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"All Men Are Created Unequal"
Conservative Ideas in the
American South, 1800-1860

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The United States has become the quintessential model of social and economic growth to which all developing countries aspire. However, the United States was not always unified in the pursuit of liberal capitalist development. A little over one hundred years ago, the Old Southern United States posed a formidable challenge to the modernization of liberal capitalist model. The Old South is better known as the modern slave society. Romanticized and popularized in the movie, Gone With the Wind, this slave society was built upon plantation economy and paternal social relations with racial superiority. Based on such different social structures arose sectional conflict between the liberal North and the conservative South.1 The impossibility of reconciling these two forms of social relations resulted in the tragic Civil War in 1861-65.

My interest in the history of the Old South came from the nature of the Southern society which, seems to be un-American, was built upon a hierarchical social order as a result of the master-slave relations. Such social relations, emphasizing strict social order and

precapitalist values, are familiar to Thai society. The implication here is that in the beginning of the world capitalist system, an attempt to provide an alternative model for development had been violently crushed. For the next century we have been told that growth and development must continue along the liberal capitalist model. In the antebellum Southern United States, conservative ideas, as compared to the emerging liberal North and industrial Europe, flourished and even combated and criticized liberal capitalism. This was possible because of the unique position of the Old South in the development of western capitalism.

The growth and expansion of the South was part of the expansion of the world market, in particular the capitalist system in Europe and North America. It is important, however, to point out at the beginning that industrial capitalism did not triumph decisively in any country until the 1840s, and even much later in many countries. The implication for this emerging capitalism is that the picture of the world remained unclear, and the outcome not yet certain.2 In this light, emerging capitalism, including its bourgeois ideology, was another social system competing with the old and existing social systems of the time. And one of them was the slave system of the South, which southerners believed was the best social organization in the modern world. They did not perceive emerging capitalism as the world system, but a deviation from western civilization and Christianity. It was logical therefore that the need to defend slavery drove southern intellectuals from attempts at accommodation with the Atlantic world to “project an alternate world order at once supremely reactionary and necessarily new.”3

This article intends to show salient characteristics of the conservative ideas of the South and their social implications especially regarding social change and social order in the age of capital. In this essay, I will trace the development of Southern conservative ideas in the pre-Civil War era as reflected in the thinking of James D.B. De Bow (1820-1867), a well-known proslavery advocate and editor of *De Bow's Review*, the first and only commercial magazine in the antebellum American South.

Finally, we know quite well how the Old South ended its history. I can only hope that we, on the other side of the globe and from another century, could learn some lessons from the American contradiction and tragedy.

**Origins of the American Mind**

Southern conservative thought cannot be understood without reference to the two most influential political ideas, Puritanism and the Enlightenment philosophy. Accordingly, American political ideas were a creation of both the New and the Old Worlds. Two distinct minds and ideologies, Puritanism, as evolved with the Pilgrims and subsequent American colonial property class and the Enlightenment philosophy, were the most influential and dominant strands of thought in American ideologies from the mid-18th century.

The distinguished Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, commented on American political ideas in 1918. American political ideas, he observed, were influenced mainly by Puritanism and the Enlightenment. The significant and lasting influence of the Enlightenment, according to Huizinga, was the belief in optimism and the ideal of

“pure humanitarianism.” Such idealism has been influential in the American mind even into the twentieth century when Western European countries, the home of Enlightenment thought, turned their backs on the utopianism of the Enlightenment. The reason for the peculiar American development, Huizinga said, was because America did not have a conservative revolt against the Enlightenment of the kind experienced in Europe.5

I agree with Huizinga on the significant characteristic of the American mind particularly that there was no conservative revolt against Enlightenment thought per se. However, I contend that there was an American conservative revolt in the Old South, which brought about a paradoxical ideological position, particularly the reconciliation between pro-slavery ideas and the Enlightenment. At the most basic level, slavery assumes men are not created equal—a direct flagrant contradiction with one of the most deeply cherished Enlightenment principles. Such a revolt, which resulted in the Civil War, was badly defeated by the growing industrial American North and its liberal political ideas. However, conservative ideas with a blend of the Enlightenment language persisted in a more unified republic.

