

Representative Mann: Horace Mann, the Republican Experiment and the South

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Northern reactions to the *antebellum* South can only be fully understood in the context of northern concerns for the future of the American republican experiment, which was at base the search for an American national identity.¹ Central to *antebellum* concerns in this regard was the issue of freedom in a nation which yet retained slave labour. In the nineteenth century, the belief in freedom was, in Fred Somkin's words, "the *res Americana*, the matter of America."² In the decades preceding the Civil War, however, North and South came to hold very different ideas of what freedom meant, and what it entailed. In time, northern concerns over slavery and the society that relied upon it found political expression in what Eric Foner termed the "Republican critique of the South." This critique was not focussed on slavery alone but on the South as a whole; its society, culture, industry, and intellectual achievements. It was both an attack on the South and an affirmation of northern superiority.³

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¹ William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*, 1961. Repr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), *passim*; David Bertelson, *The Lazy South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 146; C. Vann Woodward, *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North/South Dialogue* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 6–7; and Susan-Mary Grant, "When is a nation not a nation?: The crisis of American nationality in the mid-nineteenth century," *Nations and Nationalism*, 2: 1 1996, 105–29, 110–11.

² Fred Somkin, *Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 9.

³ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1970); William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York: Oxford

Ultimately, it was a sectional message with national ambitions.⁴ The “matter of America” became the matter of the North. How this happened, however, has never been adequately explained.

This essay seeks to shed some light on the background to the “Republican critique” by looking in particular at the career of Horace Mann of Massachusetts, specifically at his brief period in Congress (1848–52) during which he adopted an increasingly confrontational stand toward slavery and the South. Mann is well known as the architect and founder of American public education. Consequently, historians have left Mann to the social scientists, who have written several volumes on his educational impact and on the development of the Common School system in the United States.⁵

Although it has been acknowledged that Mann’s impact on the nineteenth century was rooted in a reform outlook which he shared with many Whigs of his generation, and some Democrats, historians have not thought to link this aspect of Mann’s career with his stand against the “Slave Power” between 1848 and 1852.⁶ Historians have therefore missed an opportunity to examine in detail the opinions of a man who functioned at the heart of nineteenth-century northern society. Mann represented that society in a very broad sense – its outlook, its concerns, its ambitions, and its fears – and as an educator he enjoyed a position of considerable influence within it. More significantly, given that he was not a professional politician and therefore had no political axe to grind, his views reveal more about the issues and concerns behind what eventually became the “Republican critique.”⁷

Mann was a reformer who had developed a very clear idea of America’s mission in the world and how, through education, that might best be

University Press, 1987); and Howard Temperley, “Anti-Slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism,” in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher, eds., *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Kent: Dawson-Anchor, 1980), 348.

⁴ Grant, “When is a nation not a nation?,” 120–23.

⁵ See Gabriel Compayre, *Horace Mann and the Public Schools in the United States* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1907); Raymond B. Culver, *Horace Mann and Religion in the Massachusetts Public Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929); Robert B. Downs, *Horace Mann: Champion of Public Schools* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974); and Edward I. F. Williams, *Horace Mann: Educational Statesman* (New York: Macmillan, 1937).

⁶ Jonathan Messerli, *Horace Mann: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), xi.

⁷ Mann had been elected as a Whig senator in Massachusetts in 1834, and later served as President of the Senate between 1836 and 1837. His career prior to that point had been devoted to law, and after it to education. He was elected Secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts in June, 1837.

realized. In common with other reform-minded northerners, Mann believed in “the American dream of unlimited material progress for the society at large, of upward mobility for all its people.”⁸ And, like many others, he saw in the South a real and tangible threat to that dream.

I

It was in April, 1848, that Massachusetts’ Eighth District sent Horace Mann to Congress to take the place recently made vacant by the death of John Quincy Adams. When he arrived, slavery was making itself felt as a divisive, increasingly sectional issue. As Mann himself put it, the furore over slavery was, by this time, “the salt of all political cooking.”⁹ Mann quickly became aware of the intensity of the debate at the political level, as his comments to Samuel Gridley Howe clearly indicate. “For two days past,” he wrote, “we have had a Southern tornado, – not a meteorological affair, but a psychological one. Slavery, of course, has been the theme.” However, the full effect of the debates, the “threats, insults, the invocation of mob-rule and lynch law,” he noted, could barely be discerned from the published reports. Mann painted an evocative picture for his friend of southern congressmen, whose manner was so threatening and violent that he felt prompted to muse that “if this represents the manner and the wrath with which they put it on to the poor slaves, with scourge in hand, – and I presume it does, – then you must conceive how the skin is dropped and the blood spilled.”¹⁰

Initially Mann held off from stating his position on the slavery issue, despite Charles Sumner’s continuous promptings for him to do so. Before Mann declared himself, he had occasion to visit the South, going to Richmond and to Norfolk, Virginia. Although impressed by certain aspects of Richmond, he nevertheless was struck by how backward the place seemed compared to Boston. On his return he confided to his wife, Mary, that, in his opinion, the “whole face of the country is stamped with the curse of slavery: its riches are turned into poverty, its fertility into barrenness; and man degrades himself as he degrades his fellows.”¹¹

⁸ Davis Nasaw, *Schooled to Order: A Social History of Public Schooling in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 30–31.

