Campbell's address was a philosophical exegesis on the "good society" in which he took the occasion to sharpen the distinctions between Whiggery and Democratic ideology and to recommend a Whig agenda for the future. The aim of his valedictory address

before the inaugural speech of Governor Andrew Johnson was equally bold. He declared that state government should help direct economic growth to create opportunity in both economic and social pursuits. Suggesting the adage "population is wealth" to be only partially true, he states that

it is certainly true when the population is characterized by intelligence, industry, and enterprise. The diffusion of knowledge and an elevation of the moral standard are immediate effects of physical improvements. . . .<sup>35</sup>

By articulating the Whig vision of America as a commonwealth of interrelated interests harmonized by government, Campbell was obviously preparing the state for what he hoped would be a battle with Johnson's Jacksonian creed.

Despite many challenges, the respite from sectionalism that Campbell hoped Tennessee could "enjoy" was partially realized. He had never expected Tennessee to be completely insulated from the repercussions of sectionalism. Nonetheless, the "railroad mania" his administration helped to unleash and the ideological battles that would now be waged over Andrew Johnson's proposals for public schools served to deflect the impact of sectional conflict in the state. To be sure, between 1853 and 1860 there were cataclysmic changes in the Whig party which climaxed in its decline in East and West Tennessee. Although it was no longer nationally competitive after 1852, the opposition its former leaders in Tennessee gave to their Democratic counterparts

over local concerns convinced Campbell that his administration had been a success. Myopically, Campbell failed to understand the temporary nature of his success, and that only by being an active participant in Tennessee's highly competitive two-party system could he hope to weld his state even more firmly to the Union.<sup>36</sup>

Despite encouragement from Whig Senator William Cullom and friend Robert L. Caruthers, Campbell declined to consider the Vice Presidential nomination in the election of 1852. Instead, he approached the coming contest unenthusiastically now that his chances of securing a federal diplomatic post from President Millard Fillmore had passed. Like other Tennessee Whigs, Campbell worried about the party nominee's ties to Northern Whigs but eventually concluded that Winfield Scott's support for the Compromise of 1850 and his impeccable war record would make him acceptable to Tennesseans. Although Scott carried Tennessee, his victory did little to heal the recent internal strife among Tennessee Whigs. East Tennessee Whigs such as Thomas A. R. Nelson and William Brownlow denounced Scott as partial to Catholics and soft on abolitionism. Still bitter over Nelson's Senate defeat, many East Tennessee Whigs simply did not vote in either the presidential election or the gubernatorial contest of 1853.<sup>37</sup>



Scott's failure to carry East Tennessee and Gustavus Henry's gubernatorial loss to Andrew Johnson did not worry Campbell as much as national developments in the 1850s regarding slavery. Campbell was recovering from a disastrous business venture in New Orleans when he learned that most of Tennessee's congressional delegation, including two of six Whigs, voted for the Kansas-Nebraska bill. He agreed with Representative William Cullom who described the measure as not designed to redress any wrongs done to the South by the 1820 Missouri Compromise, but instead as a purely political act. One of four Tennessee Whigs who voted against the bill, Cullom sarcastically claimed the bill should be reclassified as a private one entitled, "A Bill to Make Great Men Out of Small Ones." He bitterly denounced the measure as an attempt to "sacrifice the public peace and prosperity upon the altar of political ambition." To Cullom, it seemed ridiculous that there had been no Southern outcry against the Compromise of 1820 for over thirty years, yet now Southern Democrats and Whigs were hailing Stephen Douglas's bill as "equal justice." John Bell described the behavior of Southern Whig supporters of the bill to Campbell as deliberately destructive. He believed their enthusiasm was calculated to destroy the Whig party and then create a new organization. William Campbell went one step further and agreed with his uncle that like the demagoguery over California in 1850, the real aim was the

radicalization of the South and disunion. With the emergence of a new sectional party, the Republicans, Campbell was further convinced that "our statesmen are nothing but political gamblers willing to hazard the honor and peace of the nation, to sacrifice either for some personal advantage or aggrandizement."<sup>38</sup>

Campbell felt obliged to campaign for the American "Know-Nothing" party candidate, Meredith Gentry, in the 1855 gubernatorial race, especially since Democrat incumbent Andrew Johnson branded the state's burgeoning third party with being abolitionist. Initially Campbell tended to be skeptical of the new organization because he feared it would divide the Whig vote. But like Gustavus Henry and William Brownlow, Campbell soon realized the party gave Southern Whigs a mechanism by which they could downplay the slavery issue and promote Whiggery by another name. No less vital was the fact that the party's nativism could divert attention away from slavery. Privately Campbell doubted that the organization could remain national. Writing to his uncle during the 1855 governor's race, he reasoned that the great flood of immigrants usually settled in the western territories and thus assured that no new slave states could be added. Consequently, nativists in the North opposed to slavery but supportive of the American Party would eventually realize the necessity for foreign immigration and would abandon "Know-Nothingism." Campbell campaigned for

the party and helped to make it a serious force in Tennessee politics. Despite Johnson's reelection, the Whiggish nature of the new party provided Tennessee with a clear alternative to the Governor's hesitancy over internal improvements, hostility toward commercial interests, and desire to pursue issues likely to create class tension, such as free homesteading and the direct election of the President, Vice President, and Senators. Campbell was especially gratified to see the new party grow fastest in Johnson's home section, commercially-starved East Tennessee.<sup>39</sup>

As the emotionalism slavery aroused in the 1855 governor's race dissipated, and the presidential campaign of 1856 began in earnest, Campbell wrote his uncle that, "the springtime of our government is passed . . . we now border on decay . . . we won't have a first rate president again. The spirit of '76 has passed away. . . ." He concurred with his uncle that the causes of such "decay," manhood suffrage, universal election by the masses for all offices, and universal eligibility had created a "wild and reckless people . . . ignorant of many things," ripe for anti-republican conspirators. To Campbell and a great number of Union men, the election of 1856 was a watershed event and a portent of future difficulties. This election signaled the steady decline of national parties. Working from a purely sectional platform, the new Republican party scored impressive gains in Congress in 1854 and won 114 electoral

votes in the election of 1856. Campbell naturally feared the party's impact on the Tennessee voter because of the sympathy it created for the "Southern rights" wing of the state's Democratic party. More frightening to Campbell was his concern that extremists of the Deep South would attempt to control President James Buchanan, creating a new crisis that could result in disunion and war. Equally disturbing to him was the paranoia about all Republicans that secessionists had succeeded in generating during the campaign, which made the separation of the Lower South all but certain, should Republicans triumph in 1860.<sup>40</sup>

Although Tennessee moved into the Democratic column in 1856 for the first time in a presidential election since 1832, Campbell was still guardedly optimistic that his state would not follow the Lower South, even after further national polarization in the late 1850s. Campbell was certain that slavery was the chief sectional issue that Southern extremists sought to exploit in order to create an anti-republican, Southern nation ruled by a wealthy class of "cotton aristocrats." But Campbell was optimistic that Tennessee's non-slaveholding majority as well as middle-class slaveholders understood that the slavery issue was "kept up for political effect" and were becoming accustomed to it in that context. While he understood that most Tennesseans shared his view of slavery as necessary to their political, social, and economic well-being, he hoped that

his state's devotion to the Union was evidence of the realization on the part of some that disunion could end the "peculiar institution."<sup>41</sup>

Working from these assumptions, Campbell wanted Tennesseans to see the slavery issue for what he believed it truly was: a Southern struggle for political power. Ironically, he was as confident as the Northern "fanatics" he detested that slavery's extension constituted a conspiracy by the South's wealthiest planters to preserve their inflated political influence in the federal government. Like many observers in the North and South, Campbell was convinced that the geographical features of the western United States would naturally limit slavery's spread. Therefore, he shared his uncle's position that while slaveholders should be free to enter any part of the Mexican cession, they should never demand that "their property be entitled to representation." Eleven years before his death in 1859, David Campbell wrote his nephew that, "if slaves are property, slaveholders are not entitled to represent them in the territories and every Southern man must see the effect of such a pretension . . . or sure as we live the Union will be dissolved."<sup>42</sup>

Neither William nor David Campbell were convinced that the South's minority status in the Union could be rectified by the spread of slavery. On the contrary, they believed that it was impossible to keep a perfect political

equilibrium between the sections. They knew the South constituted a permanent minority but they contended that this inferior status was all the more reason to preserve sectional harmony rather than promoting slavery's extension. To them, only within the Union could the rights of any state, slave or free, be protected. Obviously, the Campbells did not believe that the Northern majority endorsed radical abolition. Confident that Northern opinion could best be gauged as moderate-to-conservative on the slavery question, William Campbell assured his uncle that "there are those in the North who will sustain this institution because it is constitutional and legal, and will do nothing to injure existing rights. . . ." Although he was accused of "quiet submission" to free-soilers and abolitionists in the 1851 governor's race, Campbell was ardent in his summation that slavery could not be protected outside of the Union because of the impossibility of recovering fugitives.<sup>43</sup>

Viewing the impending sectional crises through conspiratorial lenses, the Campbells worried that average Americans were unaware of imminent treachery and disunion. However, William Campbell hoped that because of his state's material progress Tennesseans might realize that their economic interests lay in peacefully resolving sectionalism and preserving the Union. During the long period of Whig ascendancy in the state, the emphasis on economic diversity

had helped rapidly industrialize and commercialize the state. Tennessee was still an overwhelmingly agricultural state in 1860, but fluidity, not stasis, typified its economy. By 1850, Tennessee already ranked first in the South in the value of home-made manufactures, eleventh in the value of cotton manufactures, fourth in the production of pig iron and sixth in wrought iron. Between 1840 and 1860 the state doubled the value of capital invested in cotton manufactures. In ten years, 1840-50, Tennessee doubled its production of pig iron. Overall, the state ranked second among Southern states in the value of capital invested in manufactures, showing a 121 percent increase between 1850 and 1860.<sup>44</sup>

During the early 1850s state opposition to internal improvements in Tennessee began slowly to ebb. The emerging consensus between the state's three grand divisions helped produce a virtual revolution in railroad transportation. As the state strengthened its ties to the Upper as well as to the Lower South, Campbell could only hope that the non-slaveholding majority, 47 percent of which were landless, could see the benefits they derived from the state's further diversification as well as the obstacles to progress often created by radical elements of the pro-slavery elite. As a Whig partisan, Campbell naturally attributed most of the state's rapid progress to Whiggery. He did not actively campaign in the gubernatorial races of 1857 or 1859 but it

was evident that "Know-Nothingism" and later the Opposition party gave former Whig champions like Meredith Gentry and William Brownlow an indispensable base from which to operate. Moreover, the Panic of 1857, which severely damaged Tennessee's banks, renewed many of the old Whig and Democratic arguments over banking and eclipsed the slavery issue in the gubernatorial campaign of 1859.<sup>45</sup>

Campbell feared the dissolution of the Union as the election of 1860 approached. He also had reason to hope that the Whig party's organization and wide support could provide a viable conservative alternative to Southern disunionists and their sympathizers. Unfortunately, Campbell, now a bank director, was more content to theorize about the condition of the Union than to be an active participant in the political process.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Republican Banner and Nashville Whig, October 1846.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.; Smith County Records, Circuit Court Minute Books (1847).

