"The Fate Which Takes Us:" Benjamin F. Beall and Jefferson County, (West) Virginia in the Civil War Era

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“THE FATE WHICH OVERTAKES US:”
BENJAMIN F. BEALL AND JEFFERSON COUNTY, (WEST) VIRGINIA
IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

A Thesis Presented

By

MATTHEW R. COLETTI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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“THE FATE WHICH OVERTAKES US:"
BENJAMIN F. BEALL AND JEFFERSON COUNTY, (WEST) VIRGINIA
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ABSTRACT

“THE FATE WHICH OVERTAKES US:”

BENJAMIN F. BEALL AND JEFFERSON COUNTY, (WEST) VIRGINIA

IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

FEBRUARY 2016

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This thesis analyzes the editorial content of a popular regional newspaper from the Shenandoah Valley, the *Spirit of Jefferson*, during the height of the Civil-War Era (1848-1870). The newspaper’s editor during most of the period, Benjamin F. Beall, was a white, southern slaveholder of humble origins, who spent time serving in the Confederate military as an enlisted man. Beall, however, had also quickly established himself as one of the preeminent Democrats in his home county of Jefferson, as well as both the Shenandoah Valley and the new state of West Virginia once the county became part of the thirty-fifth state during the war. Beall firmly believed in the institution of racial slavery, which granted whites such as himself a privileged position in southern society through the social and economic subjugation of African Americans and went to war to defend those beliefs. Yet, not all of Beall’s white neighbors decided that secession was an appropriate idea worth pursuing. Typical of other areas in the Upper South, these unionists existed in greater numbers than elsewhere in the southern United States due to the
survival of a strong, two-party political system built from an increasingly diversifying local economy. These white unionists shared a complicated relationship with local blacks, who also sought to defeat the Confederacy in order to claim freedom and citizenship rights in the United States. This paper, hence, traces the path to disunion in Jefferson County and the troubled attempts to reunify during the immediate aftermath of the war from the perspective of the largest population demographic in the county—albeit smaller than elsewhere in the South—the cultural conservatives like Beall. Beall’s words serve as some of the best surviving evidence of how most local whites felt toward the attempts to shatter slavery and how difficult it was for those whites to prevent its destruction. Beall’s story is therefore a greater tale of the complexities of disunion, war, and reunification in the Upper South.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the early days of April, 1857, welcomed farmers back to their fields and encouraged shop owners to open the windows of their musty stores, a young, aspiring printer took the first major step of his adult life in his home of Charlestown, Jefferson County, Virginia, located in the rural Lower Shenandoah Valley. A local newspaper, the *Spirit of Jefferson*, had been put up for public auction for the third time in nearly three years. The printer, 28-year-old Benjamin F. Beall, had recently finished his apprenticeship at another area paper, the *Virginia Free Press*, and decided that the opportunity to advance his career had come. With a young wife and a family in mind, the chance to run his own newspaper seemed too good to ignore. Beall purchased the *Spirit* with his brother, Thomas, a successful local merchant. Already a renowned Democratic organ in the antebellum Valley, the brothers excelled at enhancing the *Spirit’s* appeal among its partisan readers right up to the eve of the Civil War. By 1860, Beall had acquired his brother’s share of the business, and continued on to success alone, amassing a personal fortune worth 1,500 dollars. The young editor was so successful that he was able to purchase a slave; the greatest sign of social and economic affluence that a white man could boast in the Old South. The greatest impact on the *Spirit of Jefferson*, however, occurred not through a change of ownership, but because of the transformation of its proprietors *themselves*, most notably Benjamin Beall. Not only had the young editor earned a significant, personal fortune from the newspaper, he had also risen considerably within the ranks of the regional Democratic Party. While there are clear indicators of the reasons for Beall’s Democratic proclivities, his social mobility through a newspaper apprenticeship hints at his origin in one of Jefferson County’s poorer families. Nevertheless, both Beall and the *Spirit* came to embody the Democratic
character of Jefferson County by the time of the war, and remained so well after the fighting ended.¹

The story of Beall’s tenure as the editor of the *Spirit of Jefferson* (a period that lasted from 1857 to January of 1870—the heart of the Civil War Era) is unique because, unlike many places in the Old South, he was often embroiled in bitter political disputes with rival journalists, politicians, and other prominent individuals. While Jefferson County was culturally similar to other white southern communities of the Civil War Era, it also featured distinct differences. Nestled in the heart of the Middle South, Jefferson County had an energetic two-party system in which Whigs and Democrats often competed fiercely for public office. Whigs held a countywide majority due to significant manufacturing, commercial interests, and wealthy wheat farmers, who formed the basis of the party’s constituency. The Democrats, however, had a sizeable minority given the presence of small farmers, landless laborers, and the independent artisans that also called Jefferson home. As such, the political culture became intensely personal as many white residents, men and women alike, participated overwhelmingly in every political event, Benjamin Beall included. The writings and editorial content that Beall presented in the *Spirit* reflected one side of the constant, swirling political vortex that captivated the white residents of Jefferson County during the mid-nineteenth century. Beall’s perspective is especially important because it explains the underlying reasons that white residents of Jefferson County like him opted for secession in 1861—a decision that brought war to their doorstep.

Benjamin F. Beall’s assessment of the changes to his world permit fascinating insights into the ways in which white southerners navigated the unsettled waters of national and local events that distorted their sense of stability. His editorials function as a kind of diary that records the transformation of his world. Like many editors of his day Beall either authored or selected political stories by like-minded journalists that echoed his personal attitudes. He typically published editorial material that promoted his ideas, and used his prowess as a communications specialist to sabotage competing opinions that threatened the cohesion of the community, where his newspaper served as a social organ. Beall’s opinions indicate that he felt duty-bound to protect his community from the cultural depredations of dishonorable people. And those dishonorable people that Beall was compelled to fight were northern whites and blacks who sought to undermine the institution of slavery, as well as unionists, many of them former political adversaries, who abetted abolition. Thus, Beall’s story serves as a conduit for understanding the complexities of communal stability among white southerners in the more socially diverse Middle South in the Civil War Era were differing political opinions prevailed.

The first chapter lays the foundation of Benjamin Beall’s political behavior before he assumed the role as the Spirit of Jefferson’s editor. The national and local sociopolitical atmosphere that Beall inhabited at the height of the Sectional Crisis was fraught with cultural division instigated by the strife previously established during the second-party system. Differences between Democrats and Whigs over political philosophies established by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison gradually sowed seeds of deep distrust that polarized Jefferson County in the Jacksonian Era. Bitterness over political disputes intensified during the period, lasting well into the 1850s, with the start of the Sectional Crisis. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown indicated that, personal honor often defined local politics in the Old South because white
men were honor-bound to successfully govern their communities in a socially respectable manner. Elizabeth Varon and Brenda E. Stevenson observed that the family unit molded the white idea of community stability, where men were socially charged as the family’s public champions. Because politics directly affected both community and family, disputes between political rivals often resulted in highly personal animosity. Second-party system politics, then, was especially vociferous in places like Jefferson County well into the mid-nineteenth century. A review of the philosophies of one of Beall’s professional predecessors, James W. Beller, (who founded the *Spirit*) and that of his competitors at the *Virginia Free Press* suggested that whites throughout Virginia were culturally trained by the partisan politics of the second-party system to resent and distrust each other because of their different sociopolitical philosophies.²

Yet, it was slavery and the debate about its future in the United States that ultimately shattered political differences when it became the central focus of American political discourse. Chapter two reveals that slavery emerged as the all-consuming political question for Beall and his neighbors in Jefferson County during the 1850s. Historians like Stevenson and Varon, as well as Edmund S. Morgan, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Eugene D. Genovese, and David Brion Davis have shown that racial slavery was the foundation of white southern life, as it provided labor, wealth, and the comforting social roles based on skin color. While political discussions about slavery’s fate were emotionally charged in the Old Dominion prior to the mid-1800s, most whites in places like Jefferson County agreed that the survival of the “peculiar” institution should be a right guaranteed for generations. Borrowing heavily from William A. Link’s monograph, *The Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*, the chapter argues that it

was not until white southerners believed that northerners were committed to destabilizing white southern society through the destruction of slavery that the push for secession seemed reasonable. Unique social transformations in Virginia intensified the commotion, as escalating slave resistance to acts of racial subjugation encouraged beliefs that the plot to destroy white society below the Mason-Dixon Line was unfolding in full force. White southerners suspected that northerners had united *en masse* with enslaved blacks on a grand scale to instigate the mounting resistance when stories of northern opposition to legislation like the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 became well known.  

As Democrats across the South evolved politically into a party of white southern rights, their suspicions of southern Whig and northern antislavery collaboration grew with the rising national commotion. Given the prior history of antislavery proclivities in the national Whig Party, southern Democrats increasingly felt justified in their apprehension toward the North. As William W. Freehling demonstrated in his multi-volume work on the Old American South, a potent second-party system remained strong in the Middle South by mid-century (a region that included, Virginia, along with North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas and constituted the lower portion of what is considered the Upper South), where a prominent Whig political culture developed due to the diversification of each state’s local economy. As in similar communities in the Virginia, Jefferson County’s Whig Party was strong before the war, and numerous political figures there drew the active attention of Democrat journalists like Beller and Beall during the Sectional Crisis. The editorial content published by Beall and his predecessors revealed that as

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the national crisis over slavery grew, so did their suspicions about the political motivations and ethical integrity of their rivals in the local Whig Party. Attacks on state and local politicians became more vicious as the editors of the *Spirit of Jefferson* believed that Whigs aimed to advance their own careers at the expense of the white community by standing for antislavery which the editors conflated as actual abolition. Thus, when Beall became editor of the newspaper, he inherited the political distress of his Democratic predecessors about slavery and racial equality, and seized all opportunities to lambast political opponents, who seemed to threaten white communal stability to the point of character assassination. The tense political tradition spawned by the second-party system fomented wariness as the political crisis over slavery grew, and created a significant wedge throughout Jefferson County.⁴

War acutely abraded the differences between white county residents when the outbreak of hostilities forced neighbors and family members to choose sides, as chapter three discusses. A reluctant Beall finally embraced southern Democrats’ call for secession and followed his state of Virginia into war. The defense of the white southern social order inspired most of Jefferson County’s Democrats and Whigs to shelve their pre-war differences and rebel under the banner of white supremacy. Not all joined the fight, however. While the scales were never evenly balanced, significant pockets of unionism bobbed amid the raging torrent of secessionism. Like in many communities throughout Virginia and the Middle South, the decision to support southern independence was never uniform among local whites. As Alex Baggett, Daniel W. Crofts, and Richard Nelson Current explained, loyalty choices exerted nearly as much unique, personal agency as the collective will of the community. Thus, a number of the Jefferson

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County’s citizens served in and aided the Union army, which destroyed property as well as liberated slaves. Perhaps the greatest affront to white southern rebels like Beall was the continued rise of black resistance to southern whites, as many local blacks either escaped north from the bondage of their masters or helped the Union army by serving as laborers or soldiers. Jefferson and its adjoining counties were no exception to the dynamism of southern unionism and the cracks that it split open in the towns and rural villages of the lower Shenandoah Valley. Unlike other southern regions, Jefferson County was continuously occupied by some form of official military presence that turned it into a modern fortress. From the opening days of the war to its conclusion forty-eight-months later, the county was transformed into a desolated landscape. Union and Confederate military units alike marauded throughout the county, while guerilla units exacted revenge upon civilians of both sides and because of their political inclinations. For someone akin to Benjamin F. Beall, the decision of white northerners, blacks, and even some of his neighbors to violently resist the Confederacy intensified the community fractures in Jefferson County.⁵

Thus, Jefferson County in the immediate post-war years was not only a microcosm of the much larger sociopolitical drama that unfolded across the United States; it also exhibited unique characteristics because of its absorption into the loyalist Border-South state of West Virginia. After the war, the Republican answer to the very real question about the potential destruction of West Virginia’s fledgling state legislature by returning former rebels was the ratification of restrictions on voting and public services for known ex-Confederates. With unreconstructed Confederates disenfranchised throughout the Mountain State, Republicans attempted to

implement policies, like black suffrage and educational social-welfare programs, as seen in all other southern states governed by the Grand Old Party in the first few years of Reconstruction. Jefferson County’s Republicans were no different. Politics at the county level exacerbated lingering wartime acrimony, as disempowered white conservatives interpreted political developments as acts of betrayal by white neighbors, who favored the bureaucratic opportunism that inspired the Sectional Crisis. While local whites comprised the main impetus behind social change, they were assisted by white northern migrants, including federal military personnel and evangelical missionaries. Jefferson-County African Americans also contributed heavily to the transforming social dynamic by establishing independent lives as best they could as well as taking the first steps at mass political mobilization. As chapter four reveals, Reconstruction politics in Jefferson County, therefore, not only mirrored national disputes, but was complicated by the particular circumstances that materialized from West Virginian statehood and other southern states that avoided Military Reconstruction due to their wartime loyalty. As individuals like Beall navigated the opacity of war and peace, their own war experiences suffused the difficult process of reinterpreting themselves as Americans and as West Virginians.  

As Reconstruction’s political momentum increased, resistance to change escalated, as well. Decades of white-supremacist cultural reinforcement bolstered the violent paroxysm that engulfed the Republican Party’s push for southern social change initiated during the Civil War. The conservative press of which Benjamin Beall was a part, scrutinized administrative behavior

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in local newspapers, whipping Jefferson County whites into fierce opposition to local
Republicans and their allies. Conservative newspapers that encouraged a robust protest of the
liberal political agenda reprinted letters from prominent ex-Confederate officers that
memorialized the county’s fallen soldiers, and regularly published announcements of
commemorative ceremonies that glorified the Confederate dead. Chapter four also begins to
address the infusion of white memory into the politics of the day by suggesting that the past’s
glorification distorted the actions of blacks, Yankees, and unionist neighbors to make the
experience of defeat palatable. Drew Gilpin Faust outlined in her renowned publication, The
Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War, that Americans suffered psychological
trauma from the war’s immense death and destruction. As David W. Blight, Caroline E. Janney,
and William A. Blair have shown, nowhere was this more apparent than in the American South,
which endured most of the fighting in a war that it ultimately lost. Post-war newspapers and
personal letters illuminate how former Confederates used the war’s memory to not only control
Jefferson County’s post-war culture, but as an outlet for emotional recovery. People like
Benjamin Beall contributed to the fabrication of a “Lost Cause” illusion that lionized the bygone
South and justified resistance to cultural transformations that elevated the status of blacks.7

Benjamin Beall’s story is a keen look at the experiences endured by the majority of
Jefferson County’s white population during the Civil War Era. It is a tale that reveals the

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personal weight of racial slavery, which drove white southerners to disrupt national unity through war to preserve the institution. Jefferson County’s white population was atypical, however. Like most Middle-South counties, Jefferson was home to a substantial number of white unionists, as well as both freed and enslaved blacks, which made going to and fighting war a complex and personal event. While white southerners like Beall often followed the community’s collective will in decisions about secession, individuality also played a significant role in determining the course of the war in Jefferson County, contributing to the historical complexity of the Civil War in the Upper South.  