⁹ Horace Mann, in a speech outlining his reasons for accepting the Whig nomination, in *Horace Mann: Speeches*, “Liberty, and Miscellaneous Notes on Slavery, Drayton and Sayres Case” [1848], in Horace Mann MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter MHS). ¹⁰ Mann to Samuel Gridley Howe, 22 Apr. 1848, in Mann MSS, MHS.

¹¹ Mann to Mary P. Mann, 21, 23, 25 and 26 May, and 2 June 1848, in Mann MSS, MHS.

Barely a month later, Mann took the floor for his maiden speech in Congress, and expanded on this theme of southern backwardness and degradation.

In the course of his speech, Mann drew on and developed several of the main ideas concerning the South which were becoming common currency at the time. Considering the moral and economic aspects of slavery, Mann indicated how slavery, as an institution, stifled the progress of the southern states. Although deemed to be property in themselves, slaves were, Mann argued, “the preventers, the wasters, the antagonists, of property.” Slavery in no way increased either individual or national wealth, but hampered both, destroying “worldly prosperity.” The root of the problem, as Mann perceived it, was that slavery by its very nature destroyed the ambitions of the slave, and thus undermined the very natural human impulse “of bettering one’s condition.” On the main points of the free versus slave labour argument, Mann turned for support to the writings of William Gregg, conveniently enough a southerner, whose pamphlet, *Essays on Domestic Industry*, included some telling differences between the free and slave states. In his comparison of North and South, Gregg concluded that “the true secret of our difficulties lies in the want of energy on the part of our capitalists, and ignorance and laziness on the part of those who ought to labor.” The vast resources of the South, the forests, quarries, and mines, Gregg noted, lay idle, as the South contented herself with purchasing goods from the North, instead of seeking to develop her own manufacturing capabilities. As his biographer notes, Gregg’s perception of the differences between North and South “was essentially that between conservation and waste, economy and exploitation.”¹²

This was a familiar theme, and Gregg was not the first, nor indeed the last, southerner to provide northerners with such damning arguments against the South’s economic system. As early as 1837, W. C. Preston, like Gregg a South Carolinian, noted with shame “the prosperity, the industry, the public spirit” of the northern states compared with the “neglected and desolate” South. His comments were picked up by John Gorham Palfrey, who had listened with great interest and approval to

¹² *Speech of Mr. Horace Mann, on the Right of Congress to Legislate for the Territories of the United States and Its Duty to Exclude Slavery Therefrom, Delivered in the House of Representatives*, in Committee of the Whole, 30 June 1848 (Boston, 1848), 16. Extract from William Gregg, *Essays on Domestic Industry: or an Enquiry into the Expediency of Establishing Cotton Manufactures in South Carolina* (Charleston, 1845), appears on p. 19; and Broadus Mitchell, *William Gregg: Factory Master of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1928), 20.

Mann's 1848 address, and reprinted in the *North American Review*.¹³ Similarly, in the composite volume of Mann's writings on slavery, which appeared in 1851, his maiden speech was followed by extracts from a tract, written by a Virginian this time, which had appeared the previous year. The Virginian in question, The Revd Henry Ruffner, President of Lexington College, held views similar to those of both Gregg and Preston, as well as to Mann himself. Slavery was indeed a curse, Ruffner declared, and condemned the South to stagnation and decay, while the North exhibited "a dense and increasing population; thriving villages, towns and cities; a neat and productive agriculture, growing manufactures, and active commerce." Under slavery, the potential of the South would never be fulfilled, and the presence of slaves only served to bring white labour into disrepute. "Thus general industry gives way by degrees to indolent relaxation," Ruffner concluded, creating "false notions of dignity and refinement, and a taste for fashionable luxuries."¹⁴

That Mann should be critical of this lack of industry is perhaps unsurprising. As Messerli notes, Mann's support for, and belief in, the role of industrial development was evident much earlier in his career. As a member of the Massachusetts General Court, Mann found an occasion to voice "his general faith in science and technology," a faith which led him to regard industrial development as "the long-awaited touchstone for greater human happiness."¹⁵ Little wonder, then, that Mann concurred so strongly in the views of men like William Gregg and Henry Ruffner.¹⁶

Mann's brief southern visit, however, did not dictate the tone of his opening speech. Mann had been developing his ideas on slavery and the South for many years. In this final Annual Report to the Board of Education of Massachusetts, delivered just before he went to Washington, Mann made his position on this subject quite clear. "The slave States of this Union may buy cotton machinery made by the intelligent working mechanics of the free States, and they may train their slaves to work it

¹³ Speech by Hon. W. C. Preston, *Columbia Telescope*, January, 1837; J. G. Palfrey, "The New England Character," *North American Review*, 44: 94 (January, 1837). Preston's speech was reprinted eighteen years later in C. G. Parsons, *Inside View of Slavery; or a Tour Among the Planters* (Boston, 1855).

¹⁴ Extracts from *Address to the People of West Virginia; showing that Slavery is injurious to the public welfare, and that it may be gradually abolished, without detriment to the rights and interests of Slaveholders*, by a slaveholder of West Virginia [Revd Henry Ruffner, D.D.] (Lexington, 1847), quoted in Horace Mann, *Slavery: Letters and Speeches* (Boston, 1851), 73–83.