<sup>3</sup>St. George L. Sioussant, "Mexican War Letters of William Bowen Campbell," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 1 (1915): 129-67; John E. Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics 1845-61" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966), 44-6. Robert Corlew and Paul Bergeron contend that factionalism, strong personalities, and state sectionalism were the keys to Tennessee's highly competitive two-party system as well as the intraparty strife endemic to each party. See Robert Corlew, Tennessee: A Short History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), and Paul Bergeron, Antebellum Politics in Tennessee, 1830-60 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982). The most thorough study of John Bell is Joseph H. Parks, John Bell of Tennessee (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950).

<sup>4</sup>Paul Bergeron, Antebellum Politics in Tennessee, 1830-60, 53; Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 50, preface 8. Tricamo and former State Historian Robert H. White argued that the political stalemate over local issues enabled sectional ones like slavery to ascend and eventually decide the outcome of close elections. See, also, Robert H. White, Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, vol. 4, 1845-57 (Knoxville: Tennessee Historical Commission and the Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1957). However, national issues were usually not decisive in altering party allegiance in Tennessee. Tennessee politics was best characterized by practicality since voting behavior was determined by party machinery, intraparty factionalism, and geographic subdivisions. Paul Bergeron's description of this characteristic is excellent. See Bergeron, Antebellum Politics, 148-51.

<sup>5</sup>Nashville Daily American, 5 June 1851, p. 5; 31 May 1851, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, February 9, 1851, CFP. Tricamo observed that since factionalism in the Democratic party was between nationalists and sectionalists after 1845, the rise of the Republican party in the 1850s virtually destroyed the nationalist wing. Tricamo explored the growth of the "Southern rights" faction of the Democratic party in great detail. He attributed their rise to two symbiotic factors, slavery (which he maintains dominated Tennessee politics after 1845) and the national decline of the Whigs. "Southern rights" Democrats were decisive on the slavery issue and many people weary of indecision on this issue began to look to them for leadership. See Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 198. An older work, Mary E. R. Campbell, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union 1848-61 (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), asserted that slavery did not dominate Tennessee politics until the John Brown Raid. Paul Bergeron and Daniel Crofts did not believe slavery ever really dominated Tennessee politics as much as political party allegiance, competition, and state sectionalism. See Bergeron, Antebellum Politics and Daniel Crofts, Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 73.

<sup>8</sup>William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, February 9, 1851, CFP; John Bell to William Bowen Campbell, January 25, 1851, CFP; William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, February 9, 1851, CFP.

<sup>9</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 83; William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, April 14, 1856, CFP.

<sup>10</sup>Bergeron, Antebellum Politics, 104.

<sup>11</sup>Nashville Daily American, 11 June 1851, p. 3; 28 May 1851, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 24 May 1851, p. 4. Studies inclusive of the entire Upper South and the viability of its two-party system are Michael Holt, Political Crises of the 1850s (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989); William J. Evitts, A Matter of Allegiances: Maryland from 1850-61 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). All argue that party allegiance, more than slavery, was the crucial factor shaping Unionist attitudes.

<sup>13</sup>Republican Banner and Nashville Whig, 12 June 1851,  
p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 2 May 1851, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Phillip M. Hamer, Tennessee: A History 1673-1932, vol. 1 (New York: American Historical Society, 1933), 483-4; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, November 15, 1850, CFP. Judging from the experiences of other Southern Unionists, Daniel Crofts pointed out that Campbell's confidence in Northern people often put Unionists at a disadvantage in dealing with Republicans. Republicans could afford to pursue uncompromising policies regarding slavery's spread because Unionist support proved the South was not monolithic on the slavery question. See Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 119.

<sup>17</sup>Nashville Daily American, 16 April 1851, p. 5; Republican Banner and Nashville Whig, 17 April 1851, p. 4, April 1851, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup>Nashville Daily American, 24 May 1851, p. 2; Knoxville True Whig, 15 July 1851, p. 6; White, Messages, 431.

<sup>19</sup>David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, August 17, 1852, CFP; William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, April 14, 1851, CFP.

<sup>20</sup>William Bowen Campbell to Colonel Foster, August 23, 1851, Foster and Wood Papers; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, June 15, 1850, CFP; White, Messages, 423-4.

<sup>21</sup>Hamer, Tennessee: A History, 412-13; Stanley J. Folmsbee, Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee 1796-1845 (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1939), 172; Hamer, Tennessee: A History, 484-5; White, Messages, 438; James Robb and W. L. Kendall to William Bowen Campbell, November 17, 1851, Governors Papers; J. S. Claybrooke to William Bowen Campbell, August 10, 1852, Governors Papers.

<sup>22</sup>Corlew, Tennessee, 205-8. This author pointed out that opposition to railroad transportation in Middle

Tennessee was eventually suspended by the fear that a railroad connection between Memphis and Charleston would divert much of the trade of the southern portion of Middle Tennessee away from Nashville. William Campbell was never a key pioneering figure in popularizing railroads in Middle Tennessee but James Jones, James Overton, and A. O. P. Nicholson were.

<sup>23</sup>White, Messages, 431-2; Corlew, Tennessee, 243.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 236-81; White, Messages, 431; Corlew, Tennessee, 242. By 1860 public school enrollment was 140,000 compared to 15,000 in private education, yet private schools received \$600,000 from the state compared to \$400,000 for public schools.

<sup>25</sup>White, Messages, 434. David Campbell was much more representative of the importance that Whigs placed on education than his nephew. Thomas Brown summarized the Whig emphasis on education in class terms. In Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the Whig Party (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), he concluded that Whigs hoped education would prevent rigid social stratification of social class by harmonizing class interests and creating more fluidity to combat the Democratic scheme of "social levelling."

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 499-500; Robert Sobel and John Raimo, Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States 1789-1978, vol. 4 (Westport: Mickler Books, 1978), 1488.

<sup>29</sup>White, Messages, 456-8; Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 92.

<sup>30</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 93-95.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 93; Knoxville True Whig, 29 November 1851, p. 1. The finest study of Thomas A. R. Nelson is Thomas B. Alexander, T. A. R. Nelson of East Tennessee (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1956).

<sup>32</sup>Claude N. Campbell, "The Development of Banking in Tennessee" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1932), 155; Larry Scheweikart, "Tennessee Banks in the Antebellum Period, Part II," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 45 (Fall 1986): 206. In his examination of Tennessee banks between 1819 and 1861, Scheweikart reasoned that free banking was one of the most important factors in creating and sustaining an expansion in Tennessee's banking industry after 1853 primarily because the 1851 legislation helped "recover some of the energy dissipated by state banking." Significantly, he concluded that Tennessee's greatest asset in its banking community was the industry's leaders themselves who combined excellent business intuition with creativity and innovation. He cited Henry Ewing, David Kennedy, and William B. Campbell as Tennessee's three most important bankers in the antebellum period.

<sup>33</sup>Tennessee, Public Acts (1951-2), 720-1.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>White, Messages, 490-503, 523.

<sup>36</sup>Thomas Brown asserted that sectionalism did not weaken Democrats as much as Whigs because the former held the politically conservative view that the federal government did not have the final responsibility for the public good nor was it an agency to promote social progress. Thus, while Northern Whigs argued that the federal government should stop the extension west of slavery because social progress was better served by free labor, Southern Whigs retorted that slavery promoted social harmony and should, consequently, not be restricted by the federal government. David Walker Howe propounded more of an economic explanation of Whig decline, noting that the Whig program of economic diversification became less attractive to self-sufficient planters and small farmers as the South increased its dependency on cotton and slavery. He suggested a common "folk culture" among Southern farmers who "valued flamboyance rather than restraint, hedonism rather than the work ethic." See Thomas Brown, Politics and Statesmanship, 220, and David Walker Howe, The Political Culture of the Whigs, 239.

<sup>37</sup>William Bowen Campbell to William Cullom, June 25, 1852, CFP; Robert L. Caruthers to William Bowen Campbell, June 2, 1852, CFP; John Bell to William Bowen Campbell,

September 3, 1852, CFP; William Bowen Campbell to Cullom, June 26, 1852, CFP; Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 104. William Campbell's initial attitude toward Scott's candidacy was one of skepticism. He wrote his uncle that Scott was not sound on the Compromise of 1850. William B. Campbell to David Campbell, February 15, 1852, CFP.

<sup>38</sup>William Cullom, Speech of the Honorable William Cullom of Tennessee on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in the House of Representatives, April 11, 1854), 4, 8; John Bell to William Bowen Campbell, August 10, 1854, CFP; William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, March 27, 1855, CFP; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, August 22, 1850, CFP; Cullom, Speech, 4, 8.

<sup>39</sup>William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, May 6, 1855, CFP; Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 138. Whigs's social and political philosophy predisposed them toward nativism. Daniel Webster remarked that rapid westward expansion could be a departure from the principle of unity by absorbing foreign people, customs, and governments. To him a vast multi-ethnic empire would end the representative nature of the American system of government by requiring great centralization of federal power. Webster's views are best expressed in Richard Nelson Current, Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1955), and Irving H. Bartlett, Daniel Webster (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978). Campbell and his uncle believed in the perils of unrestricted immigration. As early as 1837, David Campbell warned that in cities "there are thousands of foreigners who have no character and who are ready for any mischief." See David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, May 23, 1837, CFP. Shortly after the European revolutions of 1848, he wrote that new arrivals to America know nothing of American institutions or the English language and were a "serious evil and a baneful influence." See David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, July 16, 1848, CFP.

<sup>40</sup>William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, April 6, 1856, CFP; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, April 10, 1856, CFP; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, July 14, 1854, CFP; William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, July 8, 1856, CFP. Carl Degler noted that Southern Unionists joined the American Party because it did not require a stand on slavery. See Degler, The Other South (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). Tricamo reasoned that

"Know-Nothingism" grew fastest in East Tennessee because its leaders chose to ignore slavery and concentrated on transportation and industrial development. See Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 136.

<sup>41</sup>William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, February 8, 1855, CFP; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, April 22, 1855, CFP. Tricamo interpreted Tennessee's support for Buchanan in 1856 as proof that the growth of the Republican party was weakening voter constancy. Tennesseans depicted Republicans as abolitionists and "Know-Nothings" as wanting to restore the Missouri Compromise line giving Congress the right to restrict slavery. He argued that the chief consequence of the paralysis over slavery in both parties was the further intensification of factionalism. The Democratic party was now hopelessly split between nationalists and "Southern rights" advocates. Moreover, "Know-Nothings" failed to win back the entire Whig electorate. Thus, in the late 1850s Southern extremists like Isham Harris began to move rapidly to the forefront. See Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 160-66.

