

# A QUESTION OF NATIONAL DESTINY

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## **The South under Siege 1830–2000:**

A History of the Relations between the North and the South

Frank Connor

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*Reviewed by William Scott*

They were fighting for the things for which men have always fought: family, faith, friends and country. For the ashes of their fathers and the temples of their gods.

—Patrick J. Buchanan

The last decade has seen a resurgence of interest in the war that, more than any other, defined America's form of government—the 1861–1865 struggle by the Confederate States of America for withdrawal from the union created by colonial secession from Great Britain. This war continues to illuminate sharp divides in American political, social, and cultural thought 138 years after it effectively ended with Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox. It is a measure of the degree of unresolved conflict still extant that partisans of the conflict cannot agree even on the name by which the war should be called. The winners long ago decreed it a "civil war." But no honest person, Southern or otherwise, can seriously contend that the South was vying for control of the residual nation left after eleven Southern states began their bid for separation. Southerners will accept the neutral War between the States appellation (and even convinced Congress to pass a resolution to that effect in the 1920s, when political correctness was but a gleam in the eye of the Frankfurt School's odious minions). But, many Southerners see the war for what it really was—the War for Southern Independence.

A number of books supporting the Southern cause have appeared recently, many by non-Southerners. Perhaps this reflects a growing consciousness of the ugliness liberalism has inflicted on America as well as a renewed appreciation for the essentially conservative character of the Old South. Most of these books have focused on historical aspects of the war: e.g. the causes of the war, the character of Abraham Lincoln, a more balanced view of the conditions imposed on African slaves, etc. Among the more useful are Charles Adams's *When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession*, Jeffery Hummell's *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men*, Webb Garrison's *The Lincoln No One Knows*, Thomas DiLorenzo's *The Real Lincoln*, Greg Durand's *America's Caesar*, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross* (1975, reissued in 1995), John C. Perry's *Myths and Realities of American Slavery*, and Donald Kennedy's *Myths of American Slavery*. Untainted by political correctness, they do much to weaken the ideological and moral chains imposed on the losers. However, most do not deal with the issues that were under contention during the war as they apply to modern Americans.

But nothing remains static for long, and once Pandora's box was opened, questioning the past was certain to lead to questions about the present. This is certainly the case with Frank Connor's *The South under Siege*. Connor devotes much of his massive 700-plus-page text to a review of the history of the South from the founding era up to the present. However, the underlying purpose is not to rehash history but to reawaken a spirit of cultural identity and activism among Southerners concerned with the direction America has taken in the half century since World War II.

Today the U.S. social fabric continues to be shredded by a series of battles in a cultural war that was proclaimed clearly as such in the late 1980s. Today we see almost-daily battles over: preferential treatment of "victim" groups; the banishment of Christian values from the mores enforced by federal, state and local governments; unlimited sex and violence in our mass-entertainment media; the steady destruction of the family; theoretical rehabilitation versus real punishment of criminals; environmentalism as a means of totalitarian control; animal rights; and on and on and on....

Actually, this cultural war has raged unabated since the 1830s, when Northern liberals decided to supplant Christianity with secular humanism as the official religion, and they selected the religious South as their battleground.

A key premise of Connor's book is that an ideological war has been fought against traditional Western culture and religious beliefs at least since Jean Jacques Rousseau and the French Revolution. The nature of this conflict is manifold: secular humanism vs. Christianity; mankind as inherently good and therefore perfectible vs. sinful humanity in need of a moral compass; concern for "oppressed" others vs. taking care of family, faith, and community first; government as all-powerful enforcer of social outcomes vs. government as an organic compact of the people. However expressed at any place and time, the

conflict is always grounded in egalitarian universalism vs. the particularities of distinct peoples—a struggle aptly described by Lincoln’s future Secretary of State, Senator William Seward, as an “irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces.”