¹⁵ Messerli, *Horace Mann*, 108.

¹⁶ For further examples of Mann's economic critique of the South, see *New Dangers to Freedom, and new Duties for its Defenders: A Letter by the Hon. Horace Mann, to his Constituents, May 3rd, 1850* (Boston, 1850).

with more or less skill,” he argued, but they would never be able to keep abreast of progress. The South, he concluded, would always be dependent on northern ingenuity and skill; “the more educated community [would] forever keep ahead of the less educated one.”

It was not simply southern backwardness that concerned Mann, but its effects on the republican experiment that was America. As he put it, “the establishment of a republican government, without well-appointed and efficient means for the universal education of the people, is the most rash and fool-hardy experiment ever tried by man.” “It may be an easy thing to make a republic,” he continued, “but it is a very laborious thing to make republicans; and woe to the republic that rests upon no better foundations than ignorance, selfishness, and passion.” This was a theme he expanded on. “We are part of a mighty nation, which has just embarked upon the grandest experiment ever yet attempted upon earth, – the experiment of the capacity of mankind for the wise and righteous government of themselves,” he declared. However, in more than half the nation “no provision worthy of the name is made for replenishing the common mind with knowledge, or for training the common heart to virtue.”¹⁷

II

Mann’s thinking was in line with the reform impulse of the age, particularly its more aggressive side. Clearly, nineteenth-century reformers were concerned about the changes that America as a whole was undergoing, and they devoted a lot of thought to how these might be controlled. In the free-labour ideology of the North, Mann and his contemporaries believed that they “had discovered a republican solution to a universal problem.” The answer was a common school education, which would ensure that the population was both more moral and less prone to social upheaval and civil disobedience. As Nasaw argues, the reformers sought to inculcate the necessary republican principles from the outset, “not only through the history and geography texts but in the readers and spellers...that formed the core of every curriculum.” This reform impulse and the impetus toward universal education was, Nasaw reminds us, hardly benign. The type of education that Mann and others hoped to impose on the nation presented a form of republicanism that “was in fact no more or less than the Whiggism preached and practised by

¹⁷ Horace Mann, “Twelfth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts,” in Mann, *Life and Works of Horace Mann* (Boston: Horace B. Fuller, 1868), Vol. 3, pp. 757–58; quotations p. 682–83.

the reformers themselves; it was a republicanism that emphasized the need for public obedience rather than public participation.” In the reformers’ world view, America represented liberty, and the “republic that had survived into mid-century was sacrosanct in form and function.”¹⁸

Education was not, in any sense, a secondary or subsidiary issue as far as the North/South debate of the *antebellum* period was concerned. One of the first things that the South did in response to sectional tension was to ban “Yankee” school texts from the classrooms, and substitute those that preached a more “southern” line.¹⁹ That something as seemingly innocuous as school-books should become a source of sectional disagreement is less surprising than it seems. In the mid-nineteenth century America was very much a nation in search of an identity. The revolutionary generation had laid the groundwork for the creation of the American nation, but it was the particular responsibility of nineteenth-century Americans to make explicit the ideals which were implicit in their national identity. As Butts and Cremin indicate, any people with a “growing spirit of nationalism” require an “education for patriotism,” and nineteenth-century America was no different in this regard than many of the European states. On both sides of the Atlantic at this time one can trace “the growth and development of conceptions which viewed popular education as a tool of the national state.” The American impulse in this direction was “just one phase of a broader movement in the Western world toward education for national, as opposed to purely religious or personal, ends.”²⁰

The question for Mann was whether America would “be reclaimed to humanity, to a Christian life, and a Christian history,” or whether it would be “a receptacle where the avarice, the profligacy, and the licentiousness of a corrupt civilization shall cast its criminals and breed its monsters.” The nation’s only salvation, he averred, lay in the beneficial influence of “the mother States of this Union, those States where the institutions of learning and religion are now honored and cherished.”²¹ For Mann, his own state of Massachusetts had already achieved the necessary conditions for the maintenance of a virtuous republic. “The people of Massachusetts

¹⁸ Nasaw, *Schooled to Order*, 38–42. See also Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians of Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 289–93.

¹⁹ On this point, see John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830–1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 19–20, and esp. 132–33.

²⁰ R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence A. Cremin, *A History of Education in American Culture* (New York and London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1953), 217.

²¹ “Twelfth Annual Report,” in Mann, *Life and Works*, Vol. 3, p. 689.

have, in some degree, appreciated the truth,” he boasted, “that the unexampled prosperity of the State, its comfort, its competence, its general intelligence and virtue, – is attributable to the education, more or less perfect, which all its people have received.”²²

Mann’s arguments represented the summation of years of thought on the subjects of education and slavery, subjects which were twinned forever in Mann’s world view. On the occasion of a 4th of July oration Mann had touched on similar themes. “We are a Union made up of twenty-six States, a nation composed of twenty-six nations,” he observed. Yet, “[a]cross the very centre of our territory a line is drawn, on one side of which all labor is voluntary; while, on the opposite side, the system of involuntary labor, or servitude prevails. This is a fearful element of repugnance, – penetrating not only through all social, commercial, and political relations, but into natural ethics and religion.”²³ The subject of slavery was clearly uppermost in Mann’s thoughts at this time. He referred to it again that year in a letter to the Scottish phrenologist George Combe, in which he expressed the hope that “our boisterous democracy could furnish you with a peaceful retreat,” but concluded that “in our political latitudes there reigns one storm, & that is endless.”²⁴