The personal nature of southern politics ensured that the fighting fomented community wide resentment, making the war especially traumatic. Thus, when post-war reconstruction flared briefly in Jefferson County, the defeated population sought refuge in antebellum nostalgia for the lost, white-supremacist social order, while fervently resisting additional cultural changes that dissipated the last vestiges of the Old South. Beall’s story, then, also chronicles the intricacies of the war in the portion of the Upper South known as the Middle South, and how the region’s ruptured communities struggled to reconstruct a collective identity when the killing had finally ceased. To understand how Benjamin Beall and his community experienced the phenomenon of war, it is necessary to understand why Jefferson County was susceptible to divisiveness among whites and blacks in the first place.

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8 Many historians, including Freehling, refer to both the Middle South and the “Border” South as being part of a larger region known as the “Upper” South. Those states that composed the Border South were Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and eventually, West Virginia.
CHAPTER II

“The Spirit of the Age:”

The Creation of a Political Tradition in
Antebellum Jefferson County

Frances Wright, an English visitor to the United States in 1840, remarked that the “spirit
of the age,” was, “to be a little fanatical.” She alluded to a mania that gripped the nation against
the backdrop of an impending presidential race between Whig William Henry Harrison and
Democratic incumbent, Martin Van Buren. The curious characteristics of the 1840 election
cycle sprang from ordinary Americans’ unprecedented involvement in the electoral process;
national voter turnout that year approximated 80 percent. Such mass enthusiasm, however,
resulted from the raucous partisanship that dominated the American political landscape, spurred
by populist campaign messages that strained to entice the unaffiliated voter. The “populistic,
emotionally evocative,” election of 1840, as historian Daniel Walker Howe termed it, was
symptomatic of the tumult in American politics during the pitched battle between Democrats and
Whigs over the country’s socioeconomic future, dubbed the “second-party system.” The fevered
passion derived from the injection of populism into the nation’s political bloodstream, which
inspired Americans to seriously contemplate the personal effects of governmental policies on
their lives, their families, and their local communities.10

Nowhere was this more apparent than in areas of the Middle South, in places like
Jefferson County, Virginia, now West Virginia. In a region where family and community were

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synonymous, politics were entwined with a deeply personal element that inflamed followers of the unique visions proffered by each political party. As white southern men were honor bound to protect their families and communities, county residents who fought the political battles of the second-party system did so with heightened sensitivity because their masculinity was constantly challenged by other male political rivals, resulting in volatile disagreements that easily descended into bitter acrimony. This profound irritation festered under much of the area’s future political development. Schisms surfaced in the 1830s and 1840s, escalating into a pattern of mistrust that was intricately wound into the county’s cultural fabric by the 1850s. The cracks that surfaced as a result of the second-party system lingered into the 1850s and provided the foundation for the political drama over slavery that infuriated Jefferson County’s white population during the Sectional Crisis and ultimately tore the community asunder. There is no better way, then, to understand Benjamin F. Beall’s political behaviors than a review of the type and style of stories published by his predecessors that were read during the ensuing controversies. An examination of the political perspectives introduced by James W. Beller, the first proprietor of the *Spirit of Jefferson*, and that of his opposition in the rival *Virginia Free Press* will reveal how the discord shaped by the second-party system propelled the county’s population toward calamity when slavery assumed the dominant role in American political thought by the 1850s.

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An editorial printed by Beller in the inaugural issue of the *Spirit of Jefferson* declared that it, “will be governed in its course, and to sustain by the utmost ability, those principles as laid down by the great fathers of the Republican Church, but more especially by the great Apostle of Human Liberty, the High Priest in the Temple of our Constitution, whose name composes a
portion of our head.” Founded in 1844 during the heated presidential race between James K. Polk and the persistent Henry Clay, editor James W. Beller hoped that his Spirit would establish the principles of Jacksonian Democracy firmly in Jefferson County. Although something of a political maverick in his later years (he championed temperance and limited funding for the county’s public schools), Beller initially presented himself as a staunch Jeffersonian traditionalist and anti-federalist ideologue. “Looking upon the Federal Government as one not of general, but of special power, and the Constitution as an enumeration rather than a limitation of those powers,” Beller insisted in his maiden editorial that, “we would leave the internal policy of the country to be controlled and regulated by such laws as the wants of the community might suggest to their respective local Legislatures.” Observing that any expansion of the federal government was a, “dangerous assumption of power on part of the General Government,” he insisted to his new readers that, “Man’s perfect Equality, and his competency for Self-Government,” ensured that a decentralized government was best for the future of the states in the union. He used the Polk campaign’s platform to justify his sentiments, believing that its opposition to national economic legislation and friendliness to land acquisition boded well for a society that was meant to remain agrarian. “Arise then, and give to us a helping hand,” Beller resounded. “Make the interest of this Journal your interest—exert yourselves by all fair and honorable means to sustain it, and it will be found contending for your rights at all times and under all circumstances.”

James Beller did not need to worry about his newspaper’s future stability. For the duration of the second-party system, he discovered that his political messages found a receptive, countywide audience, and the Spirit of Jefferson evolved into a renowned regional party organ in both Jefferson County and the Shenandoah Valley. Much of his early success derived from the

hunger of local Jacksonians, who shared Beller’s vision that the Democracy emanated from the political ethos crafted by Thomas Jefferson and craved a party-friendly paper in Jefferson County. The connection between the Jacksonian-era Democratic Party and the Republicanism of the Founders’ generation stemmed from the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798 and 1799. Authored by Jefferson (with his colleague, James Madison) and endorsed by the Virginian and Kentuckian legislatures, the Resolutions established the basis for the belief that the national union originated from a legal compact between the states, which created a unified power over the federal government’s actions. For Jacksonian Democrats, the states epitomized the people’s will and the central government in Washington threatened that sovereignty. Since the states pre-existed the federal government, popular sovereignty emanated first from them, and it was vital that they remained firmly agrarian in their socioeconomic composition because it ensured that American producers maintained more control over the price of labor. In Jefferson’s particular view, “corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age or nation has furnished an example.”12 Thus, federal activity was limited to legislation that facilitated the accumulation of public land for American laborers’ development. These Democrats believed that it was better for the states to take care of their own unique set of problems, rather than take guidance from an elusive and removed political entity that could be exploited by sectional interests.13

Thomas Jefferson’s theories as presented in the resolutions expressed concern that a strong federal government risked being corrupted by political bureaucrats and interest groups, who twisted federal power for their own benefit. The Democracy was populated predominantly

by the white working classes, like subsistence farmers, factory hands, artisans, and other wage earners, who believed that a powerful federal government served the interests of the rich at their own expense. Yet, the Democratic second-party system also attracted more affluent farmers and businessmen, who thought that congressmen cut insincere deals with bankers and financiers according to sectional biases or personal greed, which undercut economic freedom. As historian Sean Wilentz explained:

“The Jacksonian Democracy was chiefly what its proponents said it was—a political movement for, and largely supported by, those who considered themselves producers pitted against a non-producer elite…a belief that relatively small groups of self-interested men were out to destroy majority rule, and with it, the Constitution.”

To Jacksonians, the credit-system style of banking promoted by Henry Clay was a sell out to small groups of financers, who robbed Americans’ ability to price their own labor. As such, congressmen and federal judges became scapegoats for Jacksonians, who suspected the growing influence of economic special interest groups in Washington. The corruption of Washington politicians seemed to be substantiated when congressmen struck a deal to send John Quincy Adams to the White House over Andrew Jackson, who commanded the popular vote in the 1824 election. Democrats were adamant that steps must be taken to reduce deliberate Whig (and their predecessors, the National Republicans) attempts to solidify the protection of the wealthy. James Beller assessed the perception perfectly, when he criticized the Whig Party for elitism and a skewed favoritism that was based on a national economic agenda that promoted industry:

“When we see then, a party disregarding these great lights in our political system, and by an unjust and partial legislation, creating in society favored classes and privileged order, plundering the many to enrich the few, and guided alone in its policy by the principle that the rich and better-born should govern, we turn in horror from that party, as unworthy of the support of Freemen and dangerous to the Liberties of the People.”

14 Wilentz, 513.
For Jacksonians, as the agent of the people’s popular will, it was up to the executive branch in Washington to safeguard the sovereignty of the states and the people from the depredations of politicians and judges, who may be influenced by sectional and special interests.15

Because of his actions as president, Democrats deified Jackson as a legend for his perceived capability to prevent biased congressmen and judges from corrupting society meant exclusively for white Euro-Americans. Jackson brought with him to the presidency, as Daniel Walker Howe determined, an ironic combination of, “authoritarianism with a democratic ideology” that interpreted his personal political perspectives as one with the people. Old Hickory’s tireless populist eloquence about elite corruption merged with older, anti-government ideology fomented by the Republicans of Jefferson’s age. Jackson interpreted common law as an impediment to the people’s sovereignty because it protected propertied interests. Impatience with imposed legal restrictions drove Jackson to use executive branch powers to bypass his adversaries under the premise that his station personified the true political intentions of the common man. While the president’s actions never achieved neatly uniform acceptance by his constituency, Jacksonians nationwide found something to like in at least a few of his policies. The president’s disregard of both congressional protests and the legal sanctions of the Marshall Court against enforcement of his wildly controversial Indian Removal Act attracted vast praise from dedicated Jacksonians, since the act opened land for white settlement across the South (and Illinois). Jacksonian Democrats interpreted the expulsion of 46,000 Native Americans across the United States through the negation of federal treaties as facilitating the will of the American people instead of the laws passed by supposedly presumptuous, disconnected congressmen and

judges. Many party faithful cheered when Jackson fought corruption in Washington by purging federal offices at the start of his presidency, and they rejoiced when it looked like he diminished the political influence of privileged capitalists through his veto of internal improvement bills and his titanic “Bank War.” Even his stand against South Carolinian nullifiers eventually protected Jacksonian interests, despite the president’s reaffirmation of federal hegemony over the states. Like rumored Northern financial threats, to most Jacksonians South Carolina’s nullifiers represented elite planters, who were willing to compromise national unity for their narrow interests.\textsuperscript{16}

At the height of the second-party system, Jacksonian Democrats of Virginia considered the fabled Doctrines of ’98 as synonymous with the activities of the Jackson administration, which became firmly ingrained in the psyche of Jacksonian Democrats across the nation. Nowhere else was this more evident than in the Commonwealth of Virginia, whose own Jacksonians developed a serious appreciation for the ethos. A chronicler of Virginia’s antebellum political atmosphere, William G. Shade, said that, “the question of the proper interpretation of the Constitution continued to be the central defining element of the Virginians’ political perspectives.”\textsuperscript{17} “The commonwealth generally divided between states’ rights advocates, who kept alive the anti-federalist tradition, and the federalists, who advocated a positive (if limited) role for the national government.”\textsuperscript{18} For Virginian Democrats, it was unethical to diverge from the revolutionary generation’s political ideas. From the mid-1830s to the start of the Sectional Crisis, national controversies over Indian Removal, nullification, and the structure of the country’s financial institutions were intimately connected to Virginia’s

\textsuperscript{17} Shade, 227.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 227.
constitutional debate-oriented political culture. Popular political topics in Virginia centered on the interstate debate of the Constitutional responsibilities that dealt specifically with an America that was meant for whites and only whites. President Andrew Jackson’s Native-American policies and federal power had tried to forge a national community, where whites were free to pursue their own happiness, often at the expense of non-whites. In a society like Virginia’s, where racial subjugation defined the social system, the federal government’s forcible removal of natives in favor of Euro-American settlement and deregulation that allowed racial enslavement seemed in line with Virginia’s revolutionary forbearers. Whigs and Democrats, hence, saw the interpretation of the Constitution as inseparable from political decisions that pertained to the nation’s future and the state of the commonwealth. Jacksonians in particular, however, upheld their Doctrines as a sociopolitical heritage that must be obeyed whenever new legislation was introduced in Virginia’s House of Delegates.  

The presence of a large, rural white labor force in Jefferson County offered the ideal environment for the circulation of the principles celebrated in James Beller’s newspaper. In the 1860 census, Jefferson County accounted for 463 farms, most of which were comprised of approximately 100 to 500 acres. While not exactly the size of staple-crop plantations, the farms were large enough to encourage the use of additional labor, including a large number of unskilled whites, who worked alongside slaves and the small population of free blacks in antebellum Jefferson County.\(^2\) By mid-century, 62 percent of the county’s workforce was agricultural, including a significant number of free blacks. Still, noticeable segments of the white male population were modest “farmers” or “laborers,” who had little wealth. The 1850 census

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 228-249.

\(^{20}\) Population statistics for the local African-American population are presented in greater detail in the next chapter.
indicated that the average paid farm hand received 75 cents a day plus room and board and around a dollar without it. As many crops were seasonal, especially wheat, most laborers worked temporary jobs and risked debt if a second or third job was unavailable. Local tax records in 1860 showed that working-class white men, like laborer James Hansen, yielded little taxable property and contributed less than five dollars to the county coffers on average. In contrast, one of Shepherdstown’s most prosperous merchants, Isaac Chapline (a Whig, who turned Republican after the war), prospered enough that he was taxed just over one hundred dollars yearly.  