<sup>42</sup>David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, August 12, 1858, CFP; William Bowen Campbell to David Campbell, July 12, 1858, CFP; Hugh Preston to William Bowen Campbell, May 1, 1851, CFP; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, January 24, 1850, CFP. Middle Tennessee Unionist Emerson Etheridge argued that Southern secession would "bring Canada down to the banks of the Ohio." Etheridge's Unionist career is superbly described in Lonnie Maness, "Emerson Etheridge and the Union," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 48 (Summer 1989), 97-110. Unionists of the Upper South were concerned that the slaveholders in their states would be forced to flee to the remoteness of the Deep South to protect slavery should Lincoln be elected. For a fuller discussion of their views, see Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 106-8.

<sup>44</sup>David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, June 15, 1850, CFP; DeBow's Review, 15 (1853): 65; U.S. Census Office, Compendium of 6th Census 1840 (Washington, 1841), 358; J. D. B. DeBow, Statistics of the United States, vol. 1 (New York: Government Printing Office, 1854), 395.

<sup>45</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 183. Michael Holt and Daniel Crofts submitted that the Whig party organization and electorate provided this Unionist alternative. However, conditional unconditional Unionism best reflected attitudes in the Upper South. See Crofts, Reluctant Confederates,

45-109, and Holt, Political Crises of the 1850s, 220-5. Entrepreneurialism was typical of Whigs of the Upper South. Daniel Crofts observed that Southern manufacturers were naturally reluctant to join the African slave trade to lower the price of slaves. Also, Southern railroad promoters, especially those from Tennessee, feared secession would end Congressional interest in subsidizing a trans-continental railroad as well as European investment in such a venture. See Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 107. Older studies of Tennessee Unionism such as James W. Patton, Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee 1860-69 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934) attributed Tennessee Unionism to closer social and economic ties with the North.



## CHAPTER V

### THE CAST OF THE DICE

It is all a fraud by wicked, ambitious men, their aim all along has been the time, place, distinction, honors and emoluments from which they had been ejected, and rule or ruin is their bold purpose--brave, reckless, desperate men risking their all upon the cast of the dice.

William Campbell, Papers

William B. Campbell's political career has thus far demonstrated that the most destructive sectional issue, slavery, battered but did not break Tennessee Unionism prior to 1860. Even the election of Abraham Lincoln and the rapid exodus of the deep South did not cause Tennessee to close ranks with "Southern rights" advocates and secessionists over slavery. The highly competitive and factionalistic nature of Tennessee's two-party system, the multiplicity of state and local issues, state sectionalism, and the heterogeneous nature of Tennessee's economy served to minimize the worst effects of pro-slavery extremism. On the contrary, Tennessee was the only Southern state in which Whig and Democratic Unionists merged into a Southern Opposition party to win control of the lower house of the state legislature. Similarly, the state's Unionists nominated and ran John Bell

for the Presidency and offered their assistance to mediate once secession began following Lincoln's electoral victory. William Campbell, who took no part in these events as a public official, was further heartened to see the state's powerful Democratic party split over the disunion question, enabling John Bell and the new Constitutional Union party to carry the state in 1860. Once "secessionitis" swept the Lower South, Campbell applauded the efforts of former enemy Andrew Johnson, who brought common sense to the secession question in Congress by exposing the hypocrisy of Southern disunionists who demanded the North obey the Constitution by respecting the Fugitive Slave Law but had themselves violated that very document through secession. The opportunities that the events of 1860 and 1861 afforded Campbell to return to the political arena provide a micro-cosmic view of the nature of Tennessee Unionism between Lincoln's election and the state's secession. William Campbell's stern moralism had always prevented him from practicing the art of compromise. Now this self-righteousness would quicken his attachment to the Union, but, tragically, prevent him from influencing others.<sup>1</sup>

The departure of South Carolina on December 20, 1860, presented Tennessee and the rest of the Upper South with a common dilemma. If the secession of the Lower South continued, the free state majority would become more decisive, leaving the border states alone to face the new

party in power. At a meeting of the state's Unionists in Nashville on December 30, 1860, it was resolved to work for a new Southern Convention that would urge the President-elect to make sectional concessions by supporting compromises involving slavery's extension to the territories. Over the next few months, former Whig leaders John Bell, Gustavus Henry, and Thomas A. R. Nelson took an active part in the compromise process. They urged Lincoln to curb anti-slavery rhetoric about slavery's exclusion from the territories since the issue was geographically moot and maintained by extremists on both sides for political gain. Bell, who had an interview with Lincoln, suggested the President-elect choose a Southern Unionist to his cabinet as a good-will gesture, make public assurances that he was a conservative Republican, and endorse the major compromise efforts in Congress.<sup>2</sup>

Representative Robert Hatton, Campbell's Wilson County protégé, kept his mentor informed about the various compromise proposals. Encouraged at first, Hatton wrote Campbell that Republicans seemed to be growing more pliable daily and the conservatives among them might be able to conclude a compromise agreement before Congress adjourned. John Crittenden of Kentucky proposed a multiple part reconciliation plan in which the South would effectively abandon the Dred Scott decision by allowing Republicans to restrict the spread of slavery north of a new compromise

line. However, the Lincoln Administration never strongly endorsed his work. When Representative Emerson Etheridge of Middle Tennessee joined others in supporting another such effort, the "border state" plan, Republicans stood to gain assurances that the South would relinquish any intentions to acquire new slave territory outside the borders of the United States. Both efforts climaxed in the Washington Peace Conference in which the most controversial provisions of both proposals were modified but still defeated twenty-eight to seven in the United States Senate. In spite of the fact that Congress passed and Lincoln endorsed the Adams-Corwin Constitutional amendment protecting slavery in the states, most Tennessee Unionists pressed Lincoln for broader concessions.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Hatton, like most other Tennessee Unionists, was certain that Tennessee should and would secede if the Lincoln Administration attempted to coerce the seceded states back into the Union. Even Williamson County, with the highest percentage of slave owners in Middle Tennessee, appeared to approach the crisis from a Republican perspective in passing resolutions in January 1861 damning secession and supporting compromise, but also warning that a Union "held by the sword with laws to be enforced by standing armies is not the Union as our fathers intended and is not worth preserving." Tennessee, with its proud

military tradition, associated such sentiments with the "right of revolution."<sup>4</sup>

In retirement at his Lebanon home and still recovering from the death of his uncle, William Campbell followed the compromise proposals and counterproposals with trepidation. Like all of his Unionist contemporaries, Campbell detested Republicans and worried for the institution of slavery. On the other hand, he reached a different conclusion about the purpose, progress, and results of the peace talks. Campbell was not as anxious for Republicans to give signs of good will as he was for the seceded states to do so. To Campbell, Abraham Lincoln's only "crime" was in winning a constitutionally mandated election. The Constitution allowed no "right" of secession. Campbell believed in the "right of revolution" but only as he understood Thomas Jefferson intended it; that is, after a "long train of abuses" hostile to constitutional, Republican government.<sup>5</sup>

Campbell hoped that Lincoln would follow a non-coercive policy that would enable the departed states to "work out their own salvation" because he was confident that they would realize the impossibility of maintaining political independence with an agrarian economy dependent on the North. He was sure that as these economic realities were slowly realized, the Southern Confederacy would have to amend or violate its own constitution to impose order. Centralized power, increased taxation, and finally military

dictatorship would result. As secession lost its appeal, those who had been consulted the least before secession began, the non-slaveholding majority, would recognize disunion for what it truly was: the exaggerated fears of cynical "cotton aristocrats" hungry for political power. Writing to W. P. Jones nineteen days before South Carolina seceded, Campbell restated his lifelong view that the common rights of all states could only be maintained under a general government based on constitutional supremacy rather than through the whims of either "the mob" or the tyrant.<sup>6</sup>

Admitting to his pro-secession cousin that his "poor opinion of Abraham Lincoln" was much "better than many of the leaders of your cotton confederacy," Campbell wrote Alabamian A. C. Beard that the Confederacy's defining element, "the freedom of the white race," would be destroyed either by war or by slave insurrection. Campbell had always shared his uncle's concern over the disgraceful conduct of slave patrols. His Whig sense of order and his own racial nightmares convinced him of the necessity of such measures and the impossibility of controlling either them or fugitive slaves should the South secede. This scenario led Campbell to imagine secession leaders as not only wicked but naive. Understanding secessionist motives to be based on the protection of slavery, Campbell assumed that their strategy with the masses would be to exploit Southern fears of racial equality. While he was certain that once the Confederacy

reintroduced the slave trade, imposed high taxes, and centralized its governmental power, reason and Unionism would return to the yeoman masses, Campbell was working behind the scenes in Tennessee in preparing a strategy to combat disunionist attempts to inflame Southern racial phobias.<sup>7</sup>

Campbell and Unionist associates feared that the man most likely to frighten Tennessee with the specter of "Black Republicanism" was Governor Isham Harris. As a matter of fact, Harris's successful political career was largely due to his brilliance in capitalizing on sectional tension. As a state senator in 1846 he had introduced strongly-worded protests in the Tennessee Legislature against the Wilmot Proviso, including resolutions requiring the state to ignore any treaty concluded by the federal government prohibiting slavery in lands acquired in the Mexican War. Furthermore, Harris recommended firm, united, and concerted action by the slave states should the Proviso pass Congress. Elected to the United States Congress in 1849 and again in 1851, he clearly identified with the new "Southern rights" wing of the Democratic party. Harris's rapid rise was further enhanced by his move to aristocratic Shelby County, with its high percentage of planters. His gubernatorial victories in 1857 and 1859 were due in no small part to his strident denunciation of Northern "fanatics" and his pro-slavery proclivities.<sup>8</sup>

Following Lincoln's election, Harris became one of the most controversial men in the state by distancing himself from the Congressional compromise efforts and arguing that Tennessee needed to act in concert with the states that had seceded or were considering seceding, such as Georgia. The Harris administration's chief mouthpiece, the Nashville Union and American, dropped its earlier insistence on constitutional guarantees to protect slavery and recover runaways and began to popularize the Governor's call for a united Southern front. This strategy was a masterpiece of deception since it could be interpreted dichotomously as a call for Southern unity against Republicans, or against radical, independent action in the South. When Georgia called a secession convention and appropriated funds to arm the state, Harris decided to summon a special session of the Tennessee Legislature for January 7, 1861, to deliberate on the "present condition of the country." Hesitant to propose that the legislators call for a special secession convention, Harris suggested that they draft a referendum giving Tennesseans the option of voting on the separation question. To the chagrin of many secessionists, Unionists in the legislature won approval for a stipulation that even if Tennessee voted on February 9 to have a secession convention, such a body could not end the state's ties to the Union without another popular referendum.<sup>9</sup>