III

Education, clearly, was the root of all good in Mann’s America, and he proudly observed that “[i]t has been justly remarked by the most intelligent foreigners that the nature of our political institutions does much to educate our people...that from being called upon to decide so many questions, their minds are honed [trained] to a great degree of activity.”²⁵ Mann did not, however, include the South in his version of America. Mann was very much of a mind with the reformers that Richard Abbott identifies, who ascribed to the North all the positive values of free labour, education, and individual advancement.²⁶ Given Mann’s general

²² Nasaw, *Schooled to Order*, 47; Mann, *Fifth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1842); John Hardin Best and Robert T. Sidwell, *The American Legacy of Learning: Readings in the History of Education* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), 184–88.

²³ Horace Mann, “An Oration Delivered Before the Authorities of the City of Boston, 4 July, 1842,” in Mann, *Life and Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 341–403, quotations 350–51 and 372.

²⁴ Mann to George Combe, 28 February 1842 Combe Papers, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS).

²⁵ Miscellaneous Notes, 12 [184–] Education, Mann Papers, MHS.

²⁶ Richard H. Abbott, *Cotton & Capital: Boston Businessmen and Antislavery Reform, 1854–1868* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 6.

philosophy on matters of free labour and education, it is perhaps unsurprising that he chose to present the South in the manner he did in his maiden speech. That Mann chose to paint such a negative picture of the southern states indicates quite clearly that he, too, subscribed to what was fast becoming an accepted critique of the South.

What was significant about this critique was that it focussed less on the economic failure of the southern states *per se*, and rather more on the comparative success of the North. Likewise, although slavery was promulgated as the root cause of so much southern distress, concern for the slave took second place to concern for white southern society. Much of this hostile imagery drew on abolitionist rhetoric, although its exponents were often suspicious of the Garrisonian approach.²⁷ The critique itself, moreover, often represented no more than a simple inversion of the positive images of the South which Taylor, among others, has identified.²⁸ Those who were concerned about the social effects of the North's increasing industrialization and diversification looked to the South for evidence of a conservative, stable society rooted in what were perceived to be traditional English values. Those who welcomed progress, and we must include Mann in this category, who sought to create a society sustained by essentially republican values, regarded the southern way of life with suspicion, and tried to show how backward it was. The abolitionists, and other like-minded reformers of the period, had even more cause to play up the negative side of southern life, focussing on the suffering it caused not only to the slaves but also to the non-slaveholding white majority, and it was the plight of this latter group that the politicians often focussed on.

Certainly, by the time the Republican party appeared, the image of the South as a threat to northern free-labour ideology was firmly fixed in many minds. Mann's approach, however, differed in one important way from the typical critique, in that it emphasized, unsurprisingly, the lack of educational accomplishments in the southern states.²⁹ Ignorance, he opined, was the root cause of all the problems facing the South, and this ignorance was itself fostered by slavery. "Create a serf caste and debar them from education," he observed, "and you necessarily debar a great

²⁷ See Mann to Mary Peabody, 25 June 1837; to Samuel J. May, 22 Sept. 1848, in Mann MSS, MHS.

²⁸ Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, *passim*.

²⁹ This is not to suggest that Mann was alone in criticizing the lack of educational development in the South. This was, certainly, one element in much of the northern criticism. Where Mann differs from the others is in his increased emphasis on the dangers arising from this lack of education. He sees in this far more than most. This is to be expected, since education represented so much of his life's work.

portion of the privileged class from education also.” By destroying common education, Mann argued, “slavery destroys the fruits of common education – the inventive mind, practical talent, the power of adapting means to ends in the business of life.” As he took pains to show, it was certainly not the southern states which were producing “all those mechanical and scientific improvements and inventions which have enriched the world with so many comforts, and adorned it with so many beauties.”³⁰

This was an issue which Mann had worked out at some length in private over the years, and was an expression of some of his most deeply held beliefs concerning human development and the responsibilities of living under a republican form of government.³¹ Turning again to the writings of his previous career as Secretary of the Board of State of Education in Massachusetts, it becomes clear just how vital education was to Mann. For him, education was “much more than an ability to read, write, and keep common accounts.” Education meant “such a training of the body as shall build it up with robustness and vigour, – at once protecting it from disease, and enabling it to act, *formatively*, upon the crude substance of Nature, – to turn a wilderness into cultivated fields, forests into ships, or quarries and claypits into villages and cities.” “It is a truism,” he continued, “that free institutions multiply human energies. A chained body cannot do much harm; a chained mind can do as little. In a despotic government, the human faculties are benumbed and paralysed; in a Republic, they glow with an intense life, and burst forth with uncontrollable impetuosity.” It was, therefore, the duty of a republican government to confer, via education, the necessary “wisdom and rectitude” upon its people, that they might harness this energy for the greater good. Mann, again, made explicit the link between education and republican government, and the necessity for the former if the latter was to have any chance of success. “If republican institutions do wake up unexampled energies in the whole mass of a people, and give them implements of unexampled power wherewith to work out their will,” he argued, “then these same institutions ought also to confer upon that people unexampled wisdom and rectitude.”³²

³⁰ Mann, Speech of 30 June 1848, Horace Mann, *Slavery Letters and Speeches* (Mann: Mnemosyne, 1969), 25.