Class warfare, an integral Jacksonian philosophical viewpoint was, thus, a reality for Jefferson County’s working poor. Rural or urban supporters of the Democracy, however, did not have to be impoverished to appreciate the party’s economic perspective. Proprietors of both large businesses and enormous estates were also attracted to the Democracy for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which was unease about increased government intervention that compromised profit through regulations and taxes. Because Jefferson County had a significant population of both enslaved and free blacks, wealthy white entrepreneurs were attracted to the Democracy because of its tough political rhetoric, which defended slavery and the county’s conversion into a whites-only republic. Yet, the party’s economic message keenly appealed to

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Surkamp diligently compiled the statistics about Jefferson County in 1860, in part, from; United States, Bureau of the Census; United States National Archives and Records Service, “Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Virginia,” Microfilm, Reel 1355—1860. It should also be noted that the tax records from West Virginia University are incomplete; only the years 1859 and 1860 are completely intact. There is not much of a record until after the Civil War, and even then the records are sparse.
the county’s white lower order, where resentment of prominent business interests and potential competition from free, non-white labor remained strong.\textsuperscript{22}

James Beller’s unrelenting rivals in the valley in the early years of the 1850s were editors of the \textit{Virginia Free Press}, the Gallaher family, also of Charlestown. They represented the strong political support of Whiggery in Jefferson County that Beller, and later Beall, continuously campaigned against throughout the antebellum period’s twilight. Originally founded by John S. Gallaher in 1821, the daily operations of the \textit{Virginia Free Press} by the end of the decade fell to his relative and partner Horatio Nelson Gallaher, who also ran it as a family business. By the time Horatio Gallaher became the periodical’s proprietor, the \textit{Virginia Free Press} frequently printed stories that promoted fundamental Whig philosophies. The Gallahers presented various news items that promoted the essence of Whig culture, which, as noted scholar of American Whiggery, Daniel Walker Howe, detailed, revolved around the party’s national economic program that advocated, “purposeful intervention in by the federal government in the form of tariffs to protect domestic industry, subsidies for internal improvements, a national bank to regulate the currency and make tax revenues available for private investment.”\textsuperscript{23} The Gallahers hailed the proposition of the American System, a program of coordinated economic improvements instigated by state and federal interventions. The economic program’s progenitor, Henry Clay, maintained a storied position in the columns of the \textit{Free Press}, as well, both before \textit{and} after the Great Pacifier’s death. Clay’s American System promised the alluring possibility of a diversified, national American economy for each state in the union, where opportunities to create labor and capital were limitless. The Gallahers, however, were not nearly as aggressive in

\textsuperscript{22} Shade, 142, 203-211; Wilentz, 511. More discussion on the specifics of racism and the southern branch of the Democratic Party in Jefferson County will appear in the next chapter.  
\textsuperscript{23} Daniel Walker Howe, \textit{The Political Culture of American Whigs} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 16.
their calls for state-sponsored economic growth as some of their northern party associates. Rather, the Gallahers aligned more closely with the Madisonian National Republican tradition of strong state administrations within the federal system, and were firmly committed to the expansion of a consolidated national government as long as it emerged through congressional legislation.24

Policies propagated by the American System resonated in a family like the Gallahers because Jefferson County had become emblematic of the type of diversified economy that prominent Whigs across the nation championed. Since the 1730s, the county’s farmers were renowned wheat horticulturalists, producing 422,514 bushels of wheat by 1860; a number that ranked first in production among the ten counties that comprised the valley. Given the proximity of major commercial centers in Baltimore, Alexandria, and the District of Columbia, local merchants reaped substantial profits from agricultural trade. As early as the mid-1820s, county residents formed committees and corporations to improve transportation area wide. Throughout the next two decades, turnpikes linked various hamlets, driving the countryside’s commercialization. Demand for wheat and other agricultural products encouraged investment in river and rail transportation, resulting in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Baltimore and Ohio and Winchester and Potomac rail lines passing through Harpers Ferry. The expansion of the transportation network transformed villages into bustling commercial hubs along the upper Potomac River, with Harpers Ferry and Shepherdstown each featuring numerous merchants and small industrialists, who operated a variety of businesses that nourished the burgeoning agricultural trade network. The 1860 census indicated that 114 different manufacturing

24 Year: 1860; Census Place: Charlestown, Jefferson, Virginia; Roll: M653_1355; Page: 811; Image: 161; Family History Library Film: 805355; Bushong, 87. For examples of the staunch adoration of Clay shortly after his death, see; “The Death of Henry Clay—The Patriot Statesmen,” Virginia Free Press, July 1, 1852.
establishments and a diverse array of auxiliary occupations, including millers, tanners, coopers, smiths, wagon makers, and even a successful tobacconist, Solomon V. Yantis, offered services to the county’s agricultural producers. Many of them had access to enslaved labor or owned it outright and thought that the economic policies enhanced their ability to regulate their workforces for greater productivity and profit. Charlestown, the county seat, even boasted a bank by 1850. Several mills and factories netted a few thousand dollars profit yearly, and rewarded their small staffs (roughly six each) with a comfortable wage of six to twenty dollars a month. The improved transportation and active, local commerce revolutionized sleepy villages into thriving towns and cities of a few hundred people. Jefferson County accounted for five incorporated towns, three of which, Shepherdstown, Harpers Ferry, and Charlestown, totaled more than a thousand residents on the eve of the Civil War. Much like the rest of the Virginia, Jefferson County slowly reflected the economic trends that had developed throughout the Old Northwest and the Northeast.25

Despite a noticeable wealth gap between the county’s residents, prosperity expanded during the Jacksonian Era. Some enterprising white men took advantage of the promising economic opportunities tied to industry and commerce and were rewarded with minor, personal fortunes. Various financial successes in the area inspired faith in the fabled “entrepreneurial ethos,” popularly internalized by mid-nineteenth century American businessmen, which augured that talent and diligence would be generously remunerated.26 The Whig’s great patron saint,


26 Howe, The Political Culture of American Whigs, 97; Wilentz, 491.
Henry Clay, defined the notion that the country’s entrepreneurs were wholly self-made men birthed by the protestant work ethic as the *middle class*. The Gallahers enjoyed a modest living before the war, and Horatio Gallaher’s personal estate, funded in part by his family’s newspaper subscription and advertising revenues, was valued at 5,000 dollars in 1860. Historian Charles Sellers suggested, however, that the middle-class aspirations so energetically championed by the Whigs were unobtainable by many because the philosophy overlooked American society’s social inequities, like domestic financial status, that disabled advancement. While not exactly a rags to riches tale, John (who began as a printer’s apprentice) and Horatio Gallaher’s editorial success produced riches. For a family like the proprietors of the *Virginia Free Press*, there was something to the whole “entrepreneurial ethos” of Clay’s middle-class.27

The calls of both national and regional Whig leaders for “mixed economic” policies, that encouraged government and private-sector cooperation made sense to the Gallahers because Whig philosophy propositioned that what was good for entrepreneur was good for the community. Whigs believed that the people were one polity and their community and all the actions within it were meant to preserve stability. Good government, therefore, was inherently meant to serve society’s interests because it was a natural part of the whole. They perceived that the public and private sectors could overlap and influence each other, as both enhanced

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It is important to note that some free blacks in antebellum Jefferson County experienced financial success in spite of the institutionalized discrimination that they encountered as Virginia residents. One black woman, Clarissa Jones, who herself owned slaves, was identified as “well-to-do,” although many believed that the slaves under her care were actually family members that she protected from white slaveholders. Another African American, James Roper, amassed a personal fortune of 166,000 dollars by 1860. While many other free blacks were typically laborers and domestic servants, a few earned a wage working for the government. For more information, see: Hannah N. Geffert, *An Annotated Narrative of the African-American Community in Jefferson County, West Virginia* (Charleston, WV: West Virginia Humanities Council, 1992), 51, 55.
communal structure. Essentially, government and socioeconomic laws ensured order, which was the key, binding trait of Whiggery. Those political principles found a ready audience among white Virginians during the second-party system because another of their revered political ancestors from the Revolutionary Era helped to create the philosophy. Unlike his lifelong friend Jefferson, James Madison believed that a centralized government was necessary for American society because independent states could take advantage of each other. The government, then, could help structure society in a number of ways that sustained long-term stability. To facilitate entrepreneurial development and commerce through strong governance, thus, was good for all members of society. The Gallahers endorsed Henry Clay and Daniel Webster’s political rhetoric that proclaimed, as Sean Wilentz explained, “in America, rich and poor alike were workingmen, and all workingmen were capitalists, or at least incipient capitalists, ready to strike out on the road to wealth that was open to everyone.”

This white American egalitarianism in the 1840s created a populism that made the Whig Party particularly attractive in the wake of the Panic of 1837.

When merchants were inspired to construct the Berryville and Charlestown Turnpike through farm land in 1853 because it would stimulate the county’s economy, the Gallahers vigorously defended the road’s construction because it benefited everyone—even farmers who lost land. “My chief object,” according to one Gallaher editorialist in February, 1853, “is to reiterate the opinion that the fertile and productive portion of the county surrounding the Kabletown mills should have a branch to communicate with the main pike.” The columnist pressed that, “the distance would not, I presume, exceed three miles, and, to speak of nothing

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28 Wilentz, 486.
else, it would serve for the conveyance annually of twenty thousand bushels of wheat, the transportation of which would be reduced, no doubt, half a cent a bushel. Good roads, easy for transportation and pleasant to ride upon, are amongst the most efficient promoters of the prosperity of any county.”

The premise of American egalitarianism and private-sector interventionism afforded the framework for a social order that was built on tenets of self-improvement through public reform. The Whig culture advocated by the Gallahers theorized that sound economics would bolster American morality, which was under modernity’s assault. According to Wilentz, “Even in the Whigs classless pastorale, some citizens were better off than others, and despite rapid economic development, the curses of crime, pauperism, and drunkenness appeared to be growing worse, not better.”

Strong protestant overtones spawned by the Second Great Awakening compelled the Gallahers to embrace a centralized economic direction as, “a conception of progress that was a collective form of redemption; like the individual, and society as a whole, was capable of improvement through conscious effort.” Wilentz explained that the Whigs believed that, “the lazy, the drunk, and the criminal chose wrongly, succumbed to sensuous temptation, and failed to exercise human faculties of self-control that could elevate their souls.” The social reform backed by the Gallahers raised an aura of paternalistic altruism that hoped to cast society in the mold of self-control and restraint that was an integral part of nineteenth-century Christianity. Thus, Whigs ceaselessly clamored for reforms that taught Christian moral lessons, and outlawed vices to eradicate troublesome social disruptions. Unlike the radical elements of the national

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31 Wilentz, 488.
33 Wilentz, 488.
Whigs, the Gallahers adhered to a more conservative approach to modernization. They hoped for socioeconomic reform that matured a rapidly transforming America, while preventing the spread of social radicalization reminiscent of the populist revolution in Europe during the 1840s. They believed that discipline must be accepted both legally and morally to wring maximum opportunity from modernization in support of the family.\textsuperscript{34}

Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown revealed that the concept of personal honor was another southern cultural pillar, especially for white men and their families. The Old South’s domestic and political social apparatus was governed by rules that were based in the ancient code of chivalry. At chivalry’s core was a selfless obligation to the community, while protecting dependents, including family, neighbors, and even their slaves. Patriarchy, however, soon dominated because men were expected to fulfill their duty through a cultural system of gendered social customs that relegated white women and men to subservience as well as black men and women to slavery. Christian morality blended with strict notions of high social position and produced the genteel social circles of the Old South, where honor was everything and fear of shame constrained behavior. For white southern men, epitomizing the role as a good husband and father was compulsory because their masculinity was defined by self-sufficient success that later enabled a thriving family. “At the heart of honor,” Wyatt-Brown explained, “lies the evaluation of the public.”\textsuperscript{35} The specter of family negligence and poverty’s instability was dreaded because the status of a man’s family was a matter of public honor. Men in public life who ran afoul of social strictures risked isolation and were required to mount a passionate, public defense of their personal character that disproved the accuser. According to Wyatt-Brown, “The

\textsuperscript{34} Howe, \textit{The Political Culture of American Whigs}, 150-52, 210-211; Wilentz, 483-493.
\textsuperscript{35} Bertram Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South} (New York: Oxford University, 1982), 15.
threat of shame would encourage a resort to any means of deceiving the all-praying, ever-judging public,” by displaying, “surprise at betrayal,” and, “horror at the thought of vulnerability.”  

Therefore, white southerners, especially adult men, were dually compelled to react fiercely, even violently, to public indictments of cowardice and to censure those who appeared to breach social contracts. As a result, white southern men were fully capable of harsh, personalized responses to political controversies because of the entwining of social politics with the effect on the family.

While the Virginia Free Press typically ran advocacy parables about appropriate Whig comportment for both men and women of all ages, it is significant that the family occupied a special place in the Whig world view promoted by the Gallahers. In a series of weekly columns that appeared in 1856, the Virginia Free Press lectured women directly about their essential responsibilities as wives and mothers. In the second issue, called “The Second Chapter,” the column pontificated that, “the sphere of the woman by divine permission, is that of Home. The position, that of Mother and Wife. In so ordaining and regulating that she was to be the influencing genius of the domestic circle, it was never intended to deprive her of any privilege really and justly her own.” For the Gallahers, a woman’s main role was the quintessential embodiment of and advocate for the role of wife and mother both publically and privately.

The Spirit of Jefferson offered perspectives about the social roles of men and women that were similar to the Virginia Free Press. James Beller’s gender-related publishing, however,  

36 Ibid, 155.
37 Ibid, 26–34, 64–90, 175–198, 327–332. Slavery played a central role in defining southern honor for white men. Historians, like Drew Gilpin Faust and Stephanie McCurry, have written extensively on the relationship between honor, gender, and slavery in the Old South, using South Carolina as an example. While the basics of white southern honor have been defined here, a deeper look at honor, slavery, and whites occurs in chapter two. McCurry’s research in particular was instrumental in this exploration. For more on McCurry and Faust, see: Drew Gilpin Faust, James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982); and, Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (New York: Oxford University, 1995).
contained fewer explicit political overtones because Democrats like the Spirit’s editor would have regarded any suggestion of government interference in the domestic realm as intrusive. However, rhapsodizing about social roles in the community animated the editors of both newspapers because gender conformity was a mainstay of southern psychology. The family structure was prized by white southerners because of its salutary influence and stability. As such, nineteenth-century gender definitions confined women to the home’s private sphere because they were believed to be naturally adept at raising children, while men pursued public activities because they personified the social domination required for such endeavors. Historian Elizabeth R. Varon summarized that, “Men pursued their self-interest in the public sphere,” while, “women maintained harmony, morality, and discipline in the domestic one.”

Marriage and the responsibility of both men and women to fruitfully fulfill that social contract were linchpins of the southern community, and the entire social dynamic was predicated on each family’s ability to produce stable relationships. Marriages were a public fixture where intimate scandals concerning infidelity, spousal abuse, and bankruptcy risked condemnation. Thus, white southerners believed that the inculcation of qualities necessary for a successful family life and consequent stable, public order was vital. Conforming to rigid social expectations was unrealistic for many white southern families in Jefferson County, however, as widespread rural poverty necessitated that the breadwinner was interchangeable, but both Beller and the Gallahers zealously reminded readers that it was imperative to protect the virtuous family.