Campbell reentered politics hoping that if Tennesseans voted for a convention, they would also elect a Unionist majority that would defeat secession. Along with Jordan Stokes he was overwhelmingly elected to be a delegate from Wilson County on January 21, 1861. Prior to the referendum, Campbell travelled widely in the county with Unionist J. S. McClain and found anti-secession sentiment to be very strong. At a public meeting in Watertown, Campbell focused on the "folly and madness" of the course secessionists were following and charged "Southern rights" Democrats like Governor Harris with disingenuousness regarding a united Southern front. Campbell excoriated pro-South Democrats for the many years of political gamesmanship with the slavery question. Pointing to an American flag, he exclaimed, "I would rather rally beneath the flag and fight Abraham Lincoln, if it were necessary to maintain our rights, than to go out of the Union and go under some cotton planter or some other trifling thing." Campbell was still sensitive about the "quiet submissionist" label given him by his political enemies in the canvass of 1851. Therefore, he was quick to differentiate between the Constitution and the incoming administration elected under it by explaining the logic and necessity of defending constitutional rights inside the constitutional system.<sup>10</sup>

Once again Campbell was attempting to walk a political tight rope. As governor, he had tried to balance his

Whiggish sense of aristocracy with the wishes of the majority. Now he was attempting to bring reason and logic to a state being propagandized with sectional bravado. To the delight of the audience Campbell averred he would fight Abraham Lincoln should the President usurp power, but never secede. In his estimation, fighting the President inside the Union was a conservative act just as his ancestors had fought King George III but not the Magna Carta nor the English Bill of Rights.<sup>11</sup>

Campbell and his Unionist allies were naturally pleased with the results of the February 9, 1861, election. Although thirty-two counties favored a convention, that option was still defeated by nearly twelve thousand votes. Had the convention met, Unionist candidates would have had a three-to-one advantage, with hardly any overt secessionists elected. The pro-Union position had won 70.2 percent of the votes in high slaveholding counties. Even Williamson County, with its widespread slave ownership, voted against separation 1,684 to 430. Similarly, Davidson and Rutherford counties, with chattels comprising 45 percent of their total population, turned down the convention by comfortable margins.<sup>12</sup>

Following the February 9 vote, Campbell returned home, but unlike other Unionists, he had little time to savor the victory. As the Crittenden proposals and those of the Washington Peace Conference failed, he came under increasing

pressure to lead in the creation of a new Union party and be its candidate for governor in the summer of 1861. Twice in the last ten years, Campbell's martial image had created bipartisan support for the Union. Throughout the spring, he received letters from Union Democrats and former Whigs imploring him to make the canvass. However, Campbell knew that to win he would have to identify with a political party. He was repulsed with the very thought of returning to a brutally competitive political process marked by factionalism and intrigue. His worst fears were confirmed on April 2, 1861, when Bledsoe County nominated him for governor and four days later Wilson County nominated his colleague Jordon Stokes. Campbell would also have to contend with the factions of John Bell and Senator Andrew Johnson, especially since the latter was strongly supported by former Whigs and Union Democrats. Furthermore, Bell and Johnson were rivals over who would dispense federal patronage in the state under the new President. Although disinclined to accept any nomination of any party for any office, Campbell was unaware of imminent disaster at Sumter and of Governor Harris's subsequent machinations that "revolutionized" opinion in the state. Ironically, this turn of events would give Campbell the greatest political opportunity of his career, provided he was ready once again to become a political insider.<sup>13</sup>

The clash at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and the President's "Call to Arms" on April 15 forced the state's Unionists to answer three questions. First, did Lincoln's actions constitute a usurpation of power? Second, if the executive authority had been unconstitutionally extended, was the state justified in invoking the inherent "right of revolution?" Third, and most important, when should this "right" be exercised? Governor Isham Harris's actions compounded the complexities of all three.

On April 17, 1861, Harris refused Lincoln's request to provide troops to suppress insurrection and restore the Union. Harris summoned the legislature back into session and with their approval began to draft an act of secession in the form of a "declaration of independence" from the United States. Two weeks before the legislative action was complete, Harris had unilaterally pledged to the Confederate Secretary of War, Leroy P. Walker, that he would raise three regiments to defend Virginia. He also invited a representative of the Confederate States of America to address the General Assembly and began secret negotiations to enter Tennessee into a military league with the Confederacy. As the pandemonium following Sumter overwhelmed the state, nearly all prominent Union men supported Harris's refusal to contribute militia to the United States and his call for another special session of the legislature. At a Unionist rally in Nashville on April 18, resolutions were drafted and

signed by twelve of the state's leading anti-secessionists disapproving of secession as a constitutional right and refusing to choose sides, but warning that "if the United States should undertake to subjugate the seceded states, then Tennessee must resist at all hazards and by force of arms." Four days later John Bell, one of the twelve, spoke to an audience at the Court House in Nashville suggesting that the separation of the sections was now an accomplished fact partly because of the "indifference which had been manifested toward the Border States in the distribution of the patronage of the Government."<sup>14</sup>

Most other Whig Unionists that Campbell had known for many years, such as Neill Brown, Meredith Gentry, and Robert L. Caruthers, endorsed the Legislature's May 6 "Declaration of Independence," secession ordinance, and approval of the Constitution of the Confederate States. At the urging of Governor Harris, Gustavus Henry agreed to serve as a commissioner to meet with Henry A. Hilliard, Jefferson Davis's emissary to Tennessee, and establish the military arrangements that would place the Tennessee militia at the disposal of the Confederacy. In reality, the legislature proceeded illegally by violating the state's constitution which sanctioned the people's right to alter, reform, or abolish their own government as long as such action was consistent with the Constitution of the United States. Moreover, the General Assembly's May 7 approbation of a

military league with the Confederacy placed the state's military power at the disposal of Jefferson Davis, absolved state officials from the oath to support the Constitution, and established an army in peacetime of 55,000 volunteers, all of which was in violation of the Tennessee State Constitution. Although the legislature established June 8, 1861, as the date on which to hold a special election to settle the secession question, Harris soon requested that Confederate troops be sent into Tennessee. Stationed mainly in Middle and West Tennessee, they were instrumental in providing the necessary intimidation Harris believed he needed to secure a secessionist victory on June 8.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the legislature's "Declaration of Independence," the pressure on Campbell to enter the 1861 canvass was intense. Jordon Stokes withdrew his name from gubernatorial consideration, refused to support Harris's actions, and urged Campbell to accept the nomination of the Union party. Like Campbell, Stokes believed secession was a totally impractical, if not insane, ploy to secure constitutional rights outside the Constitution. Should the North actually try to deprive the South of its rights, Stokes and Campbell favored non-cooperation with the United States through "armed neutrality" until the Republicans were defeated politically. Whig editor William Brownlow wrote Campbell confidently predicting that his candidacy would produce a twenty-thousand vote majority in East Tennessee,

especially since Thomas A. R. Nelson and Andrew Johnson strongly supported him. Other correspondents were just as sure that Campbell could carry much of Middle and even some of West Tennessee because of his ties to railroad men like Memphian Robertson Topp. Rolf Saunders wrote that he could carry Davidson County by a two-to-one margin because of his awesome reputation among Mexican War veterans.<sup>16</sup>

Campbell also received letters from secessionist sympathizers who hoped that his patriotic image would "unite Tennessee and all the South to repel aggression and usurpations." John W. Bowen implored Campbell to make a decision for one side or another to end the uncertainty of the "quiet thousands turned to you in hope." General Gideon Pillow, who had served with Campbell at the battle of Monterrey, wrote Campbell that in such conflicts he could not be a spectator and should "I take the field, I want you along." Pillow, whom Campbell thought of as one of the Mexican War's "political officers," went on to offer his former subordinate a brigade command. Railroad acquaintance Robertson Topp telegraphed Campbell two days later informing him of the Military Board of Memphis and Committee of Safety's offer that he assume command of the western division of the state. So noncommittal was Campbell between the fall of Fort Sumter and the June 8 election, that much of the mail he received was from ordinary citizens and their leaders simply wanting to know of his views.<sup>17</sup>

Despite entreaties from Nashville's Unionists to come to the city and counter recruiting efforts already being made by Tennessee military officers, Campbell deliberately stayed away from the capital, even after his nomination on May 2, 1861, by leaders of the Constitutional Union party. That party's gubernatorial hopes were dealt a severe blow by the events of Sumter and the defection of John Bell, Neill Brown, Gustavus Henry, and Meredith Gentry. A letter from Bell, Brown, John S. Brien, and old friend Balie Peyton on May 3, 1861, informed Campbell of his nomination and asked him to set aside his aversion to public office and accept the nomination. Certainly Campbell must have found it appalling but not surprising that men such as John Bell, whose professed loyalty to the Union had already become legend, would support the Union Party after his belated endorsement of secession. Campbell's overly sensitive temperament and ideological rigidity had been eroding his faith in Whig party leaders for many years. Now as close friends like Robert L. Caruthers defected, Campbell's sense of betrayal was complete. To him, there seemed little point in accepting the nomination of a party that itself was divided over the secession question. Even the candidate eventually nominated, William H. Polk, a Maury County planter and brother to former President James K. Polk, implored Campbell to accept the nomination but still voted for secession on June 8. The actions of such men were too



much for Campbell's almost monopolistic sense of republican virtue. Accordingly, he declined the nomination on May 3. In the August canvass Polk carried East Tennessee by a twelve thousand vote majority but was crushed in Middle and West Tennessee, 39,404 to 8,788 and 20,682 to 7,440, respectively.<sup>18</sup>

To friends and admirers, Campbell's self-imposed silence between the state's "Declaration of Independence" and June 8 special election was inexplicable. Pleas continued to pour in from secessionists and Unionists alike demanding that he make his views known. Although Campbell declined a Confederate command, many took his passivity before the June 8 vote to signify a subtle approbation of secession. Three weeks before the election Campbell began receiving letters from parents asking him to use his influence with Confederate commanders to change the assignments of their sons. As late as August and September 1861, Campbell was still getting detailed information from his Confederate nephew, David Campbell Scales, about his regiment's movements in East Tennessee.<sup>19</sup>

Campbell's lethargy was not matched by secessionists who waged an energetic campaign in Middle Tennessee where the contest would ultimately be decided. Henry Brown, back from university studies in England, found in Nashville secession speakers at every corner, secession flags,

processions in the streets, all ripe for joining the Confederacy. With twenty thousand Confederate soldiers in the state by June 8 and nearly half of these stationed in the capital, the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Mary Catherine Sproul, an Overton County Unionist, wrote that rumors were rampant in her county that Confederate soldiers had been ordered to Livingston, Tennessee, to disrupt Unionist Horace Maynard's speech and even "riddle his hide" if necessary. A school teacher, Sproul was threatened with hanging by "rebel ladies" and told vigilantes planned to kill anyone that voted a Union ticket on June 8. Emerson Etheridge, the only well-known Unionist from Middle Tennessee publicly to denounce secession after the firing on Fort Sumter, was subjected to considerable violence during a speaking engagement in Paris, Tennessee, in which pro-Confederate gangs killed one and injured four.<sup>20</sup>