³¹ See “Universal Liberty Necessitates Labor,” in *Notes on Slavery* [n.d.]; “Education,” in *Lectures, Sermons, Speeches, Legal Notes*, 12 [184–]; and “Education” [1854], in Mann MSS, MHS.

³² Mann, “The Necessity of Education in a Republican Government” (1838), in *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, Vol. 2, *Annual Reports of the Secretary of the Board of Education of*

The role of education in rendering democracy safe, by creating “universal elevation of character, intellectual and moral” along with it, occurs throughout Mann’s writings. It is little wonder that he regarded the lack of education in the southern states with such concern. It did not simply result in intellectual backwardness, in a population which could neither read nor write (although that in itself was bad enough in Mann’s opinion), but it threatened to undermine the very foundations of what Mann considered to be successful republican government.³³ In a rare example of understanding exhibited toward the South, Mann wrote to his wife: “I begin to have more charity than I ever had for the Southerners. Does not the aberration of mind they evince in regard to the eternal principles of truth & justice excite your profound compassion, & induce you to look upon their acts in a somewhat more charitable spirit than before?” Of course, the problem of the South could be traced to its educational deficiencies. “Should we have been any better,” he inquired, “if so educated? It makes me look upon Mr. Clay with much admiration.”³⁴ However, Mann could not be reasonable on this subject for long. As he saw it, the educational failure of the South threatened all American free institutions – with ignorance lay danger and the threat of despotism. Addressing the South across the floor of the House of Representatives in 1850 he went on the attack:

We of the North, you say, are Abolitionists; but abolitionists of what? Are we abolitionists of the inalienable, indefeasible, indestructible rights of man? Are we abolitionists of knowledge, abolitionists of virtue, of education, and of human culture? Do we seek to abolish the glorious moral and intellectual attributes which God has given to his children, and thus...make the facts of slavery conform to the law of slavery, by obliterating the distinction between a man and a beast?... Do our laws and our institutions seek to blot out and abolish the image of God in the human soul?³⁵

Massachusetts for the Years 1837–1838, to which are prefixed Lectures on Education (Boston, 1891), 143, 149, 150–51, and 180.

³³ See, for example, Mann’s “An Historical View of Education; showing its Dignity and its Degradation,” and “An Oration Delivered Before the Authorities of the City of Boston, July 4th, 1842,” in Horace Mann, *Life and Works*, Vols. 2, pp. 241–93, and 4, pp. 341–403 respectively.

³⁴ Mann to Mary Peabody Mann, 12 March 1850, in Mann Papers, MHS. In this letter Mann also adds that he believed that slavery, if restricted geographically, would die a natural death, and expanded on his theme of the “intellectual deficiencies” of the South and the lack of education there.

³⁵ *Speech of Horace Mann, of Massachusetts, on the Subject of Slavery in the Territories, and the Consequence of a Dissolution of the Union, House of Representatives, 15 February*, (Boston, 1850), 4–5 and 19.

Having warmed to his theme, Mann pursued it through the course of his congressional career. In one thing, he opined, the South excelled, and that was in the training of statesmen. For evidence, he turned to a famous pamphlet written by The Revd Horace Bushnell and published for the American Home Missionary Society the previous year, entitled *Barbarism the First Danger*. Slavery, Bushnell argued, hampered progress in the South, yet made politicians and statesmen out of southerners. The planter class had the leisure to develop “that kind of cultivation which distinguishes men of society.” This allowed the slaveholding southerner to excel in public life, “where so much depends on manners and social address.”

Again, this was a common theme, especially in New England. Southerners, Bushnell continued, lived isolated lives which, significantly, prevented the successful establishment and maintenance of both public schools and churches. “Education and religion thus displaced,” Bushnell concluded, “the dinner table only remains, and on that hangs, in great part, the keeping of the social state.” This, he warned, “cannot be regarded as any sufficient spring of character. It is neither a school nor a gospel.”³⁶ Having cited this damning indictment of southern life and manners, Mann concluded that “[a]ll this proceeds from no superiority of natural endowment on the one side, or inferiority on the other”; “the difference,” he stressed, “results from no difference in natural endowment; the mental endowments at the South are equal to those in any part of the world; but it comes because in one quarter the common atmosphere is vivified with knowledge, electric with ideas, while slavery gathers its Boeotian fogs over the other.”³⁷

As Fred Somkin has indicated, for Mann and other like-minded northerners, America was the once and future nation, although in the *antebellum* period Americans expressed increasing concern for the future success of their national experiment and the ideals the nation stood for. “For Mann,” Somkin argues, “sin had become the failure of self-cultivation, of which ignorance was only one facet.”³⁸ Mann was not alone in his views. Much earlier, in New York, William H. Seward, too,

³⁶ Horace Bushnell, “*Barbarism the First danger*”: *A Discourse for Home Missions by* – (New York: American Home Missionary Society, 1847). Extracts published in Mann’s speech of June, 1848, 27–28. Bushnell’s sermon was delivered throughout the northern states during the summer of 1847, and, as one biographer noted, represents “one of the best known and most striking of [Bushnell’s] public utterances.” See Mary B. Cheney, ed., *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (London, 1880), 184.