But layered on this conflict is another struggle that is rarely discussed—the age-old imperial desire of the avaricious and the powerful to control the course of political, social, and economic conditions in order to secure for themselves yet more wealth and power. Acting in concert, universalism and the desire for power have wrought much of the damage done to humanity in the last two centuries. In order to obtain or consolidate power, unscrupulous elites invariably wield the universalistic appeal to build a following among the disaffected, a power base from which to attack an organic culture targeted for destruction. Perhaps the best measure of Connor’s exposition is his exploration of the impact of these forces. As he shows, the confluence of these two fellow travelers, fused together in the Republican Party of 1860, can accurately be said to have been the primary cause of the War of Northern Aggression. Universalism—in the form of radical abolitionism—inflamed Northern public opinion against the South, allowing wealthy Northern industrialists to consummate a war of imperial conquest against an economically exploited South determined to resist its own subjugation.

Most non-Southerners pay scant attention to the South’s brief. Southern disavowal that slavery was the sole cause of the war is largely ignored—primarily due to decades of pervasive anti-Southern academic and media bias. And yet the Southern case is historically unassailable—a point that Connor is certainly not the first to elaborate. Although the two regions had cooperated to evict the British during the Revolution, they were different in many ways from the beginning. As David Hackett Fischer chronicles in *Albion’s Seed*, Massachusetts’s English settlers were led by East Anglian Puritans. Fischer describes them as being privately the most orderly and publicly the most violent people in America. The word “puritanical” long ago entered the language as a reflection of their domineering, self-righteous temperament. Joining them to the south, English midland Quakers settled Pennsylvania and the Delaware Valley, bringing to America the Society of Friends and its universalist dogma. (The synthesis of these two groups created a real case of attitude: *We believe in the brotherhood of mankind—and if you don’t agree, we will kill you.*)

Virginia’s British colonists included many Southwest English aristocrats and their retainers. Much of the rest of the South was populated by lowland Scots, northern border English, and Scotch-Irish Scots colonized into Northern Ireland by the Crown in an attempt to weaken Irish resistance. As a matter of history, the Puritans’ English ancestors had waged wars of conquest against the Scots for a thousand years. In many ways, the struggle between North and South was but a continuation of the Scottish Presbyterian struggle for autonomy from England. (Concerning the American Revolution, no less an

authority than Horace Walpole remarked to Parliament: “There is no use crying about it. Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson, and that is the end of it.”) Led by Virginia’s aristocratic officer corps, the fighting élan of a Confederate infantry well fortified with Scotch-Irish frontiersmen fell short only through lack of numbers.

While North and South began the union with some degree of economic and demographic and thus political—parity, the North grew rapidly in population and industrial capacity in the first half of the nineteenth century. Consistent with its mercantilist mantra, the North favored the so-called “American System,” the foremost exponent of which was the American statesman Henry Clay. Its fundamental tenets were threefold: high protective tariffs, central banking, and a system of federally financed internal improvements (railroads, canals, etc.)—all designed to profit the rich industrialists who backed the Federalist and Whig parties. The agrarian South was, by climate and circumstance, dependent on an economy built around cotton and other agricultural exports. Most manufactured goods were imported. The South stood to lose enormously by punitive Whig tariffs—at times as high as 47 percent—and it did. By 1860, roughly 85 percent of the federal government’s revenue came from tariffs and excise taxes on Southern imports and exports. Since the Northern population outnumbered white Southerners by a factor of four to one, Southerners averaged roughly twenty-five times the per capita taxation of Northerners. The money, however, was spent almost entirely in the North. The patent unconstitutionality of this economic rape was sanctimoniously ignored by Northern politicians—who were paid good money to vote the interests of their Yankee masters.

By the 1850s, the Whig Party had begun to lose ground to the more popularly based Democratic Party. And then a new factor entered the scene. Abolitionism had grown in influence as its followers spewed forth the vilest and most hate-filled invective imaginable against the South. Sensing an opportunity finally to wrest political control from the demographically disadvantaged South, Northern industrialists cast their lot with the abolitionists—and the Republican Party was born. John Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry—in which he planned to arm Virginia’s slaves and launch a genocidal massacre of white Southern men, women, and children alike—was funded by rich Northerners. (For the whole sordid story, see Otto Scott’s *The Secret Six*.) The murderous Brown was hanged by Virginia but eulogized as a martyr in the Northern press and compared, favorably, to Jesus Christ. With the memory of the Haitian massacre of French planters, the bloody Nat Turner rebellion, and other racial horrors burned into Southern consciousness, Brown’s lionization irretrievably alienated the South. It thus contributed directly to the onset of the war that followed the election of former Whig Abraham Lincoln.