Referred to by William Brownlow as "God-forsaken scoundrels and hell-deserving assassins," secessionist mobs and Confederate soldiers created, according to Middle Tennessee Unionist Alvan C. Gillem, a "reign of terror that subdued the Union men of Tennessee, keeping them from expressing their opinions." Wilson County Unionist James W. Smith thought Campbell to be the only anti-secessionist of great influence in his county but judged that he did not dare speak out for fear that his property and family would be endangered. On June 8 only East Tennessee voted

decisively against separation. As expected, West Tennessee supported disunion by more than four to one. The most populous and therefore most critical section of the state, Middle Tennessee, supported disunion by a commanding majority of 58,265 to 8,198.<sup>21</sup>

To understand why Campbell exhibited energy prior to the February 9 election and inertia afterward is to understand the nature of Unionism in Middle Tennessee. There is no evidence that Campbell ever seriously considered joining those who abandoned Unionism after Fort Sumter. In a letter to his sister three weeks after Tennessee seceded, he explained that his conscience and family directed his unmovable position for the Union. Margaret Campbell described her brother as a "sad and silent man with his head bowed for the torrent to sweep over him with the hope that truth may then rise triumphant and quail the storm that now prevails. . . ." Unfortunately, Campbell never explained why he kept his Unionism private at such a crucial hour. But his personal and political expectations following the election of Abraham Lincoln help bring the issue into focus.<sup>22</sup>

All his life William Campbell had shared his uncle's optimism about the simple but sincere patriotism of the common man. It had been partly for this reason that he detested what he alleged was Jacksonian manipulation of the masses for political advantage. Campbell despised class

strife and surmised that even in Tennessee's poorest regions felicity was the rule.<sup>23</sup> During the secessionist crisis he shared his Unionist friend Francis Gordon's hope that

there will be a large force of non-slaveholders who will rebel against secession. They do not want blacks set free, they are not willing to fight for slavery and say they will not. . . . If our state goes out of the Union it will have to be done by usurpation or dragooning or it cannot be done at all.<sup>24</sup>

Much of Campbell's correspondence in 1860 and 1861 indicates his belief that secessionists could only take Tennessee out of the Union by stealth, force, and by exploiting the racial fears of the yeoman majority.

For two decades Campbell had witnessed the influence of the slavery issue in the rise of "Southern rights" Democrats and the demise of his own Whig party. He had become convinced that Southern presses only presented the most radical voices among Northern Whigs and Republicans in order to destabilize the South. Even the moderate Republican Banner and Nashville Whig summed up the Republican party as having been built "upon the prejudices of the Northern people against slavery--the men whose political capital for a quarter of a century has been a crusade against slavery. . . ." Such an assessment differed little from the position taken by the radical Maury County Democratic Herald, which simplified the June 8 vote in an editorial stating that "he who votes for the Union under Abraham Lincoln will vote to abolish slavery. He who votes

to go out will vote to continue slavery. This is the question involved and it cannot be disguised." To Campbell, Unionist strategy needed to be directed toward convincing Tennesseans that secession, not Abraham Lincoln, would mean the end of slavery. As noted earlier, Campbell campaigned vigorously before the February 9 vote on the subject, often employing the same antagonistic, class-based tactics for which he had so acrimoniously condemned Jacksonians. Campbell chose terms such as "cotton aristocrats" and "cottonocracy" in depicting those to whom he had referred as power-hungry demagogues for many years.<sup>25</sup>

Campbell construed the February 9 victory as evidence that Tennesseans were satisfied that the Lincoln government had not yet become actively hostile to slavery. Moreover, Campbell was relieved that the state's keen sense of party loyalty and competition was still strong. In his own Wilson County, only 171 out of 1,180 votes had been cast for secession candidates. Campbell believed that secessionist opposition to a popular referendum was indicative of the fear that radicals had of the yeomanry. But Campbell's faith in the non-slaveholding majority and small slaveholders was tempered by his recognition of their gullibility regarding the slavery question. Campbell believed the issue to be an artificial one contrived for political purposes, but with enough emotional impact to cut across class and party lines. To Campbell, victory and defeat over old and

persistent sectional issues like slavery could only be temporary and would require constant vigilance. The hysteria that characterized the state after the fall of Fort Sumter and the June election that soon followed indicated that Campbell was partially correct.<sup>26</sup>

Extensive quantitative studies comparing and contrasting the February 9 and June 8 votes tend to vindicate many of Campbell's worst fears. Although historian Daniel Crofts did not believe the "slavery-cultural thesis" applied to the Upper South, in his most recent work, Reluctant Confederates, he endorsed the theory that secession sentiment was positively related to levels of slaveholding. The tremendous support that high slaveholding counties previously gave to the Union on February 9 seemed to evaporate almost overnight by June 8. On June 8 Tennessee counties with high concentrations of slaves and slaveholders voted to secede by huge margins. Only 4.6 percent of voters in high slaveholding counties remained Unionist on June 8 contrasted to 70.2 percent on February 9. Crofts surmised that the extent of slave ownership had emerged since the February vote to be a "powerful determinate of relative support for remaining in the Union by June 1861." He also noted that Unionist sentiment in low slaveholding counties had declined to only 50 percent of its February strength.<sup>27</sup>

Focusing on Middle Tennessee, Stephan Ash argued that the evanescent nature of Unionist attitudes in high and low slaveholding counties would not have been possible without the severe blow to Tennessee's "ideological nervous system" that Fort Sumter provided. Relying on a wealth of personal accounts, church records, and newspaper sources, Ash depicted the solidarity for secession following the events of April 12 as evidence of a socially harmonious society closing ranks behind its principle ideological unifiers: race, ruralism, agrarianism, and a paternalistic family structure. Ash defined the "heartland " of Middle Tennessee as thirteen counties whose broad prosperity, large slave population, and widespread slaveholding distinguished them from their surrounding Middle Tennessee counties, which more closely resembled the border states. However, the "heartland's" great prosperity was not monopolized by cotton any more than its political structure was by planters. Thus, this "third South," with its large middle class and enviable wealth, would usually decide the political fate of Tennessee in state and federal elections.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Unionism of Tennessee's non-slaveholding majority was greatly influenced by party loyalty and class conflicts, Ash testified that this characteristic was discontinuous with the "heartland." Instead, he persuasively described the region as an "agricultural cornucopia" in which the husbandmen of the "heartland" and their village

neighbors lived, labored, and enjoyed a class society with hardly any of the class strife more typical of other areas. Ash provided impressive examples of class antagonism between slaveholders and yeomen, but pointed to the general dearth of actual class conflict as evidence that the "centripetal forces in white society," namely "patriarchy and paternalism" dominated the centrifugal. Ash found "patriarchy and paternalism" to be endemic in all of the region's social and economic arrangements, especially home, community, and church. In his opinion, the clearest manifestations of these characteristics were in the social deference given to planters by white society and the social control slavery provided. Unlike the Deep South, the "heartland's" great prosperity was maintained by a very large middle class which was content that it benefited both from the paternalism of planters and the social stability slavery provided. Thus, the common ties of ruralism, race, paternalism and patriarchy produced a two-dimensional social system buttressing a "third South" in which a spirit of egalitarian communalism existed side by side with a social and political hierarchy to create the region's "ideological nervous system."<sup>29</sup>

Given the nature of the "heartland's" social and ideological topography, Ash contended that the secession of Middle Tennessee was ineluctable because its people became convinced that the ultimate consequence of sectional



agitation would be a bloody slave uprising. Pointing to a number of incidents in the summer and fall of 1860 that were popularly attributed to Northern extremists and free blacks, Ash submitted that Tennessee's rescission of its ban on the importation of slaves, the revival of slave patrols in many Middle Tennessee counties, the redoubled efforts of churches to provide religious instruction to blacks, and the rapid formation of volunteer militias following Abraham Lincoln's election further illustrated the importance of the slavery question to the folk communities of the heartland. He declared that Unionism was maintained prior to Fort Sumter by the state's peculiar geographical and economic conditions which linked Tennessee more to the North and border states than to its neighbors in the Deep South. While conservatives such as Campbell fought to convince the populace that secession was the most certain means of abolishing slavery, they, too, were firm in their belief that white supremacy and slavery were the "groundsills of society" and consequently, they feared Republicans. The efforts conservatives made to blame extremists for the sectional crisis were seldom effectual because of the commonality of interests in preserving slavery that the region's broad middle class had with the group they usually deferred to: the aristocratic elite. In short, Fort Sumter was a "fierce jolt to a society's ideological nervous system" and the result was the rapid conversion of opinion in the region. In this way,

secession was the logical result of the "primacy of race over class as a social force in the heartland."<sup>30</sup>

Ash challenged the popular post-Civil War view that pro-slavery radicals "dragooned or cajoled or browbeat the common folk" into supporting secession. He observed that the state's swift turnabout after Sumter left little time for aristocratic duplicity. Fort Sumter and Lincoln's "Call to Arms" symbolically ignited the "heartland's" grass roots racial phobias and made any effort by William Campbell and other Unionists futile. In short, Campbell's timid and private Unionism was the understandable consequence of being outnumbered in a class society that had closed ranks behind the slavery question. As one convert to secession told Campbell, "I determined to contribute my portion in the cause of defending the South against what I then believed to be a war for the abolition of slavery in the South."<sup>31</sup>

The most important evidence suggesting Ash's paradigm is statistical. An incredible 95 percent of the votes cast in the "heartland" on June 8 were for secession. Only four Middle Tennessee counties outside the "heartland" voted to remain loyal. In none of these four, Fentress, Macon, Wayne, or Hardin was the total slave population greater than those from the "heartland" that seceded. By contrast six counties in East Tennessee voted to secede, only two of which had more than one thousand slaves. Knox, Roane, Blount, McMinn, Bradley, Hamilton, and Marion are all

examples of East Tennessee counties that remained loyal with higher slave populations than those of Sullivan, Polk, and Sequatchie counties, all of which seceded. Significantly, none of the eastern counties that seceded differed economically from their Unionist neighbors. In his incisive study of Tennessee politics in the antebellum period, "Tennessee Politics, 1845-61," John E. Tricamo surmised that in East Tennessee political party was the determinative factor on June 8 since all of the section's traditionally Whig counties voted for Union, whereas one-half of that region's Democratic counties endorsed separation. However, statistical analyses of Middle Tennessee, especially the "heartland," appear to demonstrate the transcendent position race and slavery occupied over political party affiliation on June 8. In Campbell's consistently Whiggish Wilson County only 15 percent of voters cast ballots for a convention in February 1861. By contrast, 87 percent voted for secession in June. What Ash found more difficult to explain were the tactical decisions made by secessionists between Tennessee's two special elections for secession that appear unrelated to the state's "ideological nervous system."<sup>32</sup>

Certainly, the attack on Fort Sumter and the enthusiastic support that Tennesseans gave Harris's response to Lincoln's "Call to Arms" were the decisive factors in rejuvenating secessionist appeal. However, in context with Ash's thesis and Campbell's passivity, the most critical

question is why these events should have been decisive. If the state's most populous and crucial region, Middle Tennessee, was unconditional in its defense of "paternalism and patriarchy," why was its disunionism tentative? If Middle Tennessee shared the all-encompassing racial phobias common in the Deep South, it would seem that economic and geographical factors would not have prevented them from closing ranks on February 9, 1861. Yet six out of thirteen "heartland" counties voted decisively to remain in the Union on February 9. Without a doubt Fort Sumter totally reversed this outcome, yet secessionists did not use the primary strategy and tactics Campbell had expected them to after April 12. While radicals linked Sumter to a Republican plot eventually to destroy slavery, secessionists employed less radical rhetoric after their February 9 defeat than before and combined the language of anti-republican repression with subterfuge.<sup>33</sup>