**Characteristics of Southern World View:**

American Enlightenment came of age in the early phase of the creation and unification of the new republic by the end of the eighteenth century.6 By becoming Americanized, the European En-

5. Ibid., 179-200.
lightenment lost the critical spirit which had been its hallmark. By making the Enlightenment into an American institution, historians believe the Americans have lost the use of a method of critical self-examination, which might have added more richness and texture to its intellectual life and political inquiry. According to Donald Meyer, a noted American historian, the American Enlightenment, which was opposed to deism, infidelity and "licentious speculation," and which was characterized by a distrust of rationalism and a political assault on the intellectual, set a pattern of defensiveness, conscious provincialism, and anti-intellectualism by the 1790's. Subsequently it hardened into an American tradition in the course of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{7}

In addition, Henry F. May suggests that there was a "Southern Enlightenment" with fiercely religious orthodoxy, political conservatism and defense of slavery as an institution, in contradistinction to the American North's flourishing liberal social and political ideologies. May shows that the Virginian upper class, the staunch deists modeled after the celebrated Jefferson, one after another renounced their infidelity and were finally converted to Evangelicalism by the first quarter of the nineteenth century. According to May the "Southern Enlightenment" served mainly as another illustration of the decline of the Enlightenment in America in the early nineteenth century and the triumph of evangelical Protestantism both North and South.

In my judgment, the antebellum South created its own men of letters whose concerns were to formulate a world view that best explained the Southern way of life. The mature slave society of the South, with its distinctive culture, religion, economy, and politics,

\textsuperscript{7} Meyer, The Democratic..., 10.
demanded a formulation of a world view, that is, a common understanding and attitude towards life, death, human nature and man's relations to the world. By the middle of the 1820s there was a distinct conservative Southern ideology, including proslavery thought, which was mainly a reaction against the attack from Northern abolitionists.  

Reflecting the paradox of the Old South, the slaveholders' world view embraced visions of both old and new Europe. On the one hand, the world view of the Southern planters contained elements of traditional values that prohibited the total reduction of man to thing, of traditional political thought that stressed the responsibility of the higher order to the lower, and of economic thought that sought to distribute finite resources. On the other hand, the slaveholders' world view also contained elements of modern values, political, and economic ideas, which emphasized social progress and economic prosperity based on the primacy of propertied individualism. The Southern world view, however, with its commitment to the institution of slavery, was closer to a traditional world view that subordinated the individual to the community than to a modern world view that subordinated society to the individual. 


Influenced by the South's political and economic development based on plantation slavery, Southern thought was different from that of the North. By the middle of the nineteenth century it was apparent that the North and South had developed dissimilar responses to social and political issues. Not confined only to the political arena, sectional conflicts began to be felt in every major religious, economic and social institution. And, from the start, the South took sectionalism more seriously than the North. Ironically, while the United States was creating its unified nation and national identity, its main philosophy—the American Enlightenment—was in the process of breaking up into two schools. In the long run the bifurcation of the American Enlightenment crystallized not only into two opposite viewpoints of North and South but more important into two different world views.


11. Eugene D. Genovese proposed many years ago that the Old South had developed the slaveholder's world view which was fundamentally different from that of the North; see *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretations*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1969). Since then many studies have tried to refute his assertion by claiming that essentially the slaveholder's practices as well as their world view were also capitalist like the North. See for example James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983); and Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986). Their contention is based, however, mainly upon attitudes of southerners towards wealth and progress. The point is that the slaveholders of the South should be perceived as a social class with discrete material interests, moral sensibility, ideological commitment, and social psychology. The meaning of their economic viewpoints therefore should be seen in the context of the South's social philosophy.
Scottish Enlightenment in America:

The main influence of the Enlightenment in America was in education. The course of studies in colleges both North and South concentrated upon classical studies, natural philosophy and science, and moral philosophy, which subsequently became the central subject. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the subject of moral philosophy had gained recognition in university curricula in Europe and later America. The *Encyclopaedia Americana* in 1849 defined "moral philosophy" as "the science which treats the motives and rules of human actions, and of the ends to which they ought to be directed." Moral philosophy (ethics) insisted on the unity of knowledge and the benevolence of God. In the course of study, it came to dominate logic, divinity, and metaphysics. It was an age when man learned about himself, nature, and God less through the Bible and philosophical speculation than through the use of reason and intuition and the study of nature, including human nature itself.