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White southerners, including residents of Jefferson County, politicized the family in many of the debates about local, state, and national events. Legislation proposed by either of the county’s two major parties tempted alteration of the family dynamic for better or worse. Whig culture enshrined the family politically because they believed that the domestic and public domains intimately influenced one another. In research about the influence of white women on antebellum Virginia politics, Elizabeth R. Varon disclosed that Whigs actively promoted the implementation of their world view through the home. Whigs encouraged women to participate in a variety of beneficent social organizations to advance the political agenda of Whig men. Under certain circumstances, “Whig women” participated in party conventions, campaign events, and advocated political change to sanctify the movement by serving as reminders of Whiggery’s moral superiority. Virginia’s Whig men urged female involvement throughout the hotly contested political campaigns of the 1840s and into the 1850s.41

Politics in Jefferson County were intensely personal because of the dramatic politicization of the main components of southern life, family and community, in the early nineteenth century. Consequently, the Whig culture espoused by the Gallahers was ascendant. Beginning in 1835, until the second-party system’s fracture in the mid-1850s, the county’s voters favored the Whigs in a variety of local, state, and national elections. The second-party system that birthed the county’s Whig party resulted from Jackson’s Bank War, which reverberated all across Virginia. Prior to the 1830s, however, Andrew Jackson’s faction of the National Republican Party attracted more votes countywide, and the president remained popular well after his stand on South Carolinian nullification. Old Hickory’s star faded fast though when he vetoed the Bank of the United States’ fifteen-year charter renewal in July of 1832, and many Jefferson

41 Ibid, 13-23, 72-88, 96.
County residents remained outraged by the decision well into Jackson’s second term. Over 200 locals registered formal complaints in January, 1834, and a popular referendum in April reaffirmed their belief that national deposits must be restored. Even county newspapers were vociferously involved. According to the Gallahers, Jackson’s great crime against the bank was not so much that it was forced to close, but that one man, the president, closed it on his own initiative without the consent of congress or the courts. Given that the bank’s charter was not renewed, the Gallahers believed that the deposits also should not be returned. “A senseless clamor is raised,” the paper proclaimed at the height of the controversy, “that the true question now is, Bank or No Bank; and many of those who are engaged in keeping up this false issue, are particularly and perennially interested in deceiving the people.” The Gallahers deplored executive branch action to concentrate more authority in Washington through direct dissolution of the bank, an act that should have preoccupied the nation’s voters in the 1830s. They decried executive usurpations of power and attacks on the economy and the congress, which many in Jefferson County believed embodied the will of the people.

“Will they [Jacksonians] give to one man the authority to regulate the currency, when they deny that to their own representatives? Do they believe there is no virtue and firmness in the American people, to put down the bank (if they desire so,) without prostrating our sacred institutions, and changing the whole character of our government?”

Unease with Jacksonian Democracy among a sizeable number of middle and upper-class voters installed Whiggery as the political philosophy of choice for the next two decades, with the strongest bastions of support in the commercial centers of Shepherdstown and Charlestown. Yet, because of the strong concentration of agrarian labor throughout Jefferson County’s countryside,

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Beller’s Democrats attracted a significant minority in elections. Smithfield (renamed Middleway by 1830) sat close to the county’s southwestern border in farm country, and consistently sent large majorities of Democratic voters to the polls. Harpers Ferry assisted the Democracy’s bids for public office, although in a way different from neighboring Smithfield. The county’s largest economic endeavors were the national armory in Harpers Ferry and the corresponding rifle factory in nearby Virginius. The United States government employed a few hundred artisans from diverse vocational backgrounds to manually build military muskets. Despite working for a government facility, many armorers sided with the Democratic Party because of its insistence on reducing the amount of government interference imposed on the armory’s work atmosphere. There was also a sizeable Irish-Catholic and Yankee-Protestant migrant population from northern urban centers that bolstered Democratic ranks. For the second-party system’s duration, the Jacksonian Democracy controlled the armory’s supervisory positions through patronage and censorship of dissenting viewpoints. Accordingly, Harpers Ferry contributed decent majorities to the Democrats in important elections.  

Thus, elections in the 1830s and 1840s were great contestations as they increasingly operated as referendums on the emerging partisan political questions of the day, including the budding crisis over slavery’s expansion into the western territories. The Whig presidential candidate in 1840, William Henry Harrison, won the most votes in Jefferson County by a margin of 78 votes out of 1,200. The 1844 presidential contest between James K. Polk and Henry Clay was a similarly close race, with Clay beating Polk 725 votes to 622. The pattern repeated once again in 1848 when Zachary Taylor defeated Lewis Cass by 144 votes. State elections were also

43 Bushong, 87, 89; Shade, 142; Merritt Roe Smith, Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology: The Challenge of Change (New York: Cornell University, 1977), 260-266.
tense as demonstrated in 1848. While Whigs were frequently elected to Virginia’s House of Delegates, Democrats made the elections interesting. One Democrat, George B. Beall (no relation to the *Spirit*’s future editor), a prominent farmer worth 37,800 dollars according to the 1850 census, was 40 votes behind in the contest against John A. Thompson, the second Whig appointed to the state legislature. Democrats were comforted by the results of national congressional elections in which the county’s Whigs lost their edge. Jefferson County shared a congressional district with other counties farther south that had a tendency to vote Democratic more often than Whig. As such, Jefferson County residents were usually represented by congressional Democrats in the late 1830s and 1840s. The county participation rates of eligible, white-male voters indicated that partisan political races were quickly becoming part of the local culture. William G. Shade noted that the infusion of populism into the second-party system personalized politics and initiated steady increases in voter turnout throughout the commonwealth, including the Shenandoah Valley. On average, more than 60 percent of registered voters were active in valley elections, a large increase from the usual 28 percent in 1828. By the end of the 1840s, more than half of Jefferson County’s voting base cast a ballot.\(^{44}\)

Past decades of honed partisanship carried over into the 1850s. Mutual resentment brewed between the parties and knit into the cultural fabric of Jefferson County and Virginia simultaneously. Nowhere was this more evident than in the burgeoning controversy that loomed at the national armory in Harpers Ferry. The politicization of the armory’s administrative positions eroded production so dramatically that the facility lagged far behind its New England sibling in high output and efficient budget. Merritt Roe Smith, who documented the history of the Virginia armory, said that, “for years the Potomac armory suffered the reputation of being

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\(^{44}\) Bushong, 89, Shade, 108-109.
locally controlled, flagrantly mismanaged, and shamefully abused.”45 Smith continued, “It also carried the dubious distinction of employing the most troublesome and disorganized labor force in the country.”46 While administrators were eager to terminate political rivals employed at the armory, they were also immensely apprehensive about firing loyal partisans, fearing the political fallout. The payroll bloated as a result, which derailed the armory’s budget and prevented the facility from being properly updated with technological innovations. Despite an operating budget of 170,000 dollars, the civilian management accumulated a staggering operating deficit of 46,000 dollars by 1838. The lack of strict enforcement by Democratic administrators gave armorers too much leeway in the amount of hours that they worked per day and in the ways that they performed their work. Critics observed than many armorers were deficient in their production quotas, often brought alcohol onto the premises, and arranged personal business transactions with local merchants during work hours.47

At the behest of the Ordinance Department, President Harrison, and later Tyler, dissolved the civilian leadership at the Harpers Ferry armory and established military authority over the facility. Major (then Colonel) Henry K. Craig and his replacement, Major John Symington, implemented a series of reforms that reinvented the armory’s function in a fashion similar to northern factories of the time. Armorers, black and white alike, operated under a rigid labor code that confined them for ten hours a day, regardless of their quota, and strictly regulated their work behavior. Making matters worse, the military superintendents were strict disciplinarians, who expended great effort to rid the grounds of troublemakers who threatened to undermine production. And, unlike their civilian predecessors, Majors Craig and Symington cared little

45 Smith, 270.
46 Ibid, 270.
about local politics. If Washington authorities mandated budgetary cuts that reduced employment, turmoil was sure to follow. What truly galled many of the armorers was the introduction of technology that significantly negated the need for their labor, endangering their jobs. While the military administration succeeded in increased production and modernization, with 25 new buildings and 60 machines by 1854, the town’s laborers were in an uproar over the changes. All that was missing was a spark to ignite the seething passions of the armorers and their allies across Jefferson County.48

The armorers’ first attempt to overturn the unpopular military system resulted in disaster, when they staged an unsuccessful strike against the timed-work day enacted by Major Craig in 1841. As Smith established, “to armorers accustomed to controlling the duration and pace of their work, the idea of a clocked day seemed not only repugnant, but an outrageous insult to their self-respect and freedom.”49 The rebels hoped that the Tyler administration would be sympathetic to their demands, and were disappointed when the president was not. Several years later, however, the armorers seized a second chance when accomplished and respected master armorer Benjamin Moor and three of his staunchest allies, Zadoc Butts, Joseph Ott, and his son William, were fired from the armory by Major Symington. In response, Moor built a coalition with local Democrats and disaffected armory Whigs that he used to enter politics, with an agenda to undermine the military system. Moor had initially helped Symington strengthen the armory’s military system, but was completely disillusioned when the Major orchestrated his removal


Hannah N. Geffert noted that while constituting a minority in the federal arsenal, black armorers did work for the government manufacturing guns in Harpers Ferry. As early as the 1820s, when free black John Gust worked for the gun factory, blacks manufactured weapons up until the eve of the Civil War. Contractors also brought temporary black labor to the armory, although they were not always welcome in town. For more see; Geffert, 55.

49 Smith, 271.
through a series of exaggerated claims about the master armorer’s dishonesty while at Harpers Ferry. While the two men never liked each other personally, Symington had tried to remove Moor mainly to place fresh talent in the position of master armorer. The consequence of Symington’s schemes was a fierce debate over the appropriate kind of armory management that raged across Jefferson County for four years and opened profound fissures throughout the area.  

An epic war of words erupted between local Democrats and Whigs in the pages of the *Spirit of Jefferson* and the *Virginia Free Press* over the issue. Democrats, who voiced opinions through Beller’s *Spirit of Jefferson*, argued that the military had applied all the horrors of Whiggery’s American System to the armory, endangering the stability of the armorers and their families. Beller and his associates pushed the dispute further by suggesting that a body of supervisors, answerable only to distant Washington politicians, had undemocratically imposed an economic system that sacrificed labor for profit. From their perspective, the military system threatened the armorers personal rights because they barely controlled their own labor and were illegally deprived of their freedom when government intervention dictated when and how they earned a living. The use of military officials as opposed to public servants was despotic because only aristocracies dared to rule through such force. Meanwhile, the treatment that Whig armorers also suffered caused an irate unification with their political adversaries.

James Beller led the Democracy’s furious charge in an opening salvo that fumed, “When any branch of the Government undertakes to invade social, personal and political rights, it is time that public sentiment should be aroused, and the justice or injustice of its measures be canvassed.” Beller continued his assault by proclaiming that, “the Proposition has been advanced

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50 Hartzler and Whisker, 27-28; Smith, 281-292, 299.
on our part, that the Military System over the Armories is irreligious, and the practical operations of that system tyrannical, uneconomical, and unjust.” Another Spirit editorial, penned under a pseudonym, a “Democrat,” rhetorically asked, “If Armorers, Civilians and Citizens are to be subjected to military rule and discipline in the employ of Government, why not all others in the same employ?” The Democrat raved that the county’s “privileged” did not understand the armorers’ plight because they were pre-disposed to, “ride over them booted and spurred.” The armorers should be entrusted with the rights and ability of freemen to influence their own labor. “They are not enlisted soldiers,” the Democrat shouted, and did not deserve to be treated as such! “If the spirits of Washington and Jackson could rise and see to what extent the epaulets have been desecrated and polluted,” someone else lamented, “their spirits would sink back into the quiet grave in honest and ineffable disgust.”\(^\text{51}\)

Jefferson County’s Whigs adamantly refuted the claims made by the Democracy and their allies. For most, including the Gallahers, the military system drove productivity and profits through increased weapons manufacturing, and epitomized the socioeconomic benefits associated with government interventionist policies that the Whigs had espoused for years. They believed that the mixed economic model that the armory followed uprooted corruption that slowed production, preserved public funds provided by Washington, and installed a regimented work ethic that exemplified the vaunted Henry Clay’s entrepreneurial ethos. These socioeconomic changes helped the armorers and their families, and those who were let go had actually hurt the larger community because of their unproductivity. During the dispute, the Virginia Free Press published the work of a Whig author named “Veritas,” who staunchly


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defended the military regulations that controlled factory efficiency, particularly procedures that
governed visitors during working hours. “First in order, and very properly so, those employed
are admitted and no questions asked,” Veritas began. “Next, there is provision made for the
admittance of visitors, with the very polite request that they call on the watchman—who by the
way is always at his post—and he will show them the way.” In answer to a Spirit author, the
“Good Egg,” who utterly condemned the military’s management policy as an, “encroachment,”
and outright anti-Virginian for its autocratic undertones, he mockingly snapped, “It seems to me
that the notice makes ample provision for the admission of all persons except loafers. He wants
the Armory gates thrown open; or rather, he wants to do away wholly with the gates as was in
part the case formerly; and free admission granted to hogs, loafers, &c.” Good Egg and writers
like him, in Veritas’ view, were likely fired armorers with an axe to grind, who were removed by
the military system because of their poor work ethic. Whigs like Veritas and the Gallahers saw
writers like Good Egg as contemptible representatives of society’s idlers, the antithesis of the

Eventually, the pro-civilian coalition claimed victory when Benjamin Moor and his
congressional-district ally, Charles J. Faulkner of nearby Martinsburg, led a successful attack on
the military administration, and President Franklin Pierce signed a law in 1854 that abolished the
system for good. By the time Pierce mercifully buried the debate, the arguments in the local
newspapers had regressed to calumny on each side. By October 1853, the editorials in both
newspapers barely addressed the topic at all, and were filled with personal vilification instead.
Veritas, locked in an escalating, bitter feud with yet another *Spirit* writer, “Nous Verrons,” (who was thought to be Good Egg under a different alias), scathingly declared that:

“Hitherto his productions have been thought rather ‘attenuated,’ more voluminous than luminous; in other words, that prolixity has been his besetting sin heretofore, and now there are those who regard the brevity of his recent production as an evidence of declining genius; we are among those, however, who maintain that ‘his greatness is ripening.’”

The insults flew ferociously as Veritas attacked his opponents’ intelligence by suggesting that it was confounding, yet, amusing that the *Spirit*’s advocate was foolish enough to misread the actual situation at the armory. The energetic Veritas, however, attracted flack, as well. “Truth” confronted him the very next week though a sarcasm-laced editorial lobbed in his direction. “Then, come “spread yourself” and when by your logic, and eloquence, you have brought the community to a sense of their miserably blind, and foolish opposition to this great system, you Veritas, will be considered the night Sun that enlightened the minds of the groping multitude.”