Campbell and his fellow Unionists had defeated secessionists in February by presenting their adversaries as both un-American and anti-Southern. Prior to Sumter, disunionists had been successfully caricatured by Unionists as evil, anti-republican conspirators who distorted the slavery question to satisfy their own personal ambitions irregardless of the consequences to the nation or the South. On the other hand, the earnest patriotism of Unionists as

well as their love for the South was best expressed by Bedford County Unionist Henry Cooper when he wrote,

I despise the principle upon which Abraham Lincoln was elected President and disapprove most decidedly of the policy he has pursued since coming to power. Yet I cannot give up this government without a severe struggle. . . . I love our form of government. I think it affords more happiness to the people than any other form of government ever devised by man. . . . I think if we let this experiment fail, then the hope that man can govern himself must be abandoned and we must content ourselves with stronger government. I think also that the dissolution of this Union is the death knell of African slavery.<sup>33</sup>

It seems possible that secessionists learned more from their February defeat than Unionists did from their victory. Secessionists employed Unionist tactics after April 12 with devastating effect. Radicals disarmed Unionists with the types of republican precepts John Bell had expressed so well earlier in his career in remarking, "give me disunion; give me anything in preference to a Union sustained only by power . . . if our future is to be one of eternal discord . . . give me rather separation with all its consequences."<sup>34</sup> Secessionists combined words like "coercion," "domination," and "subjugation," with Revolutionary-era symbols that had an electrifying impact on a state firmly rooted in tradition. In Maury County where newspapers such as the Democratic Herald had unsuccessfully presented secession as slavery's salvation, T. W. Caskey recalled being swept away by the barbecues, picnics, and mass rallies in which Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was read publicly

and Northerners were vilified as "tyrants," "oppressors," and "invaders." Caskey reminisced that

the people of the South felt just as confident that the people of the North contemplated a deliberate overthrow of the Republic as their fathers in the Revolution felt that King George was a tyrant. In all the public orations and private discussions the idea that slavery was the bone of contention never once entered the minds of the common people. They thought they were contending for genuine old George Washington liberty. . . . The speakers told us that a centralized power that would presume to invade a state and set aside the right of local government which was recognized and protected by the Constitution . . . was a tyrant not to be trusted. . . . Secession was not rebellion against the American government, it was the government itself, pulling loose from a tyrannical monarchy, so that it might defend itself! I understood that in seceding the South held onto the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, Bunker Hill, and the life of George Washington.<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, the mesmerizing effect that secessionist propaganda had on the plain folk was partly due to the many years of idealistic rhetoric by Unionist leaders. After all, Whig Unionists had been responsible for the 1852 Tennessee Resolutions endorsing the "right of revolution." Although Governor Campbell had been suspicious of the Resolutions in 1852, in the February 1861 special election he indicated that he preferred to fight Lincoln if it proved necessary to preserve constitutional freedoms. Prior to February 9, former opposition gubernatorial candidate Robert Hatton remarked that

the right and duty of rebellion usually go together. Government is instituted for the benefit of the governed. So when perverted, that the aggregate good is more than over balanced by the injuries it inflicts,

it is the right, and generally, then it becomes the duty of the people to throw off such a government.<sup>36</sup>

Shortly before South Carolina's secession, United States Senator Andrew Johnson delivered one of the most powerful Unionist speeches in Congress distinguishing between federal enforcement of laws and coercion. Johnson declared that the federal government had no more constitutional right to force a seceded state back into the Union than the state had in seceding. This notwithstanding, even Johnson admitted that the "right of revolution" could be accomplished if the majority of the states agreed.<sup>37</sup>

Secessionists were relentless in their determination to convince the masses that Sumter and Lincoln's request for ninety-day militia was tantamount to a declaration of war against the South and the Constitution. Joining them were some of the state's most respected Unionists, most notably John Bell, Gustavus Henry, Meredith Gentry, and Neill Brown. Bell was aggravated that Lincoln's "Call to Arms" went beyond the recovery of federal property and called for military restoration of the Union. Similarly, Unionist Felix Zollicoffer, who was the first general officer of the Confederacy to be killed in battle, while asking Campbell to accept a command in the Confederate Army complained that Lincoln "would sustain the Union by force--a union in which our institutions are constantly menaced while they deny us terms of safety in the Union. They are now united in

purpose to overwhelm and humiliate us."<sup>38</sup> Another admirer of Campbell's martial prowess, Thomas Kelly of Livingston, Alabama, hoped Campbell would not run for governor, so that he could devote all of his energies toward commanding Confederate armies in Tennessee to "defend our homes and institutions against the fanatical hell-hounds of the North." The day before Tennessee seceded, Unionist planter Houston Bills wrote to Campbell lamenting that, "I stuck to the Union until Old Abe forced us out by a war of coercion. . . . We are wrecked and must now act together to make the best of it." Former Whig Senator and gubernatorial candidate Meredith Gentry shared Bills's fatalism when he anguished that, "I looked around and saw myself on the bank of the stream and they were pulling in the gang plank. I shouted to the captain: 'Hold on! . . . I'll get aboard and we'll all go to Hell together.'"<sup>39</sup>

Middle Tennessee secessionists and anti-secessionists all believed in the institution of slavery and white supremacy yet could not close ranks until after April 12. Moreover, Tennessee's late conversion to secession appeared to have only a secondary connection to race and slavery, judging from the defection of conditional Unionists. It seems likely that Middle Tennessee's "ideological nervous system" was held together with the sinews of republican dogma, which in the mid-nineteenth century did not appear to be greatly different than that a mere eighty-five years



earlier. Conditional and unconditional Unionists shared a common belief in the impermanence of republicanism, and the conspiratorial motives of political adversaries.

Secessionists shared these sentiments as they applied to "Lincolnites and monarchists" but failed prior to February 9 to demonstrate how "Black Republicanism" could and would destroy slavery inside the Union. Ultimately, disunionists succeeded, as Charles Lufkin observed because they learned from their mistakes and employed reverse psychology aimed at the most sensitive nerve of Unionists and most all

Tennesseans: the maintenance of a democratic Union with undemocratic methods.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the most important political difference between secessionists and unconditional and conditional Unionists was the degree of political repression that Fort Sumter symbolized. It was this difference more than racial solidarity that led to Middle Tennessee's secession. What conditional Unionists perceived to be a war of compulsion, unconditional ones like Campbell branded a thirty-year old Southern conspiracy that "worked by secretly and skillfully manufacturing a false opinion, which was nourished by the creation of exasperated public excitement and by appeals to sectional prejudices."<sup>41</sup>

The incident that gave secessionists the opportunity to "manufacture a false opinion," Fort Sumter, was to William Brownlow an act commenced by "South Carolina rebels upon unoffending American soldiers sailing into port under

the stars and stripes of their country . . . throughout the seceded states, judgment and truth seem to have fled the brutish beasts and men have lost their reason."<sup>42</sup> Although Andrew Johnson did not believe any federal military action to force South Carolina to return to the Union would be constitutional, he was adamant that the federal government had every constitutional right to uphold its law and maintain its property in all states since no state had a legal right to secede. Since South Carolina had ceded both Fort Moultrie and Fort Sumter to the federal government in 1805, the government had both a constitutional right and an obligation to reinforce its forces there. Unconditional Unionists joined with Jordon Stokes in professing that fear for the future of slavery was not the chief cause of the war but "wicked, mad, ambition and humbled pride, struggling to gain higher eminence, power, and position."<sup>43</sup>

Although secessionists did not have much time to "dragoon, cajole, or browbeat the common folk" into secession, they made use of the time they had. In the final analysis, Peter Maslowski considered force to have been the most important reason for Tennessee's secession on June 8. Since most Unionists had campaigned and won on February 9 by promising that Lincoln's government was committed to compromise and non-coercion, they were not prepared to use force to prevent the secession of Tennessee. On the other hand, secessionists certainly were. After secretly entering

Tennessee into a military league with the Confederacy, Governor Harris made full use of the twenty thousand Confederate troops that entered the state. In Nashville and in other places they joined the volunteer militias and home guards which both impressed and intimidated a populace already being bombarded with rumors, exaggerations, and lies.<sup>44</sup> William Brownlow complained that it

was a common thing to hear men of this class (secessionists) dressed in uniform and under the influence of mean whiskey, swearing upon the streets that they intended to have their rights, or kill the last Lincolnite north of the Mason-Dixon line.<sup>45</sup>

This type of intimidation was especially effective in forcefully silencing Union speakers and newspapers, and in "persuading" voters at the polls on election day. Oliver Temple, an East Tennessee Unionist, later noted that because of these tactics, a Unionist victory on June 8 would have still meant secession and war since the legislature had, at Harris's urging, transferred the state's military power to Jefferson Davis, established a wartime army, and supported the governor's promise to raise regiments to defend Virginia. Interestingly enough, many disunionists had opposed secession by popular referendum out of fear of the masses. Clearly their fear was not paralytic. Instead, they proved more ruthless in manipulating the common folk than even Campbell could have imagined.<sup>46</sup>

The "road" to disunion that Tennessee travelled bears a greater resemblance to the political theses proposed by

Michael Holt and Daniel Crofts than to those of the exponents of a "slavery-cultural" paradigm. The rapid disintegration of anti-secession opinion after Fort Sumter attests both to Unionism's strengths and weaknesses. Tennessee Unionism was so strongly republican in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sense that it could be easily used and often misused by both secessionists and anti-secessionists. At one end of the political spectrum, autocratic individuals, ambitious for wealth, position, and power, were seen as the greatest threat to liberty. At the other end, so were majoritarian democrats. Not surprisingly, Campbell was much more concerned about "Jacksonian mobocracy" than "cottoncracy" before sectional tensions engulfed the state after the Mexican War. But with the ascendancy of the slavery question, Campbell and other Unionists spoke to the fears of a great many people in the use of such words as "cotton aristocracy," even though they shared the racial fears of the masses.