Donald Meyer writes that the rise of textbook moralism in nineteenth-century America was a response to social and economic changes that created the material basis for the modern nation. Academic moral philosophers thus wanted to make certain that traditional virtues and values would not be forgotten as the moral groundwork for social progress and that morality remained "the common law of the country." In other words they attempted "to make the Enlightenment safe for democracy."

15. Ibid., 10.
Nineteenth-century American social thought was greatly influenced by the scientific method of both Bacon's analysis of observed empirical evidence, and Newton's principles of philosophical inquiry and synthesis. The vogue of "Baconianism" in America, according to Theodore Bozeman, came with the importation of the philosophical work of Thomas Reid and of the emerging Scottish School of common-sense Realism to which his thought gave rise.\(^\text{16}\) The Scottish common-sense philosophy was the most influential on the American mind, in particular, the Scottish Realists who introduced Bacon's scientific method into the intellectual community. With the passing of the New England theology, in particular the image of an "angry God" and a powerful predestining God, it was clear that man must be responsible for conditions of both his soul and his world. The rapid growth and expansion of the country in the Jacksonian era had also created conditions for the growth of optimism and a new sense of confidence in man's power to shape his destiny. Such a situation created a dilemma for Americans who could not easily reconcile belief in God and confidence in man. In addition, the spiritual crisis was complicated by an increasing awareness of the practical and theoretical achievements of science which produced further questions about the criteria of knowledge. The Scottish philosophy thus satisfied the spiritual and intellectual needs of American intellectuals who were beset by the changing social and economic conditions of the nation.\(^\text{17}\)


For Southern intellectuals, the main source of social and political ideas was Scottish philosophy. The evidence of the intellectual influence from the Enlightenment in general and Scottish philosophy in particular can be seen from James De Bow's college experience. Born in South Carolina, he graduated from the College of Charleston and was a follower of John C. Calhoun.\textsuperscript{18} As a student in the College of Charleston in the 1840s, his reading on history included Gibbon's \textit{Rise and Fall}; Livy; Tacitus; Grevies' \textit{History of 12 Caezars}; Hume's \textit{England}; and Raynal's \textit{Reflection on American Revolution}. On metaphysics he read John Locke, Thomas Reid, and Dugald Stewart. On moral philosophy he read Blair's \textit{Lectures}; Lord Kames; Campbell's \textit{Philosophy of Rhetoric}; Allison on \textit{Taste}; and Burke on \textit{the Sublime}; Paley's \textit{Natural Theology}; Paley's \textit{Moral Philosophy}; Butler's \textit{Analogy}; and Grotius de Veritale. In addition to this reading list, he also read or became acquainted with many other thinkers and writers over the course of his four years of study at the College of Charleston. For example, Schlegel, Milton, Rollin, Foster, Fittler, Smith, Mill, and Hobbes.

**On Human Nature:**

The primary investigation of social, economic and political issues, as practiced by the Enlightenment philosophers and their disciples in the nineteenth century, always began with "nature," "man" and "society." Responding to the call of their society amidst

the intense growing sectionalism, Southern intellectuals, in arguing for the support of the slave South, anchored their social and economic ideas on their beliefs about human nature and society. To them, man and human nature were corrupt and self-seeking. James Henry Hammond, a famous governor of South Carolina in 1842, wrote that men were “fools...knaves & often devils,” all possessed of an “evil genius.” George Frederick Holmes, a Virginian man of letters, insisted that men were imperfect, frail and foolish.\textsuperscript{19} De Bow's picture of human nature also was “darkly and sullenly wild.” De Bow attributes the depraved existence of man to the fact that the mind without the guidance of virtue fell victim to the four monsters; vanity, love, envy, and pride.\textsuperscript{20} Man who scoffs at the voice of reason and ignores his conscience remains vulnerable to his passions.