One writer, Sebastian Sinconna, who surprisingly wrote under his own name, received especially vicious treatment in the *Free Press*. A temporary resident visiting from another county, Sinconna was driven out in part because of the venomous acrimony of local Whigs. In a parting shot directly at Beller, Sinconna referred to his new adversaries as a, “combined clique, whose breaths stink of rot-gut whiskey and whose fulsome bodies bask in the lamp-light of a grog-shop—who put forth their Bacchanalian productions as the off-spring of repeated midnight orgies.” Sinconna belittled his critics as no better than unprincipled children with little
intelligence and less honor. Needless to say, the *Virginia Free Press* soon fired back in a devastating rebuttal and on it went.\(^{53}\)

* * *

The editors of both the *Spirit of Jefferson* and the *Virginia Free Press* could have intervened to prevent the print controversy from boiling over, but the battle was joined for quite some time because they were busy ramping up the rhetoric. It is likely that everyone involved knew one another because familiarity was heavily insinuated in the derisive editorial campaigns. Hyper-sensitivity roiled the debate because all of the editors stubbornly conveyed the message that not only was their opposition wrong, but the fictitiously named advocates were debauched. The mere suggestion that the combatants’ personal honor was questionable was enough to incite the frenzied distrust, resentment, and intolerance of different perspectives. It is clear that the second-party system fomented enormous discord countywide over political issues that directly affected the community to the point of rupture. Partisanship defined America’s political landscape, both in Virginia and nationally, since Jackson’s controversial presidency split the Old Republican Party. The emphasis on family and community interconnections in Jefferson County, and the South overall, made that partisanship particularly hostile at times because politics powerfully influenced those relationships. The strict code of honor that governed men exacerbated the situation, and caused vigorous counter-reactions to allegations of flawed character due to unacceptable political views. Heading into the brewing political divisiveness of

the 1850s, the fissures opened by the second-party system had primed the county’s white population when slavery exploded into the exclusive topic of the nation’s political discourse.
CHAPTER III

“THE JOHN BROWNS OF THE NORTH:”

SLAVERY AND THE APPROACH OF WAR

When Benjamin F. Beall lacked editorial material, he frequently re-published the political commentary of other anti-abolitionist newspapers, augmented by his personal opinions. “The Richmond Examiner of a few days since, has properly exposed the great head and front of the ‘Opposition’ in Virginia, with a befitting garment for his base abolition proclivities, and it will hang to him like the shirt of Nessus,” Beall praised of the Examiner’s harsh critique of Whig politician John Minor Botts. Botts, who had long attracted the ire of Virginia Democrats because of his cooperation with northern liberals, his patronage of working-class urbanites, and his deprecation of slavery economics, garnered exceptional grief because of his stumping for Whigs in the statewide elections of 1859. It is evident through his commentary that Beall associated Botts with the “despicable” politics of “Black Republicanism.” Citing a gubernatorial nomination speech that Botts orated from the steps of Richmond’s African Church, Beall quoted:

“with what face can Mr. Goggin solicit the Democratic votes when the Convention which nominated him applauded the declaration that a party composed of Abolitionists, Free-Soilers, Infidels and Disunionists is a better party now omnipotent in the Southern States, and comprising within its ranks many of the most conservative and patriotic men of the land?” 54

The young editor’s political assaults were indicative of Virginia’s turmoil at the height of the Sectional Crisis. Against the backdrop of the divisiveness wrought by the second-party system, Virginians across the commonwealth eventually came to view their political differences through the intense attacks leveled at slavery in the 1850s. Although the politics of slavery

existed in Virginia during the second-party system, a national political realignment in the
aftermath of the Mexican War altered the political mix of slavery and politics. Northerners
gradually organized a successful, decade-long campaign against slavery that centered on an
egalitarian outcry to abolish it completely, amplified by an even larger movement to prevent its
expansion westward. White southerners were infuriated by the political condemnation. They
viewed slavery as a profound cultural foundation, and saw northern political agitation against it
as a great campaign to wreak regional destruction, particularly in Virginia. White trepidation,
which mounted in the commonwealth under national political pressure, stemmed from the
socioeconomic transformations of the 1850s that subtly altered a slave’s role in Virginia society.
Thus, the political scene in the Old Dominion was fraught with tension. Insurrection spiked as
slaves were permitted more autonomy, and many white Virginians increasingly believed that
their communities were besieged by enemies from within and without. Democrats and Whigs
engaged in sharp personal attacks on each other from fear that a rivals’ success was entwined
with the larger, statewide developments that threatened white society. The real rift, however,
was incited by commonwealth Democrats, urged on by the building appeal of John C. Calhoun’s
assertion of southern rights.55

Circumstances in Jefferson County mirrored the statewide political climate. As
slaveholders, *Spirit of Jefferson* newspaper editor Benjamin Beall and his predecessors gradually
accepted the tenets of southern nationalism that declared northern abolitionism to be an explicit
challenge to southern society. Southern nationalists believed that northern agitation necessitated
the union’s dissolution in favor of a separate southern nation. Beall set his editorial sights on
local Whigs. Already suspect from years of bitter dispute, southern Whiggery increasingly

55 Link, 1-10.
appeared to be in league with northern abolitionists because of their prior anti-slavery flirtations, as well as their relationship with a larger national party, the Republicans, that sprang from the Free Soil and American Parties. Ferocious political rows the likes of which were unseen in Jefferson County erupted over the slavery question, when northerners solidified their opposition. The derogatory tone of the disputes unnerved the white population, who had a direct stake in the rising crisis. Carrying James Beller’s torch, Benjamin Beall personified the culture and played a significant role in advancing the controversy. Jefferson County’s community spirit collapsed mid-century along with the rest of Virginia under second-party pressure and slavery’s weight—a consequence that set the inhabitants at war with each other.

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In his remarkable study of the synthesis of racial slavery and ideas of social and economic freedom in British America, Edmund S. Morgan demonstrated that slavery’s presence in colonial Virginia bred notions of liberty in the region’s white population that formed the core of the commonwealth’s ardent republicanism. The use of human chattel on the region’s tobacco plantations yielded significant profits for local planters, cementing the use of forced labor as a staple in the plantation economy. As Virginians grew wealthy and exerted political influence, slavery became synonymous with the path to prosperity. When land became available to less affluent whites and wealth expanded over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Virginians united over a common interest in preserving property rights. Early science and seventeenth and eighteenth-century law together brewed a noxious concoction that abetted the control of the enslaved, bolstering the belief that blacks were inferior socially and best left as perpetual servants. The era’s interpretation of Christian scripture increasingly taught that black skin denoted a natural inferiority ordained by God, and interpreted slave resistance as a form of
wickedness indicative of a larger black depravity that was a threat to white society. And slavery reinforced notions of white equality because poor whites shared the belief that the ownership of human property enhanced their station in life and embodied the spirit of self-improvement through economic gain.\textsuperscript{56}

After the invention of the cotton gin, slavery emerged as the integral ingredient of white economic success in the Old South, and comfortable southern whites justified its existence. Slaves were a valuable commodity when their labor was applied to all kinds of economic endeavor, like staple crops and industry, in the early nineteenth century. States like Virginia, where the cash crop, tobacco, was no longer profitable, transformed into export centers to fulfill the rising demand for slave labor. The rising economic prominence of Old-South whites through slavery inspired slaveholders to defend it from the creeping acrimony levelled by western abolitionists and other anti-slavery advocates, who charged that slavery’s dehumanization was socio-politically hypocritical. Invoking Christian scripture of the previous two centuries, pro-slavery whites forcefully counterattacked, claiming that slavery was morally beneficial to whites and blacks of all southern social classes. Thus, for southern white, slavery was a necessary system of social controls that protected inferior people through strict and exploitative regulation, and whose energy was used to benefit their masters economically. Given the great economic success that slavery built for slaveholders, whites in Virginia and all over the south fervently believed that slavery offered the best system for an enlightened society, and that domination of black lives was actually Christian benevolence.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Edmund S. Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 295-387.

\textsuperscript{57} David Brion Davis, \textit{Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World} (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 48-102, 175-92.
As slavery matured in Virginia and the greater South, Jefferson County became one of a number of Shenandoah Valley counties whose whites eventually created a thriving slave economy by the eve of the Civil War. Although slaveholding was dispersed throughout the region well into the nineteenth century, the lucrative economic relationship between Jefferson County’s agriculturalists and neighboring commercial cities dictated that slave labor was bound to enamor the area’s white residents. By 1860, nearly 5,000 slaves lived in Jefferson County and accounted for roughly a third of the population. Of the county’s 10,317 white residents during the Sectional Crisis, only 725 owned slaves. Editor Benjamin Beall was one of them, owning one slave in 1860. His competitor at the Virginia Free Press, Horatio Nelson Gallaher, kept at least six, and may have actually possessed more in preceding years. Records indicate that large slaveholders were a countywide minority, and most whites had only two, but several did use a labor force of enslaved blacks that numbered more than a handful. While a majority of the county was made up of small-to-medium-sized farms, federal statistics in 1860 revealed that 12 families owned agricultural land that was somewhere between 500 and 1,000 acres, which likely necessitated significant enslaved labor. Adam Steven Dandridge was the county’s largest slaveholder with 80; Thomas Hite was next, with nearly half that number. 58

Regardless of the amount, most slaveholders in Jefferson County made exhaustive use of their slaves, with the greatest application in wheat cultivation. On most wheat farms, slaves fulfilled a variety of arduous tasks both during and after the growing season. Slave activity, though, was especially intense during the hot summer when wheat was energetically harvested.

and threshed to prevent spoilage. Since most whites in Jefferson County owned a relatively modest number of slaves, they typically worked in the fields alongside their masters, seasonal free-laborers, and supplementary loaned slaves. Slaves also labored at an endless variety of jobs that netted social benefits for their masters. They were domestic servants (mainly female), assisting the white mistress in daily domestic operations. In rare cases, a few were trained to serve as artisans on farms and in local shops in one of the county’s five sizeable towns. As Virginia underwent urbanized economic diversification, a process that peaked in the 1850s, masters increasingly lent slaves to the commonwealth’s fledgling industrial class, which was in dire need of labor. Some white slaveholders redeployed their slaves to pursue their own industrialist endeavors in the 1850s, as Charles B. Drew’s classic monograph about the Upper Valley’s Buffalo Forge (in nearby Rockbridge County) illustrated. While the practice of loaning slaves was less recurrent than in eastern counties, Jefferson County’s residents hired slaves only occasionally. Prominent white residents, like Whig politician Alexander R. Boteler and Virginia Free Press editor Horatio Nelson Gallaher, periodically published advertisements in the local newspapers, marketing the availability of their slaves for loan. Whites even rented their slaves to the federal armory in Harpers Ferry; in 1848, eight male slaves worked there as draymen for a fee of ten cents to one dollar and fifty cents per day. Given the expanding commercial economy, it is safe to infer that whites employed slaves through a multitude of channels available in the area’s urbanized towns.59

The Shenandoah Valley, however, was not always a haven for slavery. During the early-nineteenth century, owning human property was rare beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains because most migrants were poor-white sustenance farmers and ethnic religious minorities with a predisposition against slavery. By the time of Nat Turner’s rebellion when slavery was just beginning to root in Jefferson County, whites had more in common with Virginia’s Trans-Allegheny region than the older, eastern part of Virginia where slavery was well-established. When Virginia’s assembly debated the benefits of emancipation in the early 1830s, Jefferson County’s representative, Charles J. Faulkner, joined a chorus of young, radical westerners, who saw slavery as a social and economic threat to the commonwealth’s white population. According to William G. Shade, Faulkner argued that the planter-controlled assembly implemented conservative fiscal policies that denied western counties improvement funds, “combined sectional animosity with class conflict, and contrasted the economic interests of the planters with non-slaveholding whites, both the ‘middle-class’ and the ‘mechanics.’”\(^60\) In the Jacksonian Era, Faulkner and most other county whites experienced a profound reversal of earlier opinions when slavery dramatically expanded in Jefferson County by the end of the decade. Almost all whites grew to accept slavery by mid-century, and they were among its most emphatic proponents heading into the 1840s.\(^61\)

The infrequent challenges to slavery that occurred in Jefferson County at the beginning of the second-party system reflected broader trends unfolding in Virginia, in which political attention to slavery increased and gradually assumed an emotionally-charged character. Ever since Thomas Jefferson paradoxically implored Virginians to accept the gradual emancipation of

\(^{60}\) Shade, 197.

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 194-203.
their slaves through the gimmick of African colonization, the commonwealth periodically endured strident debates about slavery’s future. Nat Turner’s uprising, emancipation in the British Caribbean, and the mounting popularity of abolitionism in the North provoked Virginians enough to contemplate slavery’s future. Slavery’s magnitude as a political affair, thus, grew exponentially as anxiety over its perpetuation became more common among the commonwealth’s whites. Within the ranks of the Old Dominion’s Democracy, pro-slavery theorists, like Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, Thomas Roderick Dew, Edmund Ruffin, and George Fitzhugh, became zealous champions of white supremacy and black enslavement. Emancipation in the British Caribbean and the slow, steady rise of northern anti-slavery sentiment caused the commonwealth’s pro-slavery philosophers to demand slavery’s resolute defense because abolitionists were after it. Slavery, they argued, offered a positive good for all of the state’s white population, both poor and wealthy. Pro-slavery ideologues may have differed on finer points, but they all shared a common conviction that slavery constituted a natural socioeconomic order that mercifully relegated a class of social inferiors to useful servitude. Slavery’s staunchest defenders placed whites above blacks, and proclaimed that slavery preserved the social control of savages. They denounced both European abolitionism and the northern states, claiming that slavery provided better security for laborers than free-labor economics, where factory personnel were unprotected by employers.62

This atmosphere produced an interesting combination of pro-slavery, state’s-rights Democrats, who grew the southern-wing of the Jacksonian-Era Democratic Party, and laid the foundation for Virginia’s disunion over slavery. The antebellum Democracy’s affiliation with

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slavery is complex, but it can be effectively linked with the political philosophies of South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun. The combined power of the potent Whig Party, northern abolitionists, and capitalist industry prompted Calhoun’s adamant warnings that southern slavery and the agrarian economy that it served was threatened. Because the southern states were less populated than bustling northern cities, they were fated to make continual compromises that tempted slavery’s extermination. Under his “concurrent majority” theory, Calhoun preached that the southern states were a minority interest that required robust defense mechanisms against hostile northern encroachment. Since the Jacksonian Democracy crusaded for reduced federal control of the states, white supremacists eventually embraced it as a foil for a federal government that was influenced by northern antipathy. Virginia had its fair share of Calhoun acolytes (known as Calhounites), who had mobilized the agrarian, labor-friendly Democratic Party in the 1840s. In every major election cycle during the second-party system, the Old Dominion’s Calhounites conjured propaganda that cast Virginia’s Whigs as close allies of biased northern business interests in league with abolitionists. During the 1840 presidential election, Virginia’s Jacksonian Democrats sought to diminish resonant state-party Calhounites by portraying William Henry Harrison as the “Federal Abolition Candidate.” Any support directed his way represented an abhorrent abandonment of southern principles and a demonstration of duplicity toward the entire community.\textsuperscript{63}

The issue of slavery convulsed Jacksonian-era Virginia because its socioeconomic was entwined with the essence of southern white identity. White southerners at all economic levels generally assumed that God made the world unequal for people of different races and intended

that blacks support their way of life, thereby rendering black enslavement undeniably ethical. As Shearer Davis Bowman acknowledged in his review of the Sectional Crisis: “Almost all whites in the Old South—rich and poor, male and female—fervently believed that the maintenance of their superior power and authority over blacks was essential to their gendered and racial understandings of honor and dignity.” Since the household served as the primary social unit in southern white communities in the Old South, southern politics had become intertwined with the ways in which men and women regulated their families. In spite of the role women played in the white home, men ultimately operated as the superior partner in white southern families. The household was his to control. The home and everything in it, including his inanimate property as well as the people he claimed as his dependents, were under the control of the male patriarch of the family who saw the power of his dominion as representative of his freedom.