³⁷ Mann, Speech of June 1848, Mann, *Letters and Speeches*, 29.

³⁸ Somkin, *Unquiet Eagle*, 33 and 44.

had made the link between internal improvements, social development and education, and it was one which he stressed repeatedly. As Rush Welter argued, in “criticizing the defects of contemporary education, Seward challenged the American people to make their educational system match their democratic hopes.”³⁹ Over a decade later, Henry Ward Beecher, in a similar vein, traced southern deficiencies in morals and enterprise to a basic deficiency in education. “The disease is not on the skin,” Beecher declared, “but in the bones and heart; in the political and social system. The South has made slavery to be its heart.” Consequently, southerners “are made to lag behind the march of civilization, and so see the whole world running past them in social elevation, popular intelligence, and industrial enterprise.”⁴⁰ Beecher would have concurred with Frederick Law Olmsted that “[t]here is no life without intelligence – no intelligence without ambition.”⁴¹

It is clear, then, that when Mann addressed these themes he established himself as being of a mind with many other northerners. He expressed similar concerns about the future of the nation as Seward had in 1835, concerns that would be repeated by many others throughout the 1850s. “For Mann,” Nasaw has argued, “hard work was the key to the kingdom of riches, power, and personal glory because that had been his own experience,” but the South did not exhibit any such ability. Southerners were, as the critique went, lazy aristocrats, who relied on others for their survival.⁴²

IV

In the course of his denunciations of the South, Mann also focussed on another common idea, that of southern despotism. This is one to which he frequently alluded in his private correspondence, and although he was able to converse with particular slaveholders without an “uncivil word” being exchanged, his response to the slaveholder class became increasingly denunciatory as his congressional career continued.⁴³ In part, this image of the despotic southerner derived from the prevalent image of the aristocratic and lazy southerner, who by virtue of the “serf caste” in his

³⁹ Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 83 and 98. Welter describes Mann in this study as “one of the country’s leading social theorists” (p. 98).

⁴⁰ Henry Ward Beecher, *A Discourse Delivered at the Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York, upon Thanksgiving Day, November 25, 1847* (New York, 1848), 15.

⁴¹ Frederick Law Olmsted, conclusion to “The South,” No. 47, 26 January 1854, New York (*Daily Times*).

⁴² Nasaw, *Schooled to Order*, 31.

⁴³ Mann to Mary Mann, 4 March 1849, in Mann Papers, MHS.

section could devote time to the cultivation of manners which, as Bushnell noted, were so necessary to a successful statesman. Another element in this image, however, arose from the increasing perception that in Congress the southerner acted in concert with other members of his section, effectively blocking northern votes on such issues as the tariff and, more importantly, slavery and its further extension. He made this point in 1850, and again two years later.⁴⁴ “Nominally the South is divided into the same parties” as the North, he argued, “but, in whatever regards slavery, it is undivided and a unit—indissoluble as the Siamese twins... On tariffs, river and harbour improvements, and so forth, they carry on a feeble and somnolent warfare among themselves, but whenever the tocsin of slavery is sounded, they awaken to seize their arms, and form in solid column for a quick-step march to the point in contest.”⁴⁵

While hostility toward slavery often comprised a significant element of the northern critique of the South, the focus of much northern criticism was not on the moral wrong of slavery, but on the economic, social, and political danger arising from the power of the white, slaveholding inhabitants of the southern states, a power which was expressed by, and drew its strength from, the ownership of slaves. As Larry Gara notes, this distinction is “crucial” to an understanding of the increasing sectional tensions of the *antebellum* period.⁴⁶ The northern critique of slavery all too often evolved out of a deeply racist concern for the continued well-being of American white society; in other words, concern for the slave was not necessarily the motivating factor behind northern attacks on slavery. For Mann, too, concern for the slave was not an issue, and he admitted to harbouring racist sentiments. In his defence, Mann struggled just a bit harder with this idea than most, but he was unable to overcome a deep-felt antipathy for blacks.⁴⁷

In Mann’s continuous opposition to the further extension of slavery, and in his increasingly hostile denunciations of slaveholders, we can trace Mann’s growing perception that there was a real danger inherent in the

⁴⁴ Mann, *New Dangers to Freedom, and New Duties for Its Defenders: A Letter by the Hon. Horace Mann to his Constituents*, 3 May, 1850 (Boston, 1850), 14 and 30.

⁴⁵ *The Institution of Slavery: Speech of the Hon. Horace Mann, of Massachusetts, on the Institution of Slavery. Delivered in the U.S. House of Representatives, August 17, 1852*, (Boston, 1852), 22. See also Mann, *New Dangers to Freedom*, 30, and Mann to Mr. and Mrs. Combe, 5 December 1851, Combe Papers, NLS

⁴⁶ Larry Gara, “Slavery and the Slave Power: A Crucial Distinction,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 15 (1969), 6. See also Russell B. Nye, “The Slave Power Conspiracy: 1830–1860,” *Science and Society*, 10 (1946), 262–74.

⁴⁷ Mann to Mary Peabody Mann, 23 April 1848, Mann Papers, MHS.