The politicizing of the slavery question, along with perceptive attempts to identify it as a constitutionally protected state right, began soon after the War of 1812. In time it was overshadowed by a more militant pro-slavery hypothesis in which the institution was defended as a "positive good" in itself. Significantly, the triumph Tennessee separationists enjoyed on June 8 came when they disguised their aims with the "spirit of '76." Arguably, if

Abraham Lincoln had followed a more conciliatory course regarding sectional compromise and federal property, Tennessee might not have seceded. Likewise, if disunionist attitudes in the state had been based principally on sociological factors, such as race, Tennessee, with only 24.8 percent of its population in bondage, would have been radicalized perhaps much later, if at all. While race was the mainstay of slavery in the United States, it was not entirely determinative in explaining the complex process by which individuals in the Upper South defined or shed their Unionism.<sup>47</sup>

Campbell's Unionist career gives evidence of the vitality of Tennessee's two-party system, the state's rivalries between its subdivisions, and the dominance of state and local issues throughout most of the antebellum period; all of which mitigated the worst effects of sectional tension. While it is impossible to gauge how successful Campbell would have been in maintaining Unionism after April 12 had he not chosen silence, there is no denying his popular appeal. Although Tennessee's Whig party had never been as successful in the back country as the state's Democrats, Whigs did have a consistent core of supporters to spread their message. A well-known, charismatic figure like Campbell might have provided the patriotic symbol Tennessee needed after the clash at Sumter, had he chosen to run for governor.

Instead, Campbell misjudged the strategy of his adversaries as well as that of many of his long-time Whig colleagues. In fact, his hypersensitivity made it difficult for him to distinguish between the two. Because of his stern moralism and overly sensitive nature he feared reentering a "morally bankrupt" political process that would have entailed a strenuous political campaign. While he held many of the republican views of the state's best known Unionists, Campbell had always acted as if he had a monopoly on republican virtue. Unable to compromise with other Unionists, he probably would have had to campaign against them and Governor Harris, had he decided to accept the Union party's nomination. Although many were convinced he could win, Campbell was not inclined to try. In any case, his decision was tragic. There did not appear to be anything inevitable about Tennessee's secession. As Charles Lufkin professed, Tennesseans were not predisposed toward the Confederacy by either race, geography, or economics. Tennesseans were united in their racial fears but this did not underlie secession, since such phobias might make one either loyal or disloyal toward the Union. Conversely, a "war of compulsion" was inimical to Tennessee's eighteenth-century concept of patriotism and republicanism.<sup>48</sup>

William Campbell's hope that reason and truth would eventually triumph over extremism if Tennessee seceded was realized much sooner than he expected. With the devastation

that accompanied the 1862 Union invasion of Tennessee, Unionism returned to the state. Campbell accepted Lincoln's offer of a brigadier-generalship in the United States Army, was an adviser to Tennessee's military governor until Andrew Johnson attempted to end slavery by executive order, and accepted an appointment as the Commissioner to Administer the Oath of Loyalty to the Union to Confederate veterans in the state. In spite of his services, Campbell had turned away from the cries of Tennesseans when many wanted and needed him the most. One who never forgave, John Williams, wrote Campbell that he should have publicly explained his position before secession, concluding that "I fought with you in the war with Mexico and then thought you were a brave and honest man, but now you have lost the confidence of all honest men in Tennessee."<sup>50</sup> In the years following Campbell's death in 1867 he became more favorably remembered, especially for his heroism in the Mexican War. As a tribute to his patriotic heritage, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, established during World War II, might have pleased Campbell as much as Philip Hamer's assessment: "he was a man in whose integrity, honesty, mental and moral courage even his political enemies had confidence. He was one of those few men in public life who did not seek office but had it thrust upon them."<sup>51</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Andrew Johnson, Speech on the Rightfulness of Secession, Given in the United States Senate on December 18, 19, 1860 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1860), 1-10.

<sup>2</sup>Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 221-6; J. S. Brien to R. M. Corwin, December 31, 1960, Buell-Brien Papers (Tennessee Library and Archives).

<sup>3</sup>Robert Hatton to William Campbell, February 4, 1861, CFP; Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 195-206, 250-1.

<sup>4</sup>James Valux Drake, Life of General Robert Hatton Including His Most Important Public Speeches Together, with Much of His Washington and Army Correspondence (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce, 1867), 320; Nashville Weekly Patriot, 9 January 1861, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>William Campbell, "Political Writings," CFP.

<sup>6</sup>William B. Campbell to A. C. Beard, March 15, 1861, CFP; William B. Campbell to W. P. Jones, December 1, 1860, CFP. William Campbell's views on this subject were not typical of Upper South Unionists, most of which wanted assurances from Republicans. The fact that these assurances were meager persuaded Daniel Crofts that had Abraham Lincoln followed William Seward's advice for a more conciliatory policy, the Upper South would have remained loyal. See Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 90-120.

<sup>7</sup>William B. Campbell to A. C. Beard, March 15, 1861, CFP; David Campbell, "Instructions for Slave Patrols," William B. Campbell to A. C. Beard, March 15, 1861, CFP. Crofts noted that conditional Unionists were also sure that given time secession would lose its appeal and economic hardships would force the seceded states to retrace their steps; Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 110-20.



<sup>8</sup>Robert H. White, Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, vol. 5, 1857-61 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1957), 250; Robert Corlew, Tennessee: A Short History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 281-3, 300.

<sup>9</sup>John E. Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics, 1845-61, 275; Corlew, Tennessee: A Short History, 290. James W. Fertig noted that the February 9 referendum was the result of widespread concern that a convention might lead Tennessee out of the Union contrary to popular wishes. The legislature seemed determined to allow the people to have the final say. Thus, even if a secession convention was held, it could not take Tennessee out of the Union until another referendum was placed before the people. See James W. Fertig, Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee 1860-9 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1898).

<sup>10</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 245; Nashville Republican Banner, 9 February 1861, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 170; Nashville Union and American, 3 March 1861, p. 5; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860; Population, 1860, 466.

<sup>13</sup>Nashville Weekly Patriot, 2, 6, April 1861, pp. 1-5. J. Milton Henry, "The Revolution in Tennessee, February 1861 to June 1861," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 18 (1959): 99-119.

<sup>14</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 269-71; James W. Fertig, The Secession and Reconstruction of Tennessee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1898), 22; J. Milton Henry, "The Revolution," 116.

<sup>15</sup>Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 270; Fertig, The Secession, 26.

<sup>16</sup>Jordon Stokes to William B. Campbell, May 6, 1861, CFP; Jordon Stokes to Adam Fergusson, December 22, 1860, Fergusson Papers; William Brownlow to William B. Campbell, May 6, 1861, CFP; Rolf Saunders to William B. Campbell, May 31, 1861, CFP.

<sup>17</sup>Citizens of Smithfield to William B. Campbell, May 1, 1861, CFP; John W. Bowen to William B. Campbell, May 9, 1861, CFP; Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., The Papers of Andrew Johnson, vol. 4, 1860-1 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 389; Gideon Pillow to William B. Campbell, April 22, 1861, CFP; John Martin and Robertson Topp to William B. Campbell, April 24, 1861, CFP; W. R. Hurley to William B. Campbell, May 20, 1861, CFP; Neill Brown to William B. Campbell, May 25, 1861, CFP; J. C. Apple to William B. Campbell, May 31, 1861, CFP; B. Smith to William B. Campbell, June 3, 1861, CFP; T. H. Williams to William B. Campbell, April 19, 1861, CFP.

<sup>18</sup>A. V. S. Lindsey to William B. Campbell, April 16, 1861, CFP; Neill Brown, John Bell, Balie Peyton, John S. Brien to William B. Campbell, May 3, 1861, CFP; Nashville Republican Banner, 3 May 1861, p. 7, CFP; Robert McBride to Dan M. Robinson, Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly, vol. 1, 1796-1861 (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives and the Tennessee Historical Commission, 1975), 592-3.

<sup>19</sup>R. A. Lapley to William B. Campbell, May 13, 1861, CFP; D. C. Scales to William B. Campbell, August 10, September 6, 1861, Scales-Campbell Papers.

<sup>20</sup>Henry Brown, April 1861, Campbell Brown Diaries and Memoirs; Albert W. Schroeder, Jr., ed., "Writings of a Tennessee Unionist," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 9 (September 1950): 247-50; Lonnie E. Maness, "Emerson Etheridge and the Union," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 48 (Summer 1989): 97-110.

<sup>21</sup>Knoxville Whig, 25 May 1861, p. 5; Graf and Haskins, The Papers of Johnson, vol. 5, 1861-2 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 9; Mary E. R. Campbell, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union 1847-61 (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 291-3.

<sup>22</sup>William B. Campbell to Virginia Shelton, June 25, 1861, CFP; Margaret Campbell to Virginia Shelton, August 22, 1861, CFP.

<sup>23</sup>William B. Campbell to David Campbell, May 31, 1841, CFP.

<sup>24</sup>Francis Gordon to William B. Campbell, April 21, 1861, CFP.

<sup>25</sup>Nashville Republican Banner, 26 May 1861, p. 3; Columbia Democratic Herald, 26 March 1861, quoted in Republican Banner, 26 May 1861, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>Nashville Weekly Patriot, 13 February 1861, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 170-3.

<sup>28</sup>Ash, Middle Tennessee Society, preface, 48.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 22, 281.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 65-75. Mary Jean De Lozier found that racism was a very easy issue to exploit even in low slaveholding counties. See Mary Jean De Lozier, "Civil War in Putnam County," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 38 (1979): 436-61.

<sup>31</sup>G. G. Dibrell to William B. Campbell, December 21, 1865, CFP.

<sup>32</sup>Population, 1860, 466-7; Nashville Union and American, 25 June 1861, p. 2; Tricamo, "Tennessee Politics," 280-3. Perry County in West Tennessee seceded with less than 10 percent of its population as slaves while Hardin, Wayne, and Macon counties of Middle Tennessee remained loyal despite the fact that these three had a much higher slave population.

<sup>33</sup>Nashville Union and American, 3 March 1861, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup>Henry Cooper to William F. Cooper, April 23, 1861; Cooper Family Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

<sup>35</sup>1850 Senate speech of John Bell quoted in the Nashville Weekly Patriot, 24 January 1861, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup>F. D. Srygley, Seventy Years in Dixie: Recollections of T. W. Caskey and Others (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce, 1867), 333-4.

<sup>37</sup>Andrew Johnson, Speech, 11. Among Southern Unionists the fear of a union of compulsion was widespread. Studies such as Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, preface, Michael Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s, 238-56, and Carl Degler, The Other South, 183, all point out that this fear was inseparably linked with the American Revolution and the concern by Southerners that the United States was fast degenerating into a European-style monarchy in the sense that their region might be held as a conquered province by Republicans. Holt is especially persuasive in arguing that the political ideology of egalitarian republicanism was concentric to both sections, especially the fear of anti-republican repression. In short, he believed that any moral passion to abolish slavery or Southern determination to preserve it was secondary to preserving a constitutionally-based republican government of limited powers. William H. Freehling describes Holt's thesis as useful in understanding the antebellum North but less so the South. He postulated that Northerners had reason to doubt the democratic rhetoric of plantation elites regarding slavery's extension to the territories, since secessionists who preached republicanism actually did not accept nor practice it. Slavery not only produced undemocratic methods of social control but also mal-apportioned legislatures, efforts to censor mails, "gag" rules, etc. See William H. Freehling, The Road to Disunion, vol. 1, Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854 (New York: Harper and Row, 1990). Freehling's hypothesis did little to discredit the quantitative comparisons of democratic conditions in the Upper and Lower South by Ralph Wooster, Politicians, Planters, and Plain Folk: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Upper South, 1850-60 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975) and The People in Power: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Lower South, 1850-60 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969). Wooster concluded in these studies that overall the structure of state and county government in the South was democratic in the nineteenth-century sense. Actually, he discovered there to be more rotation in office on the county level in the Lower South than Upper South. He also noted that while the planter aristocracy exerted its influence disproportionately to its actual numbers, it is impossible to prove with any precision that planters dominated Southern politics the way Eugene Genovese or Edward Pessen have said they did. Certainly in the Upper South, where planters held a majority of local offices in only two states, the power of slaveholding elites was limited.