But slaves, too, qualified as his dependents, even if white men perceived their relationship to their human chattel differently from their family members. A white man’s slaves became seen as the most imperative piece of property that enabled him to care for his family in a socially acceptable manner while also defining his personal liberty as a free individual with civil rights. Slavery’s importance to white men extended beyond his personal home, however, as the presence of racial slaves in the general community gave them gendered examples of how a man was supposed to act in society. Even if white men did not or could not own slaves, their presence in southern society provided an important function in determining how to construct their identities as white, southern males. White men were to never tolerate subjugation to a supposed foe that might threaten them or their families. In essence, they were to vigorously defend

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64 Shearer Davis Bowman, *At the Precipice: Americans North and South during the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 105
themselves lest they assume the appearance of a slave. That was what was expected of white men—to not appear like the black male slaves in their societies who seemed to be subjugated even though that truly was not the case. For those who suggested that racial slavery, the important ingredient to ensure the stability of the southern white family, ought to be abolished (or heavily regulated by the federal government), white men felt honor-bound to defend the institution—a system they had come to believe was inherently natural—for what it did for themselves as well as their families. “Since the reputation and character of an honorable man and his family should and could not be attacked with impunity, anti-slavery criticism…obviously constituted an insult to which men of honor must respond.”

Thus, all challenges were internalized as affronts that provoked especially vitriolic responses by politically active men, who interpreted political opposition as personal threats because of the second-party system’s earliest cultural traditions. The intermittent outbursts in the commonwealth over slavery corresponded intimately with the pressure to protect southern identity.

The noisy finger pointing between Virginia’s Democrats and Whigs caused periodic bouts of temporary political instability throughout the Jacksonian Era, foreshadowing events to come. Northern antagonism was still largely fictional for the majority of southern whites, including pro-slavery Democrats, and most agreed that their political opponents appreciated maintaining a race-related status quo in Virginia, including Jefferson County. Polk’s war against Mexico changed everything, however. Manifest Destiny politics in the 1840s whipped up a torrent of discontent that exacerbated the slavery question, and culminated in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo that doubled the size of the United States. As the war entered its second

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66 Bowman, 105.
67 Bowman, 96-108; McCurry, 259-71; Stevenson, 199-202.
year, northern Democrats joined the northern Whigs’ anti-slavery refrain to condemn the war and expansionist agenda. Southern pro-slavery fanatics mobilized in opposition to mounting protests, especially in the wake of David Wilmot’s notorious Wilmot Proviso. Virginians across the commonwealth watched in anxious fascination as a flood of eastern migrants traveled west to Young Hickory’s war prize, lured by fanciful stories of abundant, glimmering fields of California gold. California would soon be a state, it seemed, and each section forcefully demanded favorable conditions for its admittance to the union. The actions of the newly elected Whig president, Zachary Taylor, made matters worse. Instead of relying upon congressional compromise to resolve the situation amicably, Old Rough and Ready, a fervent nationalist who believed that slaveholders rights’ threatened American unity, committed to force California’s (and New Mexico) statehood under an absolute anti-slavery constitution. Despite Henry Clay’s rearguard action to salvage the situation through national compromise, Taylor was resolute. The president’s action unnerved the southern states so much that nine of them, including Virginia, met in Nashville in June of 1850 to mull their options if the new territories were admitted as free states.  

Throughout the South that tense summer, the ramifications of the new territories’ fate was heartily discussed. In Jefferson County, James Beller published an editorial that contemplated the peril that Taylor’s actions held for the South. “The question involved is to the right, or pretended right, in the Federal Government to curtail or abridge the rights of the sovereign states individually or collectively by legislating upon the subject of slavery,” Beller declared. Neither congress, nor the president, had the right to interfere with the rights of the

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states because they both had inferior powers in comparison. “The power is nowhere given to Congress to interfere with the rights of property, as between man and man,” Beller affirmed, “nor is the exercise of such a power necessary and proper to carry out and delegate power.” He insisted that the government in Washington had no right to impose property-rights restrictions upon southerners in the territories since they were in the service of their individual states, not a singular national entity. “It would be an attack upon the rights of every property holder in the Union, for if a man be prevented from going to a territory with his slave property, he can be restrained from taking any other species of property there,” he emphasized. “Such laws then would be not only an infringement of the rights of the States, but would at once destroy their equality by subjecting the slaveholding States to a deprivation of the right to the enjoyment of a kind of property peculiar to them…but by which the non-slaveholding states would not be affected.”

“We have more than once asserted that so far as the abstract question of slavery is concerned, there is no contest between North and South,” Beller confidently asserted in the same article. The sectional upheaval had just begun and southerners far removed from Washington politics were beginning to compare prior political affiliations with a theoretical sectional identity. Even Virginians like Beller, who were empathetic to southern rights, shied from extremist strategies offered by zealots in Nashville that hinted at secession. “Those…who have ascribed to the projectors and advocates of that Convention purposes of disunion,” Beller complained, “have uttered as a base a calumny as could well be conceived; and they deserve to be ranked amongst the abolitionists and other political demons by which our body politic is so much infested.”

While they may have felt startled, even offended, by anti-slavery actions in Washington, most

Democratic Virginians believed that their pro-slavery position was an opportunity to project a cohesive southern voice that defended their constitutional rights in the swirling controversy. If there was one political truth that Whigs and Democrats agreed on at the start of the Sectional Crisis, it was that their rights as white southerners were better protected within the Constitution’s legal constraints instead of beyond them. The *Spirit of Jefferson* presented the county’s joint editorial front when Beller counseled that “we will therefore have to make concessions to Northern fanaticism that probably would not have been thought of five years ago.” He also warned the North to beware of the grave threat that a *true* secessionist convention posed, intuitively foreshadowing the political course of the next decade:

“But it is to be hoped that the North will not presume too much upon what appears to be the present position of the South; for should the compromise measures be defeated on account of the rejection by the North of the proper amendments, or by their passage, there may indeed be a *Southern Convention*.70

As Beller anticipated in the *Spirit*, sectional anxiety over the developmental destiny of the new territories never truly disappeared with the implementation of the Compromise of 1850, and the unease nourished a staunch political platform in every southern state and national election in the 1850s. The stalemate in Washington abated when Taylor abruptly died from a stomach ailment later that summer. More moderate than Taylor, his successor, Millard Fillmore indicated that he would sign any compromise measure as the new chief executive if one passed congress. Henry Clay’s coalition muscled through an unpopular series of bills that temporarily placated the polarized North and South. Among its many accords, the Compromise of 1850 admitted California as a free state at the expense of the Wilmot Proviso’s inclusion in future territorial legislation. The agreement that Clay and Webster engineered tamped the smoldering sparks of

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disunion in 1850, and achieved an edgy truce between the sections for the next ten years. It was a peace, however, that grew progressively unstable.  

Northern politicization of antislavery continued apace after the Compromise of 1850, producing what historian William W. Freehling termed, “an ambiguous armistice.” Abolition and less charitable strands of political anti-slavery existed in American politics prior to the 1850s, but a cohesive antislavery sentiment had not yet emerged as an attractive mainstream political movement. Abolitionism operated on the fringes of American political life for much of the early nineteenth-century as the egalitarian attitude that abolitionists exhibited toward the enslaved remained highly unpopular among most whites, regardless of their native region. Racism in antebellum America endured in the minds of northern whites much as it did for white southerners. By the end of the 1840s, however, abolitionism was more appealing as a political effort because of a rise in antipathy toward slavery throughout the North. Due to worries that slavery’s expansion into newly acquired territories threatened the economic and political stability of white northerners, the north’s labor Democrats and the liberal faction of New England’s “Conscience Whigs,” soon championed the prevention of slavery’s westward spread. These labor-conscious whites feared that slavery in the territories would eliminate the use of economically viable land by whites of all northern socioeconomic classes, and deter the honorable practices of free employment.

Abolitionists and other anti-slavery proponents soon unified politically to prevent both the growth of the slavery and slaveholder power in the United States. Citing Thomas Jefferson’s

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72 Ibid, 487.
theory of man’s natural rights, the new “Free Soilers” believed in the premise that slavery in the Mexican Cession endangered free, white laborers throughout the country, while granting greater political authority to white slaveholders. Abolitionist criticism that denounced white slaveholders’ inhumanity gained significant traction, as well. Notable white and black abolitionists and ex-Liberty Party members, like Benjamin Butler, Salmon P. Chase, and Frederick Douglass, pushed the Free Soilers to adopt a policy that demanded the federal government, “relieve itself of all responsibility for the existence and continuance of slavery,” wherever it could, including its abolishment in the District of Colombia.”74 While the scattered groups of anti-slavery advocates were unable to entirely merge their messages during the 1848 presidential election, the popular beliefs introduced by the Free Soilers transformed the anti-slavery movement into a tangible, exclusively northern political entity (the Republican Party), which was committed to halting slavery’s expansion.75

Attitudes in the North maintained that the debased immorality that flowed from slavery characterized white southern culture generally. Northerners thought that bellicose arrogance was embedded in the South’s adult population because of the visible bravado of pro-slavery zealots. The flaws were conferred equally on all southern whites, who were seen as innately coarse, conniving, and raucous from prolonged exposure to slavery. In northern eyes, these southern traits evolved into widely shared stereotypes by the middle of the 1850s, when a series of national events intensified the growing sectional rift over slavery.76

74 Wilentz, 624
76 Bowman, 140.
When President Franklin Pierce signed Stephen A. Douglas’s bill that repealed the Missouri Compromise, northern consensus rapidly concluded that a plan perpetrated by southern slaveholders was behind the deed to permit slavery into the territories. Northerners were convinced that dishonorable white southerners, specifically the planter elite, had thoroughly undermined the foundation of American democracy, and that Pierce and Douglas were corrupt examples of southern perversion because they were both of the North. The subsequent bloody civil war that erupted in Kansas confirmed northern outrage because the regional violence threw pro-slavery Missourians hell-bent on forcing legalized black enslavement onto free-soil settlers into stark relief. While Kansas’ voters were terrorized into territorial slavery, the Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott v. Sandford* ruling further roiled antislavery sentiments through Justice Roger Taney’s conclusion that the federal government had no constitutional right to regulate slavery in the territories. Therefore, the actions unfolding out west were legal. Noticeable contingents of anti-slavery northerners feared that their states’ own sovereignty was damaged since the court also ruled that the Dred Scott family was never free despite significant time spent in northern states. Because the Supreme Court bench was packed with slaveholding southerners, including Justice Taney, anger at the undemocratic, southern encroachment on the federal government exploded.77

Northern whites agreed in principle that black enslavement negatively transformed southern whites and threatened their own prosperity. As sectional tensions ratcheted, they undertook activities that undercut the infringement of the “Slave Power.” The sharp rise of Republican and the short-lived American Party (the political arm of the nativist, proto-Whig, Know-Nothing movement) victories signaled that identification with anti-slavery politics was

77 Bowman, 232-236; McPherson, 117-130, 170-189; Wilentz, 670-677, 707-719.
also up. Even northern Democrats campaigned on direct anti-slavery platforms, including the architect of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Stephen A. Douglas. And, while most northern political activity was peaceful, some of it was unrestrained, sometimes violent, resistance of the South. Perhaps the greatest open resistance was large northern migration to Kansas to help free-soil settlers prevent hostile bands of Border Ruffians from taking over the territory. As an adjunct, the renowned abolitionist preacher, Henry Ward Beecher, inspired a northeastern movement to arm westward-bound Free Soilers with Sharps rifles, known (much to the reverend’s chagrin) as “Beecher’s Bibles.”

Among the most unpopular agreements arranged by the aged Clay in 1850 was a renewed fugitive slave law that coerced northern cooperation with slave catchers to return runaway slaves. Northern condemnation was dynamically immediate because the law reinforced notions of southern brutality and fed fears that southern designs on northern sovereignty were real. White northerners were wearied, even enraged, by the authority that southern white slave catchers wielded with impunity to force blacks south, regardless of their free or runaway status. Northern resentment was palpable, especially within the abolitionist community, when it was clear that they were coerced to perpetuate an evil system. They desperately attempted to prevent black re-enslavement, as exemplified by the large demonstrations that erupted across Boston, Massachusetts, surrounding the case of Anthony Burns. It seemed that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s significant novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, was undeniably true when it appeared in 1852 as a response to federal law. Consequently, runaway captures were regularly obstructed, with slave catchers directly opposed in fights in both the North and South. Historian Stanley Harrold revealed that northerners and southerners had vicious confrontations along the border between

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78 McPherson, 131-162; Wilentz, 677-706.
the North and South over escaped blacks, since the first fugitive slave act passed in 1793. Against the unprecedented sectional estrangement spawned by the country’s territorial expansion, resistance to slave catchers swelled spectacularly. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 even caused northern state legislatures to enact stringent “personal liberty” laws to nullify the federal bill. “As arrests continued, opposition in the North, and especially in the Lower North,” Harrold explained, “went beyond discussion of constitutionality, state sovereignty, civil rights, and abstract justice.” While northern blacks and whites helped runaways escape either through the clandestine Underground Railroad, personal threats were issued by brutal slave catchers, who hunted through communities with an utter disregard for local customs, the Constitution, or state law. Harrold observed that, “. . . the dominant theme became how the new law affected questions of personal safety, self-esteem, and common humanity.”