“Slave Power.” Slavery, the cause of southern difficulties, now threatened to subvert northern institutions. Mann argued that were it not for slavery the South “would today possess, threefold the population of the northern section – all free, all blessed with more abounding comforts and competence, and with all the means of embellishment, education, and universal culture.” “It is slavery,” he reiterated, “and slavery alone, that has struck them down from their lofty pre-eminence; that has dwarfed their gigantic capacities, and driven them to maintain an ascendancy – ultimately worthless, and worse than worthless – by subordinating Northern politicians, instead of exulting in the legitimate superiority of home-born and undecaying vigour.”⁴⁸ This represents a change of direction for Mann. The blight of slavery was no longer contained within the South, but in its effect upon northern politicians was extending its pernicious influence over the northern states.

As the sectional struggle in Congress became more vehement, Mann’s concern for the North’s position increased. The furore at the start of the 31st Congress over the choice of Speaker prompted him to increased criticism of his own section for allowing Howell Cobb to be elected.⁴⁹ Writing to his wife, Mann expressed his increasing concern over the power that slaveholders wielded in the national arena, and his fears that the North was losing ground to the South. “You are in error,” he informed her, “in supposing that the exclusion of slavery from the Territories will affect the growth of cotton or rice unfavourably. Slaves are in great demand now for the cotton and the fields.” Instead, he stressed that the southern determination to extend slavery into the Territories arose from their “fear of losing the balance of power, as they call it.” On this subject, he concluded, “they are not a reasoning people.”⁵⁰ In this period, Mann increasingly stressed his concerns for the North both in his speeches and in his private correspondence.⁵¹ Two main events prompted his most extreme outbursts: the Compromise of 1850, in particular its Fugitive Slave resolution, and Daniel Webster’s infamous Seventh of March Speech of the same year.

⁴⁸ Mann’s speech of 17 August 1852, Mann, *The Institution of Slavery*, 24.

⁴⁹ See Mann to Mr. and Mrs. Combe, 15 November 1850, in Combe Papers, NLS. For a more comprehensive analysis of the Speakership debate at the start of the 31st Congress, see Messerli, *Horace Mann*, 507.

⁵⁰ Mann to Mary Mann, 15 March 1850, Mann MSS, MHS.

⁵¹ See Mann to Mary Mann, 9 and 13 June 1848, when he writes: “it is said we have yielded to the demands of the South again and again; that they always ask for once more; and that we may yield and yield forever, and still they will require us to do it *once more*.” Mann Papers, MHS.

Mann believed that his home state, formerly “the impregnable citadel of freedom,” had been irredeemably tainted by the passage of the revised fugitive Slave Law, and the South was entirely to blame. The southern planter, Mann argued, “seems to possess some wizard art, unknown to the demonology of former times, by which he impregnates his bales of cotton with a spirit of inhumanity.” Yet, even on this subject, Mann never lost sight of the importance of education nor missed the opportunity to make a sectional point. Although he was doubtful that the planters would ever “abandon their slothful habits, become industrious, and manufacture for themselves” he hoped that they might. Then, Mann argued, southerners “would become better customers for those ever new forms of commodities which our industry and inventive skill, while we keep our schoolhouses in operation, will always be able to supply.”⁵²

As for Webster’s Seventh of March Speech, Mann never forgave Webster for what he regarded as the latter’s apostasy. In speeches, letters, and in his private journals, Mann criticized Webster as a “fallen star,” and a “hireling of slavery,” who had betrayed the North.⁵³ Webster’s speech, together with the effects of the Fugitive Slave Law, combined to create for Mann the spectre of a “Slave Power” encroaching on the rights and freedoms of the northern states. Although he confidently asserted to his wife that Massachusetts would never permit a slaveholder to recapture runaway slaves on her soil, he was less than convinced that this would be so.⁵⁴ He feared that “the slave-power of the South and the money power of the North have struck hands.” Between them both, Mann believed that the republican form of government, on which he pinned so many hopes, would be destroyed.⁵⁵ In his final year in Congress, Mann wrote to his friend George Combe, setting out his fears that northern politicians were too keen to placate the South. If the North could only “unite for freedom as the South do for slavery, all would be well,” he wrote, “but the lower and hinder half of the brain rules, and we do not.”⁵⁶

⁵² Mann, *Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law, delivered at Lancaster, May 19, 1851* (Boston, 1851), 2–3.

⁵³ Mann to Mary Mann, 8 and 14 March; 8, 14, 15, and 17 September; to Samuel Downer, 1 March; to Mr. and Mrs. Combe, 15 November 1850; to Samuel Gridley Howe, 3 January [1851]; and *Speeches: Liberty and miscellaneous notes...* [1848], in an extract in which Mann outlines his reasons for accepting the Whig nomination. The date is doubtless post-1850, possibly even post-1854. All in Mann MSS, MHS.

⁵⁴ Mann to Mary Mann, 14 March 1850, in Mann MSS, MHS.

⁵⁵ Mann to Mary Mann, 18 and 28 August; 6, 15, 17, 20, and 21 September; to Samuel Downer, 22 December 1850; to Mr. and Mrs. Combe, 5 December 1851 and 8 May 1852. All in Mann Papers, MHS.

⁵⁶ Mann to Mr. George Combe, 8 May 1852, *Life and Letters*, 364.