Central to Southern intellectuals'social philosophy was the belief that man was by nature unequal. As God's creature, man was endowed with faculties that differentiated him from other animals. Dissimilarities in man's faculties also led to differences among men. Some were superior in certain respects to their neighbors, and others were inferior. The nature of man was based on two natural conditions; one the temperament of his body and another the attributes of his mind. One individual's constitution was weak and indolent, another robust and active. De Bow writes, “One strenuously declines all intercourse and communion with knowledge; crawls as the worm upon the surface of the earth. Another grasps it with a giant fangs, and soars with the eagle's wings above the limit of the cloud.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} J.D.B. DeBow, “The Life of Man,” An oration delivered at Cokesbury school, August 2, 1839, in \textbf{De Bow Papers}, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina; hereafter cited as DU.
On Slavery:

The significant aspect of Southern conservative thought was the reconciliation of old (ie. Biblical) and modern (ie. Enlightenment) ideas and beliefs; a paradox which was a result of the existence of the slave South in the emerging industrializing world. Central to Southern conservatism was pro-slavery ideology in the South. De Bow's early proslavery ideas were constructed on the Biblical arguments and Enlightenment philosophy, which maintained that slavery was a “natural” institution, while his later proslavery ideas were influenced by the increased North-South sectional conflicts, and expanded to incorporate the scientific and racial arguments in the defense of slavery as the best state of social organization.22

Slavery was a natural condition fit for Africans whose social development was still in the barbarian stage. De Bow argued from the background of Enlightenment thought that society progressed according to its intellectual development. He contended that the light that made the master civilized also caused him to feel the suffering of the slave, even more than the slave himself. In effect, he argued that the slave was “an African from Africa, a benighted

land" 23 which, like Europe, had previously been enlightened. But somehow the “lamp” had expired in Africa and some portions of its people were forced into slavery. When the “light” went off in Africa, it also deprived the people of the capability to acquire knowledge, the most important factor in a modern and civilized society, which contributed to the refinement of individual senses and perceptions especially of guilt and sorrow.

In addition, such human deficiencies and inequalities rule out the applicability of natural law, which, for De Bow, was “to govern individuals in their conduct towards each other previous to the formation of society.” 24 In such a situation, the natural law was not applicable in its fullest extent, and binding upon societies of individuals or states in their mutual relations.

De Bow believed that rights and equality were not the rule for everybody and society. 25 The rule in the one instance might not be suitable for the other because individuals and communities were so essentially dissimilar and unequal. 26 He rejected the principles of both natural rights and social contract because of their fundamentally egalitarian premises which were, according to De Bow, against God's law and history.

23. Original emphasis.
25. George F. Holmes, a noted scholar of the South, expressed a similar idea when he said that freedom was not a right but a privilege man earned by demonstrating himself able to suppress the “profound corruption” that was the essence of human nature. See Faust, A Sacred Circle, 84.
On Society and Government

For De Bow, the origins of man and society were not at all a question to be investigated or probed since they had already been proved and established as nothing but truths and God's nature. His Protestant faith had provided him with basic "truths" about man and society as Southern clergy proclaimed that natural theology was absolutely compatible with "rationalism." In a sense, one can say that the "naturalization of Protestantism" characterized De Bow's social and political thought. Nature in itself, De Bow thought, only gives the elements of a thing, which must be fashioned into shape by men. Accordingly, nature, as it is, must be explored and analyzed so that men can collect and arrange facts from which inferences are drawn, and principles fixed. But this does not mean that man with the laws of man and society can change the order of nature or alter social order according to one's desire. Man can change his society only to conform to God's law of nature, not against it. To De Bow the order of nature thus is something fixed and correctly established according to God's law.

In order to make men equal, he challenged, one had to change the "peculiar" constitutions of men, both body and mind. "He must revolutionize the mind, De Bow said, and "he must overthrow the established orders of nature," and recreate what he could not remodel. This he believed was absolutely beyond the power of man.

28. This argument about the fixed order of nature had not been used since the classical period until the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. See the discussion on the concept of the order of nature and its relations to the philosophy of history in Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, The Discovery of Time (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965).
29. Emphasis added.
30. De Bow, "Does a Republican Government Contain Within Itself the Seeds of Its Own Destruction," delivered before the Procopian Society of Charleston, July 1840, in De Bow Papers, DU.
No matter what man knows about the laws of man and society, he cannot change the order of nature or alter social order according to one's desire. Man can change his society only to conform to God's law of nature, not against it.