White southern Democrats eyed the spike in northern antislavery agitation with nervous bewilderment. It seemed as if the entire North arose to unjustly subvert a social order guaranteed by both God and the federal constitution. Devout advocates of states’ rights in the Democracy were especially agitated by surging northern aggression, and found a receptive audience for their secessionist demands in a bastion of support, the Lower South. In Virginia’s Border region, Democrat moderation remained intact. They still believed that slavery was best protected within the federal governments’ legal framework, but their patience was quickly running out. While not all northerners were Republicans or even abolitionists, residents along the Mason-Dixon Line

81 Ibid, 147.
construed the popularity of abolitionist politics and fierce opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law as indicative of all northern society.\textsuperscript{82}

Southern states along the sectional border, like Virginia, wearied of runaway-slave sagas because successful escapes in the region climbed dramatically in the 1850s. It was a serious problem in Virginia, where the monumental increase in successful escapes correlated with a general spread of slave resistance. The link between runaways and sharpened slave resistance existed in the Old Dominion in the 1850s, as a result of the increased socioeconomic autonomy permitted by their masters. Tobacco’s unprofitability and a decade-long urban industrialization across the state caused slaveholders to attempt the preservation of slavery’s financial viability through loans of their chattel to business entrepreneurs. Work in industrialized settings exposed slaves to wider personal freedoms (they, in some cases, could actually negotiate contracts and receive payment) that inspired acts of resistance. As William A. Link revealed, slaves convicted of crimes against their masters increased in the 1850s. When John Hatcher, a black slave killed a white overseer in self-defense at the Richmond factory where he was employed in May of 1852, the \textit{Fredericksburg Herald} lamented that a “spirit of mischief” had taken root among enslaved African Americans, and that 1852 experienced more slave insubordination, “than any previous period in the history of our state.”\textsuperscript{83} Escape into nearby free Pennsylvania constituted the highest resistance by blacks, who hoped to obtain freedom from Virginia’s exploitative environment. Most slaves fled on their own for a variety of reasons that ranged from abuse, to economic independence, and reunification with family members, especially spouses, who lived elsewhere. The mobilization against slavery suggested that slave resistance interacted intimately with the

\textsuperscript{82} Link, 138-48; Harrold, 139-143.
\textsuperscript{83} Link, 90.
anti-slavery North. Southern whites in Virginia soon thought that their society’s foundation was truly endangered. 84

Jefferson County shared in the changes unfolding between whites and blacks that other slaveholding Virginian counties experienced. Given the close proximity to the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, the possibility of slave escapes worried the area’s white population and their concern was justified. Census records of 1860 revealed that 602 slaves escaped across the river into Maryland. Age was not an impediment, as the elderly escaped alongside adults and young children. One group of slaves, most likely a family, brought a one-year-old with them on their perilous trek north. While most escaped slaves may have left on their own with little assistance, some, like Robert Jackson and Wesley Harris, sought the help of the Underground Railroad to reach the North. Slave owners, thus, sustained deep losses because of their slaves’ perseverance to escape bondage. Numerous slaveholders indicated that they lost all or nearly all of their former property, but the damage extended far beyond actual enslaved labor. Most of the escapees hailed from the southeastern corner of Jefferson County along the water, where farms were large and most of the mills ground local grain. As such, the area’s businesses suffered reduced production because of labor losses, and local whites were alarmed by escape rates. To capture runaways and prevent escapes, handbills were often circulated with detailed information about the fugitive and advertisements were published in the Spirit of Jefferson, Virginia Free Press, and Shepherdstown Register. 85

84 Harrold, 177-79; Link, 36-61; 77-119, 149-158; Simmons and Sorrells, 171-3; Stevenson, 184-7.

A version of an advertisement from Jefferson County about the disappearance of a slave would look like this: “A Negro boy named Henry, aged seventeen, the property of Mr. John R. Ruckle of this county took it into his head to declare his freedom and absquatulated [sic] on Tuesday night the 29th for parts unknown to his master as yet. A reward of $100 is offered.” Taken from Shepherdstown Register, Sept. 2, 1854. It can also be located in Geffert, 24.
Jim Surkamp, a contemporary local historian who diligently researched these events, theorized that Jefferson County’s free-black population assisted in the exodus. In 1860, Jefferson County contained a free-black population of at least 242, which was a sharp reduction from the 540 that lived there ten years prior. Reflecting the growing tension between whites and free blacks, Virginia enacted new state laws that restricted the legal rights of free blacks, curtailing their social activities intended to stop the rising resistance to white communal hegemony. Among the numerous impediments raised were denial of education and fire arms, special taxation, and the inability to vote. Many free blacks fled the state following the passage of the new laws, but others stayed despite the hostility. Those who remained were forced within one year to acquire the support of sympathetic whites, who in turn could petition the Jefferson County court and state legislature on their behalf for residency. Failure resulted in deportation. Occasionally, county whites appealed directly to the authorities for certain blacks, as in 1852 when the Virginia General Assembly permitted a recently manumitted slave, Harry Robinson, to stay.86

Over the years free blacks interacted with the local enslaved population, often sharing domestic connections and economic relationships. John Douglas, for example, was a local freed man, who interacted with Jefferson County’s enslaved population because his wife and son, Fanny and John Henry, were the property of the Coons family with whom Douglas lived. When he discovered that Stephen Coons planned to sell his family to cover business losses, he worked a deal to purchase his family for a thousand dollars. Like many black families with both enslaved and free members, Douglas wanted to keep as much of his family intact as possible lest

it was transported farther South never to be seen again. Contact between Jefferson County’s free and enslaved blacks may have occurred in other ways, too. Surkamp noted that two free-black residents, Thomas Goens and Jackson Newman, owned property near a ferry on the Shenandoah River. The Goens family operated the ferry and frequently took passengers upstream to a popular Valley resort destination called Shannondale Springs. It is possible that Newman and the Goens helped slaves to escape by boat, transporting them to Maryland via the adjacent Potomac River or by ferrying them to nearby Loudon County. Whites in Jefferson County had much to lose due to the actions of their slaves, and it was typical of them to blame anti-slavery advocates for the events unfolding countywide. It is little wonder that James Beller referred to Pennsylvania’s anti-slavery activities along the Maryland border as a “tragedy.” “Twice, now, in the course of a few years, have citizens of Maryland been set upon by an armed mob, and their heart’s blood made to mix with the dust,” Beller fumed, “whilst seeking their lawful, their Constitutional, and their moral rights, in possessing themselves of their legal property.” “Shall these things continue? Are we on the borders to suffer martyrdom,” he furiously asked. 87

Such was the tense environment when young Benjamin F. Beall and his brother purchased control of the Spirit of Jefferson in 1857. White Jefferson County locals were wrung out by anti-slavery pressure, adamantly insisting that a great northern conspiracy was afoot to destroy the very fabric of their society. Anti-slavery activities, growing slave resistance, and new mass support for the Republican Party proved it. For county Democrats, even Virginia’s lingering Whig Party remnants were eventually believed to be associated with anti-slavery (which was often conflated with abolitionism) because of the massive influx of northern

Whiggery into the Republican Party. The “Opposition” as it was known was a smattering of former Virginia Whigs and to an extent Know Nothings, who remained popular in area politics. It was immaterial to Democrats Beller and Beall that many of Jefferson County’s Whigs owned slaves themselves, including Horatio Nelson Gallaher of the *Virginia Free Press*, who had six in 1860. Rather, because of Whiggery’s loose association with Republicanism, Democrats assumed that their Whigs harbored abolitionist sympathies, and they were not entirely wrong. Several prominent Jefferson County Whigs *did* indeed, at one time or another, entertain positive views of abolition. As a result, tension over slavery between Benjamin Beall and other local Democrats and the area’s Whigs reached new heights.88

Among Beall’s earliest political targets was Alexander R. Boteler, a former Whig who made an Independent run at a Jefferson County congressional seat against Democrat Charles J. Faulkner in 1859. Beall quickly resumed his predecessors’ well-established, savagely personal politicking in the *Spirit*. He responded to nasty criticism leveled by an “Anti-Faulkner Democrat,” who used *Virginia Free Press* editorials to attack Faulkner’s candidacy in favor of Boteler. For two days, the self-proclaimed “Anti-Faulkner Democrat” railed in the *Virginia Free Press* against the re-nomination of Charles J. Faulkner to the U. S. House of Representatives. “The worshippers of the Immaculate Chas. James were practicing their orgies, incantations, and pow wows to learn from that demi-god,” whether or not Faulkner would come, “to witness how well they would yell, distort their features, and gyrate their bodies, in honour of him.” Despite the editorial’s affronts, the “Anti-Faulkner Democrat” posed as a political philosopher and true descendant of the commonwealth’s Democratic legacy as imagined by Thomas Jefferson and

James Madison. The disparager was disgusted by the idolization of Faulkner that materialized among voters throughout the Jefferson County. To him, the politician was a “renegade,” whose actions during his congressional first term reflected the dangers associated with the liberalized influences in the state’s Democratic apparatus. Within two weeks of the editorial’s publication in the *Free Press*, Beall used his command of the *Spirit* to steadfastly vouch for Faulkner’s personal character and extoll the virtues of his candidacy. He turned the critic’s own words around to suggest that they were the ill-conceived rants of an inconsistent voter of low repute, who supported Faulkner’s first term at the expense of a more conservative candidate. Beall insinuated that Faulkner’s detractor was sour because, “he could not obtain the place which was and is the Alpha and Omega of his Democracy.” Essentially, the “Anti-Faulkner Democrat” was resentful because of his inability to secure a political appointment.89

Beall had his work cut out because Faulkner was once a Whig with known antislavery sympathies in the early stage of his career. He had since become a devoted Democrat and adopted states’ rights in the name of white supremacy. To respond, Beall deployed the same tactic against the “Anti-Faulkner Democrat” that was used during the armory fracas, contending that Faulkner’s presence in Washington was the best opportunity to prevent further interference in southern affairs by Republicans. A former Whig like Boteler would be compelled to cooperate with egregious enemies! In many of the editorials and select news stories that debuted in the weekly issues of the *Spirit* prior to the election, Beall meticulously portrayed Faulkner (and other prominent, progressive Democrats) as charming models of southern piety, while both proto-Whigs and traditional hold-overs in the commonwealth’s Democracy were scathingly

caricatured in tones that dripped with personal contempt. When summarizing an election-eve political debate between Faulkner and his nemesis Boteler, Beall recounted how Faulkner addressed the crowd in an hour-long speech, when he had, “as a free will offering to the party,” presented himself as the nominee who best represented the roots of Virginia’s Democratic political culture. It was, “a reasonable claim,” Beall haughtily blazoned, “upon all who honestly desired the continued success and triumph of Democratic measures. He passed a glowing eulogy upon the steadfast and unbroken support given by the mother of States and Statesmen, citing with happy effect and taste, the ancient saying that when ‘Rome falls, the Roman Republic falls.” Thus, Beall believed, Faulkner demonstrated that great, “force and truth that when Virginia proves recreant to her ancient faith, the Union must find its grave in that abyss where Know Nothingism and Abolitionism and every other political delusion and folly fester with corruption.” By contrast he declared, “there can be no doubt,” that Boteler was, “sadly deficient in the powers of logic and argument, and evidently has an imperfect and confused knowledge of the political history of the country, or of the philosophy of our government and constitutional system.”

When John Brown shocked Jefferson County and the entire southern United States with his daring raid on the Harpers Ferry armory in October of 1859, it seemed to white southerners as if northerners had descended into madness. Through Brown’s actions, most white southerners believed that northerners were emboldened in their defiance, going so far as to inflame mass slave uprisings that threatened to tear apart white southern society. According to historian James M. McPherson, some northerners hailed Brown as a martyr for his attempt to, “strike at the slave

power that was accustomed to pushing the North with impunity."\textsuperscript{91} It was much more than that, however. Despite his failure to incite a great rebellion in Jefferson County, some northerners eulogized Brown as a saint, who did God’s work to free his fellow man. Nevertheless, the restrained tension of the last few years exploded when rumors circulated that the number of rebellious slaves numbered in the hundreds. Jefferson County men, including Beall, served in the local militia companies that responded rapidly when word spread that a crazy band of abolitionists had incited slave uprisings throughout the entire county. Several militiamen were wounded, and a few unarmed citizens were killed in the raid, including Hayward Shepherd and the mayor of Harpers Ferry, Fontaine Beckham. Brown and his disciples may have been zealots, but that was irrelevant to Virginians. What mattered was that Brown reflected the extent to which northerners were willing to go in opposition to slavery. They were no longer content with preventing slavery’s spread into the territories. The battle over slavery had come home and was taking place in their neighborhood! \textsuperscript{92}

Long after Brown’s capture and trial, the militia remained vigilant in Jefferson County, roving the countryside for signs of insurrection. Charlestown became a virtual fortress with militia from all over Virginia stationed in the county seat, while they helped patrol. Northern strangers were chased out under the suspicion that they were abolitionist agents. White locals tried to arrest a white Charlestown man for interacting with the enslaved population in a way that aroused unease that he was some kind of abolitionist. The man bolted before he was apprehended. A few whites even imprisoned Betsy Peats, a black woman from Bolivar, under

\textsuperscript{91} McPherson, 210.
\textsuperscript{92} Bushong, 114-23; Link, 177-84; McPherson, 209-13.

The writer William Cullen Bryant rhapsodized that, “history, forgetting the errors of his (John Brown) judgment in the contemplation of his unflattering course…and the nobleness of his aims will record his name among those of its martyrs and heroes,” when considering Brown’s actions in relation to abolition. See, McPherson, 210.
Evidence suggests that whites had cause to be afraid because Old Man Brown’s raid may have animated even greater slave resistance to their white masters. Newspapers reported at least a dozen fires were mysteriously set to slaveholding farms in Jefferson County over the next several months, and an additional 589 new slave escapes suggest that John Brown’s raid was far more successful in the immediate aftermath than previously thought. For the residents of Jefferson County and the entire South, the clock seemed to be two minutes away from striking the hour in the countdown to civil war. Would it happen?  