<sup>38</sup>Felix Zollicoffer to William B. Campbell, May 15, 1861, CFP.

<sup>39</sup>Thomas Kelly to William B. Campbell, May 20, 1861, CFP; Houston Bills to William B. Campbell, June 7, 1861, CFP; Meredith Gentry quoted in Charles L. Lufkin, "Secession and Coercion in Tennessee, The Spring of 1861," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 50 (Summer 1991): 102.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 98-108.

<sup>41</sup>William B. Campbell, Political Writings, 1863, CFP.

<sup>42</sup>William Brownlow, Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession (Philadelphia: G. W. Childs, 1862), 94.

<sup>43</sup>Johnson, Speech, 7-11; Jordon Stokes, Oration of the Honorable Jordon Stokes on the Great Conspiracy, Rebellion, and Civil War in the United States in the Tennessee House of Representatives, July 4, 1862 (Nashville: Nashville Daily Union, 1862), 10.

<sup>44</sup>Peter Maslowski, Treason Must Be Made Odious: Military Occupation and Wartime Reconstruction in Nashville, Tennessee, 1862-5 (Millwood: KTO Press, 1978), 13.

<sup>45</sup>Brownlow, Rise and Progress, 273-4.

<sup>46</sup>Oliver P. Temple, Notable Men of Tennessee from 1833-1874 (New York: Cosmopolitan Press, 1912), 328-9. Older studies such as John R. Neal, Disunion and Restoration in Tennessee (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1899); James W. Fertig, The Secession and Reconstruction of Tennessee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1898); James W. Patton, Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee 1860-9 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934); and Mary E. R. Campbell, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union 1847-61 (New York: Vantage, 1961) all depict Tennessee secession as the inevitable consequence of its economic, social, and political ties to the Deep South. Neal argued that Middle and West Tennessee "joined the Confederacy as willingly as South Carolina or Mississippi." Fertig theorized that Tennessee maintained the same doctrines of state sovereignty and secession as the Deep South and demanded the same guarantees about slavery. Older works such as these provided an alternative to the view held by their Northern contemporaries that secession was a coup d'état engineered by Governor Harris and a small group

of willful men who led Tennessee out of the Union by force or trickery. Campbell and Patton placed less emphasis on any rigid secessionist ideology in the state and more on the shock of events in determining the secession of Tennessee. Both believed race and slavery occupied a central position in Tennessee life but that close economic ties to the border states prevented the formation of a pro-Confederate ideology as early as in the Deep South. Instead, events such as the John Brown Harper's Ferry Raid forced Tennessee to close ranks behind the Lower South. Campbell placed more emphasis on Fort Sumter and its political meaning than did Patton. More recent works such as those by Tricamo, Crofts, and Lufkin demonstrated how slavery could disrupt but not destroy party allegiance in Tennessee because of the plethora of state and local issues, the nature of Tennessee's fiercely competitive two-party system, and the strong personal rivalries endemic to Tennessee's political parties. Crofts was especially impressive in quantitative terms in illustrating voter consistency in Tennessee, but so was Frank Mitchel Lowrey III, "Tennessee Voters During the Second Two-Party System, 1836-60: A Study in Voter Constancy and in Socio-Economic and Demographic Distinction" (Ph. D. diss., University of Alabama, 1973). Both studies point to rigid party lines between 1840 and 1860. By placing less emphasis on racial solidarity among whites and more on the fear of anti-republican repression and the divisiveness of slavery and disunion prior to Sumter, Crofts and Holt made a forceful case that Tennesseans were much more united over the political nature of the Union rather than disunion to save slavery. To Tennesseans, the clash at Sumter and Lincoln's "Call to Arms" afterwards were directly related to the confutation that a "more perfect Union" must never be held together by force. The "logical" result of such a view is to place heavy responsibility on Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis for the events of Sumter. Not all recent works on this subject have been influenced by the political determinism of Michael Holt. Stephen Ash believed that "latent secessionism" in the state would have eventually triumphed, especially since Middle Tennesseans stood united with their Deep South kinsmen over the one fact that overshadowed all else: white supremacy. After analyzing the Civil War Veterans' questionnaires, Fred Bailey, who attested to a more significant amount of class friction than Ash did, admitted that conflicts between slaveholder and yeoman were "controlled" prior to the war by racial solidarity and social segregation. See Fred Bailey, "The Poor, Plain Folk and Planters: A Social Analysis of Middle Tennessee Respondents to the Civil War Veterans Questionnaires," West Tennessee Historical Society Papers 36 (1982): 5-25, "Class Contrasts in Old South Tennessee: An Analysis of the Non-Combatant Responses to the Civil War

Veteran's Questionnaires," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 45 (Winter 1988): 273-76, and Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Jennifer Boone's work in this field was supportive of Ash. Unlike Bailey, she ignored the fact that in the Civil War Veterans' Questionnaires of Tennessee the wealthy and well educated were overrepresented and concluded that antebellum Tennessee was a "complex society marked by class differences yet unmarked by class strife." She attributed the absence of social conflict to the Southern tradition of hospitality, a mobile socioeconomic ladder, common agrarian experiences, and local churches and community schools which gave people opportunity to mix and mingle. See Jennifer K. Boone, "Mingling Freely: Tennessee Society of the Eve of the Civil War," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 51 (Fall 1992): 137-46.

<sup>47</sup>Political determinists such as Daniel Crofts place very heavy responsibility on Abraham Lincoln for the secession of the Upper South. In Reluctant Confederates, Crofts analyzes the many behind-the-scenes opportunities, negotiations, and maneuvers that took place before Sumter and concluded that Lincoln worked hard to prevent Republican sectional concessions. He reasoned that Lincoln's reluctance was very tragic since his party seemed evenly divided between anti-concessionists and conciliators. Crofts admitted that the deep divisions within the Republican party were instrumental in preventing Lincoln from boldly pursuing either anti- or pro-concession options, fearing the disruption of his party. Also, Lincoln did not share the commonly-held view among Southern Unionists that the Deep South would eventually return to the United States out of economic necessity. Crofts's research into the Southern reaction following Lincoln's April 15, 1861, "Call to Arms" indicated that this event, more than Sumter was decisive in "forcing" four more states out of the Union. Crofts wondered whether a simple statement by Lincoln requesting militia to hold federal property might not have been more politically expedient than one announcing the Union would be restored by force of arms. Kenneth Stampp, James C. Randall, and David M. Potter have maintained that Lincoln's actions regarding Sumter involved no abandonment of his policy of voluntary reunion. Therefore, Stampp does not believe Lincoln's attempt to reprovise Fort Sumter was a sudden and deliberate determination to provoke war. See Kenneth Stampp, The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background on the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Stampp focused on those actions prior to Sumter that shed light on Lincoln's peaceful intent, such as the President's warning to the governor of South Carolina that a

relief expedition had been sent, while stressing the humanitarian aim of the mission. Stampp admitted there is evidence to indicate Lincoln expected hostilities, but his defensive strategy was a victory since it ended with the Confederates commencing hostilities. The only other defensive option open to Lincoln was to accept the advice of John Bell and other Southern Unionists to recognize the existence of the Confederate States of America on the assumption that the new entity would collapse on its own. Since Lincoln did not believe the Deep South would voluntarily rejoin the United States, the President decided to force the issue in the least hostile way, that is, by upholding his constitutional oath to protect federal property. Stampp's conclusions support those of Richard Nelson Current, Lincoln and the First Shot (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1963), who proved that Jefferson Davis had very strong politically-based motives for authorizing the attack on Sumter. See, also, David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis 1848-61 (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), and James Randall, Lincoln the President, 4 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1945-55). Works such as these have been very influential in discrediting older studies such as Charles W. Ramsdell, "Lincoln and Fort Sumter," Journal of Southern History 3 (August 1937): 135-65. Ramsdell and his supporters popularized the portrait of a cynical President maneuvering the Confederates into firing the first shot in order to save the Union, the Lincoln Administration, and the fractious Republican party. In this sense more recent works such as Reluctant Confederates have a lot in common with the Ramsdell school of thought.

<sup>48</sup>Lufkin, "Secession and Coercion," 88. The existence of leaders like William Campbell are the reason many historians hesitate when trying to draw a clear causal line between direct involvement with slavery and attitudes toward secession. As Carl Degler elucidated in The Other South, 122, there were so many exceptions regarding pro-slavery and pro-secession that precision on the subject is impossible. Many unconditional Unionists were slaveholders or strongly supported slavery (William H. Polk, Andrew Johnson, William Brownlow, Henry Cooper, etc.). Of course, the great majority of both Confederate and Southern Unionists did not own any slaves. These well established facts are underscored along with others in Richard Nelson Current's Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992). This recent study of the South's "inner Civil War" revealed that of the 100,000 Southern Unionists who fought for the United States in the Civil War, most were very similar to Confederates in social, economic, and ethnic background. Although



Confederates had much more of their wealth in the form of slaves, the two groups were very much alike with respect to economic and social status. Current found the greatest differences between the two groups to be educational background and family heritage. On the whole, Southern Unionist leaders were much better educated than Confederates, particularly those of Middle Tennessee. For example, Return J. Meigs was a scholar who wrote books about the legal profession in Tennessee. Before becoming State Librarian he prepared a digest of the statute laws of the state that became Tennessee's standard legal code. J. W. Richardson, a Whig Unionist, practiced medicine in Murfreesboro and was president of the State Medical Society. Campbell and his closest associates were highly educated, with very few exceptions. Interestingly enough, Current found a similar pattern regarding family heritage, concluding that Southern Unionists were more likely to come from families with proud records of fighting either British or Indians. For a socioeconomic examination of one East Tennessee Volunteer Infantry, U.S.A. regiment, see Walter Lynn Bates, "Southern Unionists: A Socio-Economic Examination of the Third Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment, U.S.A.," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 50 (Winter 1991): 226-37. This regiment had an illiteracy rate of 22.3 percent compared to 14.5 percent statewide. Bates concluded from this case study that kinship and community networks played a key role in determining whether an individual would fight for the Union or for the Confederacy.

<sup>49</sup>Emerson Etheridge to William B. Campbell, June 8, 1862, CFP; G. H. Taylor to William B. Campbell, February 24, 1866, CFP.

<sup>50</sup>John Williams to William B. Campbell, June 10, 1862, CFP.

<sup>51</sup>Phillip M. Hamer, Tennessee: A History 1673-1932, vol. 1 (New York: American Historical Society, 1933), 481.

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