De Bow also rejected the premises of the social contract theorists on the establishment of state and society as fictional and dubious in their historical reliability. He held that it was natural instinct for survival which compelled man to join with others and live together in society. For De Bow, man in the state of nature is helpless and weak because, with minimum relations with others especially in simple production and exchange, he must rely mainly on himself to sustain his living and protect his wealth. Such a state of nature obliges man to protect and defend his life against all adversity inflicted on him by others. Accordingly, men find it necessary to unite with others in society, giving them strength and intelligence to protect their lives and pursue their wealth. The necessity for human unity constitutes the origin, the advantage, and also the destruction of society. The first and most important feature of human relations, in De Bow's thought, is reciprocal service among people of various statuses and classes.

The origin of the two cardinal social institutions, society and government, according to the social contract theory, was political in the sense that individual rights to private property and security presupposed the existence of government. So, in place of the social contract, De Bow based his discourse on the origin of government and society on the "metaphysical premises of human nature, order of nature and social order," to use the words of Hugh Legaré, A a famous and learned scholar on Classics in the South. He believed

that society was the natural condition of mankind. Since human nature was weak and mediocre, De Bow thought man therefore needed society, which could turn the weaknesses of human nature into positive social relations or the reciprocal and dependent relations among men. He observed that, "to a lesser or less extent, in the workings of society or government, even the rudest men are everywhere responsible for each other, and participate, whether they will or not, in the consequences of actions and events induced by their agency, their negligence, their culpability, their guilt, or it may be, even their misfortune."

The important point for De Bow is to postulate that man is a dependent or social animal and, in order to be able to survive, has created society. Consequently, for society to exist and exert its positive role for the welfare and benefits of its individual members, there must be a need for a social institution like government to legislate and enforce the laws. For De Bow government is the earliest product of society, which "enables it to sustain and perpetuate its own existence." Like society, government owes its birth to the necessity of preventing and repressing the injuries which the associated individuals had to fear from one another. Unlike society which originates in the wants of men; government originates in their vices. Society tends always to good; government always tends to the absolute misuse of power. Society is the first in its origin and government is instituted for it, and is but its instrument. Thus, Southerners

35. I have relied on a more systematic and elaborate discussion on the origins of society and government made by the Abbé Raynal. De Bow referred to him quite often and had copied some of Raynal's ideas in "The American Revolution" in his commonplace book. See Guillaume Thomas Francois Raynal, The Revolution of America (Edinburgh: Printed for S. Doig, 1792).
always emphasized the good nature of society against the corrupt nature of government because society was created to preserve man.

Historically, there were two forms of governments, De Bow contended: a monarchy, formed on a natural foundation; and a republic, formed on the opposite, and consequently unnatural foundation. Governments, according to De Bow, consist of individuals which, in turn, are divided into classes. De Bow’s concept of class, however, was simply a category of different individuals grouped together on the basis of their “peculiar natural constitutions,” not on their social relations of production or socio-economic status. Accordingly some are born to rule and some to be ruled. Following William Paley’s *Principle of Moral Philosophy*, he stated that the origin of government was a gradual development from a simple organization like the family to a more complex and protective military form of government. The weak had to seek protection from the strong. Thus the first governments of the world were decidedly monarchical.

All forms of governments had inborn defects and were susceptible to change, corruption, and perversion. De Bow conceived government as an organism with its own life and, like humans, prey to all of the vicissitudes thereof. Referring to Polybius and Lycurgus as authorities on the various forms of governments, he quoted them as saying that “as all governments proceed primarily from the people, so all mutations in government proceed primarily from the people also.”36 Similarly, noted De Bow, Plato also said that “the grand source” of government mutations was “the intemperance of the human passions.”37 Clearly there was no absolutely good and perfect

37. De Bow, “Does a Republican Government Contain Within Itself the Seeds of Its Own Destruction” an oration delivered before the Procopian Society of the College of Charleston, July 1840, in *De Bow’s Papers*, DU.
government. The best among them, according to Polybius, who De Bow believed had made the deepest investigation into the subject, is that one which was composed of an admixture of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.