Two years after Mann had left Washington behind and moved to Ohio he still maintained his stand against southern educational and social backwardness and the danger this posed to the republic. “In all the free states of this Union there is a Government system of Public Schools, more or less perfect,” he declared, but “in the Southern States there is nothing really worthy of the name of Free Schools & whatever semblance of these exists is miserably administered.” The result, he noted, was widespread illiteracy throughout the South, from Virginia through Kentucky to Tennessee. “And were it not for the reflected light that is cast upon these people from the luminous that is the educated communities around them,” he concluded, “they would all be heathens & cannibals.”⁵⁷

Although Mann often reiterated his belief in freedom over slavery, and indeed often cited the strength of that belief as his only reason for entering Congress initially, and then for staying there at all, for his weaponry against the encroachments of the slave power he drew on the arsenal of the *antebellum* critique of the South.⁵⁸ It is indisputable that Mann truly believed that there was no “no evil so great as that of the extension of slavery,” yet his concern was consistently focussed on southern white society, and on its effects on the North, rather than on the question of slavery itself.⁵⁹ Mann was certainly not insensible to the legal and moral arguments which could be used to oppose slavery; he did, after all, act as defence attorney in the famous Drayton and Sayres trial. Nevertheless, in his public rhetoric in Congress, and in his private correspondence, Mann developed his image of the South from that of a blighted society into that of a “Slave Power,” whose aspirations for its “peculiar institution” threatened to encroach on to northern soil. “Our laws and institutions,” he wrote, referring to the North, “are all formed so as to encourage the poor man, and, by education, to elevate his children above the condition of their parents; but their [the south’s] laws and institutions all tend to aggrandize the rich, and to perpetuate power in their hands.”⁶⁰ In true Enlightenment style, knowledge, for Mann, led to freedom, and the North, for him, was the very epitome of a free society, with all the potential that offered for the nation as a whole.

⁵⁷ Mann Papers, Miscellaneous – Education, 1854, MHS.

⁵⁸ Mann to George Combe, 12 April 1849 and 15 November 1850; to Samuel Gridley Howe, 22 February 1850; and to Mary Mann, 28 December 1848 and 18 May 1850. All in Mann MSS, MHS.

⁵⁹ Mann to Mary Mann, 6 February 1850, in Mann MSS, MHS.

⁶⁰ *Speech of Horace Mann, of Massachusetts, on the Subject of Slavery in the territories, and the Consequence of a Dissolution of the Union, Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 15th, 1850*, (Boston, 1850), 19.

V

Horace Mann was in effect not only representative of a nationalist impulse that regarded education as the *sine qua non* of a successful republic, but also instrumental in the exclusion of the South from the American “nation.” In the opinion of men like Mann, Seward, and Beecher, the increasing power of the South could only be detrimental for the future of the American nation. There was no distinction in their minds between the various components of their ideological outlook. What concerned them was the future of republican government and the success of the American experiment in this regard. Free government itself, in their view, relied on a solid educational base. These were the ingredients for a viewpoint that was never going to admit the South as it was in the 1850s into the American republican experiment.⁶¹ Mann and other reformers reaffirmed the moral, intellectual, economic, and social superiority of their own section by contrasting it with the educational, economic, and moral backwardness of the South. This represented a dangerous shift in the reform outlook as far as the nationalist impulse was concerned. Again, it is a shift that can be traced through Mann.

As Secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts, Mann had contrasted Massachusetts with Europe. European theory, according to Mann, allocated to some the right to labour, to others the right to enjoy the fruits of labour. In Massachusetts, by contrast, everyone had the right to both. In Massachusetts, Mann boasted, equality of condition prevailed, whereas in Europe inequality was the norm.⁶² Yet, in the course of his Congressional career, Mann increasingly came to contrast Massachusetts, and the North in general, not with Europe but with the South. The implications of this shift for national unity and stability are clear. As William Brock has indicated, America had, for much of its history, defined itself against the Old World. Europe was the negative reference point “which helped Americans to define their own positive qualities.”⁶³ By the 1850s, however, Americans North and South were no longer looking across the Atlantic for definition, but at each other. In such circumstances, a truly *national* outlook became impossible to sustain.

It was in this spirit of sectional antagonism that the “Republican critique” emerged and developed. It drew on the sense of many northerners, including Horace Mann, that the South represented a threat

⁶¹ Somkin, *Unquiet Eagle*, 27.

⁶² Mann, *Fifth Annual Report*, *passim*.

⁶³ William R. Brock, *Parties and Political Conscience: American Dilemmas, 1840–1850* (New York: Kto Press, 1979), 140.

to the American republican experiment. It also confirmed their view that only the North contained all the necessary ingredients – intellectual, social, economic, and spiritual – that a successful republic required. Whilst Foner has detailed the form that this critique took, particularly in the late-1850s, the origins of it have received less attention. Through the concerns of an individual like Horace Mann, who was not a career politician and who left Congress before the Republican party rose to prominence, one can better identify the origins of what became the “Republican critique” as well as the ideology behind it. Mann’s anti-southern views, derived from and sustained by his own focus on the importance of education in a republic, were reiterated time and again by a much broader group of northerners in the later *antebellum* period, as Foner has shown. In this sense, Mann was very much a “representative man” for the *antebellum* North: in his denunciations of the South, one can see not only the groundwork of the “Republican critique,” but the beginnings of a sectional ideology distinctly at odds with the national ideals that it proclaimed.