Connor traces the often-ignored subjugation of the South during Reconstruction and the decades that followed, showing how the South was systematically exploited in ways that have been largely hidden from view. It took until 1900 for the South to achieve an economic status equivalent to that of 1860. Meanwhile, the rest of the country had advanced far beyond its mid-1800s status. As a single example, railroads owned by Northern robber barons such as J. P. Morgan set their freight rates so that shipments out of the South cost significantly more than shipments into the South. This placed an inescapable penalty on nascent Southern industry, perpetually disadvantaging it vis-à-vis Northern manufacturers. This differential, enforced by the U.S. government, endured until 1950.

Although the South formed a convenient early target for liberal wrath, the culture war has long since metastasized into a far broader assault. The corrosive cancer of political correctness reaches into virtually every corner of the nation. Via this malicious tactic, aspects of Western society necessary to its continued cohesion and the survival of its founding peoples are attacked as evil. Loyalty to one's own kith and kin, one of the most fundamental of all human traits, becomes prejudice and racism. The dynamic expansion of the West, bringing civilization, order, and economic development to much of the world, becomes imperialism and oppression. Out of the cauldron of fanatical Marxism a new proletariat has arisen, consisting of racial minorities, feminists, homosexuals, and other "disadvantaged" groups.

Aiding and abetting by betrayal from within are sincere liberals. Lenin called them "useful idiots" because they naively believe the Marxist egalitarian party line and eagerly cooperate in its imposition, by force if necessary – the inevitable fruit of Puritanism realized.

The utility of moralistic causes and oppressed classes in consolidation of power by a ruling oligarchy is not well understood by most Americans; if it were, we would not be afflicted with the problems we have today. But, it was well understood by Southern statesmen. Perhaps the most eloquent was John C. Calhoun, the South Carolina senator who ranks with Thomas Jefferson as one of the foremost defenders of limited government in American history. In his postwar book *In Defense of Virginia*, Robert L. Dabney cited Calhoun's warning against federal use of the slavery issue to consolidate power.

All our statesmen, of all parties, had taught us, not only that the reserved rights of the States were the bulwarks of the liberties of the people, but that emancipation by federal aggression would lead to the destruction of all other rights. A Clay, as much as a Calhoun, proclaimed that when abolition overthrew slavery in the South, it also would equally overthrow the Constitution. Calhoun, and other Southern statesmen, with a sagacity which every day confirms, had forewarned us, that when once abolition by federal aggression came, these other sure results would follow: that the same greedy lust of power which had meddled between masters and slaves, would assuredly, and for the stronger reason, desire to use the political weight of the late slaves against their late masters....

Connor's book is notable for covering topics other writers have avoided. His discussion of the role of certain Jewish groups in attacking not only the South but much of Western tradition will surprise many Southerners, who regard Jews as virtual co-religionists because of their centrality to the Bible. Connor finds balance, drawing a distinction between generations of Sephardic and German Jewish immigrants in the 1600s and 1700s vs. the wave of socialist-minded Russian Jews who entered America beginning in the 1880s. Earlier immigrants, he believes, joined the fabric of American life just as did tens and hundreds of thousands of British, Scottish, Irish, German, French, and Scandinavian colonials. Connor contends that many within the Russian group differed in that they were ideologically attuned to the same secular humanist pseudo-gospel that had inspired liberals since Rousseau. They quickly allied themselves with Northern liberals, forming a coalition that continues to this day.

Connor's proposed way ahead is public activism in opposition to liberalism's excesses, motivated by restored Calvinist morality. He is certainly correct about activism. Any restoration of Western cultural norms can result only from a popular movement grounded on the legitimate expression of cultural grievances. In fact, Southern organizations are gaining strength as they champion Confederate heritage issues. Equally important is the question of the Christian perspective as the basis for cultural restoration. So degenerate are many mainline denominations that the Social Gospel has replaced the real one. It seems likely that a sense of cultural identity must accompany any religious sentiment, else the movement will fall short of its goal.