As a product of society, De Bow thought forms of government always correspond with those of society. Divided into three stages of social progress, the “savage state” has a simple form of government and legislation, while the “intermediate state” has a complex form, and the “civilized state” has the most complex form of government and profound science of legislation.38 More significant than the previous stages, De Bow believed, the “civilized state” is the only society that can march toward “the perfection in the economy of States.”39 For De Bow, the history of legislation was the history of the human mind or “the proper philosophy of history,” and the science of legislation, the noblest and most useful, was “the depository and safeguard of life, liberty, and all the great interests of generations present and to come.”40 Such a science required no experienced men, no study or research, but virtuous men and politicians. He warned that, without virtue, genius and learning were the greatest curses which could be inflicted upon humanity. “Certainly,” he said, “a most frightful picture is presented in a human being is mind without heart, intellect without sensibility, knowledge unsanctified. How much more terrible than the mere privation of heart is its corruption.”41

39. Ibid., 100. De Bow also argued against Dugald Stewart who had maintained that “as society advances to perfection the science of legislation will be simplified,” \textit{De Bow’s Review} 20 (January 1856), 36.
41. Ibid., 43-44. Original emphasis.
He therefore wrote that the most precious ingredient for the statesman is "virtue," which, he said, "is a meagre word, in whose stead we would gladly substitute religion."42

In De Bow's political philosophy, the state is a moral being, whose essence consists in the principles on which it is constructed. He believed the most important thing in the state are men, not its geography, and government organizations, for it is "men, rather than walls, and fortification, and towns, which constitute the state, it is not mere aggregate masses, without reason, discipline, and intellect." This was the meaning of the state, which southerners understood, and it corresponded to their beliefs that all people (or society) exist antecedent to the formation of government. The will and welfare of the people, not the government, thus are the source, the center, and the end of all power in the state.43

On the Philosophy of History

Underlying De Bow's social and political ideas was therefore a philosophy of history that provided the necessary frame-work, vocabulary and analytical tools for dissecting social existence and progress. Influenced by Dugald Stewart, a disciple of Thomas Reid, who made Scottish Realism scientific and practical, De Bow emphasized the use of the inductive method and abandoned all speculation about hidden substances and essences. By concentrating entirely on the observable properties of matter and mind, he believed one could discover laws or principles of phenomena. This method enabled De Bow to make generalizations about man and society.

42. Ibid., 43. Original emphasis.
43. "The Commercial Age," De Bow's Review 7 (September 1849), 228; See also a discussion of the meaning of the state in Southern Quarterly Review 1 (January 1842), 189-90.
One place to look for these "laws" was history. Like Hume, De Bow believed that mankind was the same in all times and places and the chief use of history was only to discover "the constant and universal principles of human nature." History, therefore, was timeless so that it could provide the record of the changing qualities of mankind, which, in turn, enable men to find the universal man and the eternal verities and values of nature. According to De Bow, the course of man's life was progress, from one epoch to another, and from childhood to manhood, under an irresistible impulse like clouds hovering above his head. "The development of time eradicates the mildness of innocence, the virtue of the past."

All Men Are Created Unequal

It is a small step indeed from this understanding of man to an argument for a society and government which recognized the fundamental inequalities of man, namely a society with masters and slaves. De Bow's ideas of slavery were basically the same throughout his life; that is, the belief that blacks were a naturally inferior race and suitable for manual work in a system where a superior race of whites had the obligation to provide and care for their physical and spiritual needs. Slave or dependent relations were natural and proved to be efficient in producing wealth and prosperity. This does not mean that De Bow's ideas about advocating slavery never changed. In fact, his ideas on slavery became politically more aggressive as the sectional conflict intensified and, importantly, when the problem

44. Quoted in David W. Noble, Historians Against History: The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant in American Historical Writing Since 1830 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 10.
of slavery became an “international” issue after the British abolished slavery in their colonies. But his basic ideas about slavery still remained the same. In the latter half of the 1850's De Bow incorporated many new ideas from political economy, anthropology, sociology, and the natural sciences into his defense of slavery as a natural social organization. He firmly believed the slave system was in every way superior to the free labor system. The final attempt in the development of De Bow’s ideas of slavery was to show that the conflict over the slavery issue was not only a contest between the two regions, North and South, but was a contest between two ideas of two different social systems, the slave and free, whose outcome would determine the future of world civilization.\textsuperscript{46}