This leads to a key question: What inspires Southerners to cling to the Lost Cause long after its memory has grown cold? A thoughtful neutral observer might say that the losers of any war remember the outcome longer than the winners. A Southerner might counter that, in the fundamental points contended by the war, the South was right. But the truth is likely to be found at a deeper, more fundamental level. While the South lost its struggle for separation, it did not lose its sense of identity. This sense of identity is a valuable commodity as immigration remakes America into a Third World country; as non-Christian and anti-Christian values displace America's historical European (and predominantly British) culture; and as growth of corporate and government power erodes the freedoms Americans once took for granted. Ultimately, the war was not about slavery vs. freedom, or about tariffs vs. free trade, or about states rights vs. a consolidated federal government, or even about Christianity vs. secular humanism—all of which causes have been suggested at one time or another.

Rather, the War for Southern Independence was a desperate struggle for the survival of a distinct people. In other words, it was a war for national existence—where "nation" is defined, as it has been throughout history, as a collection of related peoples, united by language, faith, culture, traditions, values, and, most important, shared bloodlines.

Connor has tapped into the early stages of a potentially important political development—an emerging resurgence of Southern consciousness. There already exist several organizations operating within the political system—the League of the South, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and the Council of Conservative Citizens, among others. The driving force behind each group is dissatisfaction with a nation remade in the image of global mercantilism, centralized government, secular humanism, and radical multiculturalism.

Standing against this onslaught, the Southern awakening is arguably the only truly revolutionary movement in America today.

To be sure, conventional conservatism—in the form of Second Amendment organizations, the Christian community, home schoolers, anti-abortion activists, anti-gay groups, fiscal conservatives, Tenth Amendment advocates, immigration control activists, and others—wields considerable influence. (If it did not, neo-conservatives would not be working so assiduously to co-opt it from within.) Elections are still won and lost as these groups energize members to work for issues and candidates and to show up at the polls. But most of these groups are single-issue oriented. The idea that their battle is part of a larger culture war and that strategic alliances are necessary for victory is beyond their ken. It can be legitimately asked: If any of these groups achieved complete victory, would America's trajectory through history change in any meaningful way? With the exception of the movement for immigration reform—which is at least as important as cultural renewal and certainly as urgent—a complete victory for any of these groups would serve as little more than a temporary dam across one tributary of the flood that is sweeping America.

Not so Southern resurgence. While still embryonic in form, the Southern awakening carries with it the historical, cultural, and moral legacy of an ultimate struggle for political sovereignty by a culturally distinct people. The Confederate Battle Flag, under increasing attack as a supposed symbol of slavery, is in reality the symbol of a nation in being through four years of conflict, pain, and tragedy. The Flag's supporters view it as the legitimate symbol of the aspirations of America's republican founders—a mantle that supporters of the unitary state created by Abraham Lincoln's war of economic and cultural hegemony cannot claim despite some of the most bizarre rhetorical contortions ever uttered. While some may question the value of fighting heritage battles, in reality they serve a vital purpose. All struggles must have symbols and issues that arouse people from lethargy and inspire their participation. Southern heritage is such an issue. Its symbols are potent icons of cultural identity—an explicit and unmistakable rallying point for resistance.

Once set in motion, who is to say where this struggle will lead—or whether it will remain confined to the South? Indeed, many Southern activists would argue that they are already on the front line of the wider culture war. It is not surprising that the left fears the South and devotes inordinate resources to its suppression. Its intentions set firmly on global empire, the ruling oligarchy is

not so foolish as to miss the meaning of Southern symbols—or the power they convey to their defenders. Though still small, fragile, and divided, the new Southern consciousness has the latent potential to completely thwart the left's goals—a destiny directly attributable to the one characteristic that distinguishes it from all other conservative ideals. Unlike its apparent siblings, it is not about a single issue—the immediate focus of Battle Flag defenders notwithstanding. Indeed, the Southern cause is not about an issue at all. It is about the cultural identity of a people and the intrinsic sense of distinctiveness they must possess in order to survive. It is about nationhood—the one force that, throughout history, has stood between oligarchies and their consolidation of empire.

The urge that impels its adherents onward is buried deep within—often inchoate, rarely conscious. But it is all the more powerful for that—an ineradicable imprint passed down through countless generations of forebears. It will rise up again, Phoenix-like, with each new generation. William Faulkner captured its essence in *Intruder in the Dust*:

For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863. . . and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armistead and Wilcox look grave, yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think *This time. Maybe this time. . .*

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