The American North assumed that all men are equal and that equality is right while the South assumed that since all men are not equal, equality is not right. De Bow conceived equality as the most noble thing that allows one to enjoy “personal security, personal liberty, and private liberty,” and, equally, equality that allowed one to have a reciprocal obligation with others so that one could observe the “three great principles of the Justinian code, \textit{honeste vivere, alternum non laedere, suum cuique tribuere}.”\textsuperscript{47} De Bow fiercely attacked the liberal ideas of freedom and equality for all. He was critical even of the American declaration of Independence in arguing for universal human rights, freedom of opinion, and equality of mankind. He wrote that the revolutions in England\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{footnotes}
\item [46] Emphasis added.
\item [47] “Characteristics of the Statesman,” \textit{Southern Quarterly Review} 6 (July 1844), 105; the same article was published again in \textit{De Bow’s Review} 20 (January 1856), 29-55.
\item [48] De Bow probably meant the English Civil War in the 1640's since Charlestonians had great interest in the Puritan Revolution. See George C. Rogers, Jr., \textit{Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 100.
\end{footnotes}
had bequeathed the Americans with a legacy of "equal rights" as manifested in Jefferson's thought that "men were all sovereign, free and independent born" and in Thomas Cooper's indictment of the cruelty of slavery. De Bow challenged the Jeffersonian assertion by asking for proof of such experiences. Where was the "boasted independence and equality of mankind." He continued "it is an utopian delusion, the nursling of a warmed imagination and plaything of an ambitious demagogue." 49

To counter those liberal ideas, De Bow utilized the concept of a fixed order of nature and the world following the creation of God. He argued that God had not created man to be equal. Men were neither born to equal possessions, nor with equal powers of mind and body. Men were born to be rulers or ruled. Nature had endowed a ruler with the will, avarice, and ambition. How many were there in the world? "Enough to rule it," and they are at last the masters of mankind. "Look at the "sickly, emaciated, and penn[il]less sufferer" who, with "all poor-mindless-spiritless-serf," was "nature's freak." He was destined to be nothing more than a slave, "and of this sort is the mass of mankind." 50 According to De Bow, equality therefore is not a natural right but an artificial one, because it is originated in society for the purpose of keeping society in order and advancing it to a higher stage. Equality is meaningful among the equals and the privileged who have the genius, learning and arts to elevate it.

**Slavery and Progress**

Thus Southern intellectuals redefined the idea of progress so that it was compatible with the conservative ideas of the South.

49. De Bow, "Random Thoughts on Slavery," A paper presented to Dr. William Brantley, the College of Charleston, January 24, 1840, in *De Bow Papers*, Duke University.

50. Ibid.
The idea of progress in America has been simplified and addressed primarily to the economic advancement of individuals as well as of the nation. De Bow believed that given its natural resources and a slave labor system under the guidance of enlightened masters, the South could regain its dominance in national political and improve its economy based on agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing. With a strong and progressive economy, the South could defend its institutions, especially slavery, from northern attacks. His economic ideas were basically informed by the economic ideas of merchant capital, that progress and the prosperity of society were based on commodity exchanges rather than on the production process. Proslavery ideas therefore allowed Southern intellectuals conveniently to place "blacks" in a barbarous stage in a linear social development, and also to justify their guidance and protection by civilized men and societies. In this sense, slavery brought blacks into the rank of a modern world order and at the same time perfected and harmonized the natural hierarchical social order. Ultimately they defended slavery as a social system that was ordained by God and justified by history as the most suitable for an inferior and unequal race.

In conclusion, De Bow expressed many of the beliefs shared by Southerners regarding the ideas of politics, government, and society, which emphasized the organic relations between members of a society, and the patriarchal social structure of society and government. De Bow’s social and political ideas, which were informed by the slaveholders’ world view, therefore broke away from the mainstream of the American liberal philosophy. But his social and political ideas, as well as those of the Old South, were also imbued with many assumptions and ideas of the Enlightenment philosophy particularly Scottish Realism—a contradiction which was a result of the position of the slave South in the modern world.

In the end the struggle of the Old South to maintain and preserve its “peculiar” social order resulted in the disintegration and
violent change in its social fabric. Gone with the loss of the Old South was not only its evil institution of slavery but also the alternative for social and economic development based on the traditional social order and values. Moreover, in retrospect and from a global perspective, the destruction of the Southern world view and political states suggests that any attempt to stop and provide an alternative model of development to the liberal capitalist model, was nearly impossible. This point, I think, is worthy to the non-Western and less industrialized countries in the age of Globalization. For Thailand, the issues raised by Southern conservative intellectuals about the balanced development between industry and agriculture, the role of family, community and organic values in maintaining social order are relevant and worthy of consideration even from a different standpoint.