Historians like Daniel W. Crofts have explained that Virginians remained cautiously optimistic that compromise with the North over the national question of slavery was still possible on the eve of the Civil War. Both Democrats and Whigs in the Old Dominion hoped that war would be averted at the last second. The first hurdle that Virginians hoped to successfully overcome was the upcoming presidential election, when they anticipated the nomination of a political moderate on the slavery issue for the White House. Given the particular socioeconomic circumstances that influenced the distinct southern sub-regions, selecting an appealing candidate was easier said than done. As disagreements over an attractive presidential nominee reached a fever pitch when the 1860 National Democratic Convention in South Carolina failed to achieve a nationwide consensus on slavery in the party’s platform, Democrats from different areas in the country backed their own particular candidates. While national delegates from the Lower South ultimately supported John C. Breckinridge because of his known secessionist sympathies, Upper-South states rallied to a more diverse array of presidential hopefuls. During the campaign that

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93 Geffert, 64.
summer and fall, Virginians largely favored the Constitutional Union Party’s John Bell because of Democratic inability to mount a unified opposition. 95

There were enclaves, however, of dissenters about an acceptable presidential candidate, and political patronage was far from uniform among the commonwealth’s unique population of white voters. Virginia’s Democratic Party had fractured to such an extent that forming an Electoral-College coalition to elect Breckinridge became impossible. A significant factor that underlay the relative unity of Bell’s candidacy was the scattered minorities of Douglas supporters in the cities and areas west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Virtually all white southerners, however, lamented the possibility of Abraham Lincoln’s, a Republican and the antithesis of southern society, election into office. What would become of the South if the avatar of northern abolition reached the White House? For Virginia Democrats, like Benjamin Beall, that bleak future represented the last straw. The decade-old suggestion that the establishment of another country devoted to the protection of slavery was ever more appealing. 96

As hard as it might be to believe, Benjamin F. Beall was a Douglas supporter. In September and October, he printed the presidential ticket of Stephen A. Douglas and Herschel Vespasian Johnson in bold letters directly above the platform of the National Democratic Convention, which was held in Baltimore. He energetically defended his candidate’s

95 Daniel W. Crofts alleges that secession in the Upper-South states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee was not a forgone conclusion, and that the political behavior of voters in those states should be reassessed by historians. According to Crofts, “Upper-South Unionists and their northern allies remained hopeful about the chances for peaceful reunion. They either believed forcible reunion impossible or believed it could not be considered until public sentiment in the upper South became more unconditionally pro-Union.” While Crofts’ research largely dealt with what is referred to as the “Secession Winter” in the Upper South, his finding that moderate voters were easily swayed to union’s the preservation after Lincoln’s election insinuates that the presidential election of 1860 was not necessarily used as an ultimatum over slavery in states like Virginia. Daniel W. Crofts, Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988), 72 – 81, 353 – 9. Bushong, 100; Freehling, The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumph, 1854—1861, 288-322; Link, 195-202; McPherson, 234-39.
presidential aspirations against Douglas’ many detractors across the commonwealth. He launched a resolute rebuttal against the allegations in another Virginia newspaper, the *Independent*, which accused both Douglas and Bell campaign activists of anti-Breckinridge election collusion with Republicans in return for federal political favors when Lincoln won. “If the editor of the *Independent* received such information from Washington,” Beall commented sardonically, “it was not from any friend, but from some incorrigible wag, who, knowing the editor’s gullibility determined to impose upon his credulity.” He was ashamed that another newspaper in the state entertained the belief that, “honest men, who dare resist the schemes of the disunionists of the cotton or Gulf States, are accused of entering into a bargain with the Black Republican Party to share Federal Offices.” While Beall distanced himself from Bell because of the candidate’s connection to southern Whiggery, the editor believed that his election would be a decent alternative to ambitious Breckinridge Democrats, who wanted to force the country’s disunion. The heart of the article, however, rallied support for Douglas against the majority of the state’s disunionists, who wanted a Breckinridge victory. “Citizens of Jefferson County,” Beall intoned, “you who feel a deep interest in the preservation of this Union, we call upon you to rebuke this bitter spirit of partisanship, which accuses everything of unsoundness that dares to worship at any other shrine than its own.” He excitedly riled the community’s entrenched sense of honor by quoting from the *Independent*, “The South to be sold to the John Browns of the North! Douglas men, do you hear that? You are accused of selling the South to the Browns of the North in supporting STEHPen A. DOUGLAS…We appeal to your pride, to your manliness, to your integrity to rebuke such foul fanaticism, such arrogant impertinence, such down right effrontery.”

Like most Virginians, however, Beall’s loyalty came at a price. Scholars who have examined southern unionism indicated that most southerners believed in “conditional” unionism, where the cost of remaining in the union was an official, federally recognized guarantee that slavery would be protected throughout the nation. There was universal consensus in every southern state that the federal government held no constitutional authority to deny whites the ability to own human property. According to Peter S. Carmichael, Virginians, especially those within Beall’s age demographic, commonly:

“envisioned the Union as a broad shield that protected local attachments. When political crises lowered the shield, they retreated from this nationalist position and called for Southern unity. Events like the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, John C. Fremont’s 1856 bid for the presidency, John Brown’s 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry, and Lincoln’s 1860 election awakened young Virginians to the possibility that a Southern alliance would be necessary to preserve a Union that accommodated slavery.”

Therefore, unionists like Beall flipped to the secessionists’ camp because it seemed the writing was on the wall—a Lincoln presidency promised the ultimate subjugation to federal jurisdiction because of slavery. When Douglas was disappointingly defeated in Virginia (Jefferson County alone gave him a dismal twenty-three percent of the popular vote) Beall immediately jumped the fence to side with the fire-eaters. His change of heart, however, is unsurprising, as there were numerous hints throughout the Spirit that autumn that indicated his unionist loyalties were malleable. He highlighted the sixth and final resolution from the northern Democratic national platform, which alluded to the specter of federal restrictions on territorial slavery and insinuated

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As Carmichael noted, it is difficult to portray the sentiments of the Virginia’s young adult population exactly in the final years before the war. Carmichael contended that the raid on Harpers Ferry constituted the final straw for younger Virginians, who advocated for Unionism. While most male adolescents and young adults espoused separation from the union with pride, Beall apparently had a longer fuse and choose to wait for the presidential election to modify his perspective. Perhaps this reflects the class differences between Beall and the demographic explored by Carmichael, who asserted that upper-class Virginians with a personal connection to slavery would have been more eager to push for secession. See Carmichael, 113-18.
that Washington should not issue property decrees to the states. In a September 1860 issue of the
_Spirit_, Beall printed an excerpt from Andrew Jackson’s farewell address, which stipulated that
southerners had a right to preserve the union, and that the federal government must rank as a
junior partner in civil governance. Beall clearly believed that he was fulfilling his ethical
obligation to protect the union, until doing so threatened his more immediate connection to
county and state.99

    Lincoln won. That was enough for Beall, who shared the commonly held southern belief
that a Republican president assuredly doomed slavery and the southern way of life. As Upper-
South unionists scrambled to halt the progress of secessionist sympathies during the Secession
Winter of 1860-61, Beall took to his paper to denounce continued efforts to save the union.
Against the backdrop of February’s Richmond convention that was scheduled to debate
separation, he endorsed the nomination of two “State Rights” delegates, William Lucas and
Andrew Hunter. Contrary to Crofts observation that most of Virginia’s unionists were former
Whigs and Douglas Democrats, Beall asserted that, “when it became apparent to us that a
disruption of the Government was unavoidable—and unavoidable because of the pertinacious
obstinacy of Republicanism,” Virginia must secede to honor its sociopolitical traditions. Beall
professed that he had originally hoped that Virginia could serve as a mediator between the
federal government and the seceding states to avoid bloodshed. His wishful thinking, however,
was predicated on the elevation of a non-Republican as the federal government’s chief executive.
“We regard Virginia as a sovereign state—with all the rights, privileges and immunities of
sovereignty,” he declared, “free to retain her connection to with or for good cause dissolve her

99 James Alex Baggett, _Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction_ (Baton Rouge:
Louisiana State University, 2003), 44-45, 59-65; Bushong, 100; Link, 220-223; “Words of Jackson,” _Spirit of
Jefferson_, Sept. 15, 1860. An excerpt of Beall’s presentation of the National Democratic Convention’s platform can
be found in, _Spirit of Jefferson_, Sept. 22, 1860.
relation to the Union.” As Lincoln’s inauguration loomed, Beall wrote that, “the rights guaranteed to us by the Constitution are no longer observed by the ruthless and unthinking fanatics of the North, [and] we think that the promptings of true patriotism demands that Virginia should resume her vested sovereignty.” Jefferson County, however, elected two pro-Union candidates, Logan Osburn and armory superintendent Alfred M. Barbour, who it was hoped would elicit concessions from the president-elect that protected slavery.¹⁰⁰

As the aspirations of pro-Union Virginians were thwarted, Beall’s rhetoric became vociferously pro-secession. He insisted that slavery was not inherently evil, but that it constituted the world’s natural order and guaranteed social mobility. Secession was justified because, to Beall:

> “the South simply demands that this government shall remain a government of white men, with the equal rights of all citizens within Federal jurisdiction. The Republicans assume that negroes have naturally the same rights as white men, and they propose to inaugurate a policy that shall finally secure to them the same ‘impartial freedom.’”

Ironically, Beall also thought that the strident propaganda that warned southerners about the dangers of the Republican Party was irresponsible, and he scolded regional secessionists for their scheming that promoted disunion based on fear. “Now the force of this argument, fear [and] fight…that it should be adopted by the prominent and leading men of the submission party, as an instrument to demoralize the masses of Virginia with cowardice, is not only unnatural but disgraceful.” Such tactics, Beall argued, were akin to the low standards of the Republican Party. Like other members of his generation, Beall believed that a Confederate realignment was not only ethical, it was economical, as well. He thought that cotton-state solidarity was essential to economic viability because Virginia’s effectively regulated slave economy proved that costly

escapes would be reduced dramatically by joining the Confederacy. “It would be so manifestly the policy of the general government, to secure to its border states, the safety of its slave property,” he argued, “that it cannot be doubted for a single moment…that that government [the Southern Confederacy] would instantly charge itself with a devising far more efficient than that established by the bounty statutes of the state of Virginia…” The die was cast. An alliance with the other southern states was beneficial for Virginia’s future.101

The most personal attacks that Beall hurled were aimed at noted unionist Logan Osburn. The main point of contention was Beall’s assessment that Osburn’s deficient character permitted objectionable positions on the Washington Peace Conference. Many young Virginians were tired of moderate Republicans’ impotent promises of guaranteed federal protection of slavery, and secessionists of all ages were emboldened to push for separation despite their minority status. A fervent belief that Virginia’s unionists dishonored the state by cooperating with Republicans in any way propelled secessionists throughout the commonwealth to vigorously agitate for Virginia’s separation. Beall’s protest materialized as a harsh rebuttal of Osburn’s character as an explanation for the congressman’s futile conservatism. He argued that the South was gravely insulted by Lincoln’s rejection of the Peace Conference’s platform, which assured slavery’s protection. The rejection, “aroused the spirit of ’76 in the bosom of Virginia, and elicited a universal voice of indignation,” and Beall accused Osburn of complacency and craven attempts to preserve the union. Beall reviled, “[Osborn] will not resist a government because it is simply oppressive, nor one tolerably oppressive, nor quite oppressive, nor very oppressive, nor


Peter S. Carmichael also analyzed the role of economic progress among young, upper-class Virginians during the Civil-War era. There is continuity between Carmichael’s observations and Beall’s behavior. Both Beall and his wealthier contemporaries believed that secession in 1861 offered better economic opportunities than those currently available in Virginia. For more, see Carmichael, The Last Generation, 35-58.
one exceedingly or outrageously oppressive, or cruelly oppressive,” but welcomed a government
that was “intolerably oppressive. The obsequious slaves of oriental despots would not entertain
for a moment such a sentiment as a rule for action,” he castigated. “Oppression must become
intolerable before resistance is justifiable! Did not our fathers say that they would resist
oppression in any form and from any quarter?”

* * *

Benjamin Beall got the war he wanted. In Jefferson County, however, the decision to
wage war was far from easy. Most white southerners, Whigs and Democrats alike, sided with
the Confederacy when calls to protect family and community by defending white southern rights
became irresistible. Men and women alike were honor-bound to protect their community from
northern invasion, but not all sided with the CSA. Some of the county’s white residents
remained true to the Union and served the federal army in several capacities. Many local blacks
also actively served federal forces in many ways, increasing their resistance to white hegemony.

Despite the expectation of a quick, successful war, neighbors on both sides of the conflict
endured hardships, and the path of that story is long and winding. From his predecessors,
Benjamin Beall inherited a Virginia Democratic editorial tradition that eventually embraced
secession because of a deep mistrust of anyone who revered antislavery principles, either
northern Republicans or local Whigs, long assumed to be non-southern. Complex political
differences initiated by the second-party system ruptured when slavery emerged as the singular
political topic of the 1850s. Beall’s editorial voice late in the Sectional Crisis shows that he
experienced the schism first-hand. His understanding of northerners, Republicans, and the

102 Carmichael, 132-144; Crofts, 277; Freehling, 511-516; Link, 232-235, 239-241; “Mr. Osburn to his
county’s unionist Whigs, however, took a dark turn when he and his family personally experienced war’s hell.
CHAPTER IV

“How I Long for Quietness and Rest:”

CIVIL WAR IN JEFFERSON COUNTY

When war arrived in Jefferson County in 1861, it came quickly. Lincoln’s summons of 75,000 volunteers to quash the post-Fort Sumter rebellion dramatically changed unionist attitude in Virginia overnight. White southerners across the Upper South, including Virginians, interpreted Lincoln’s actions as emblematic of the political despotism forewarned by southern radicals during the 1860 presidential election. The forceful reassertion federal authority over the secessionist states was a coercive, undemocratic demand for submission by the national government! For white Virginians straddling the North-South border, the president’s actions constituted an outrageous transgression that committed the ultimate sin against the right of the states to freely administer their own affairs. At the news that Lincoln had called for armed suppression of the Confederacy, delegates at the ongoing peace convention in Richmond voted 88 to 55 to ratify secession. While one Jefferson County representative, Logan Osburn, initially remained a true unionist and voted against ratification, his fellow, Armory Superintendent Alfred M. Barbour, voted for it. The night before the vote, Barbour secretly conspired with Governor Letcher, former Governor Henry A. Wise, militia captains John D. Imboden and Turner Ashby, and many others to seize the federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry for the Confederacy if separation was approved. Shortly thereafter, young Democratic editor Benjamin Beall mustered in Charlestown with 359 other locals to secure the munitions and machinery housed in the Harpers Ferry federal arsenal.103

103 Crofts, 312-15, 340-41; Bushong, 102; Chester G. Hearn, Six Years of Hell: Harpers Ferry during the Civil War (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University, 1996), 48-55.
By 1861, however, Jefferson County was already at war with a phantom abolitionist conspiracy to undermine white southern society. Southern states along the sectional border frequently engaged in open hostility over slavery and its place in national identity for years prior to the Civil War. The civil inferno that scorched Kansas and Osawatomie (John) Brown’s audacious blitz on the Harpers Ferry arsenal confirmed for county locals that abolitionist agents had deliberately targeted the South. The rapid mobilization of North and South following the attack on Fort Sumter foreshadowed a frenzy of violence and destruction over slavery the likes of which Americans on both sides of the struggle had yet experienced. The Civil War’s awful ferocity traumatized the greater American psyche because of the unprecedented human loss, and extreme economic damage. The war’s unprecedented hardship was especially overwhelming for white southerners, who witnessed most of the fighting from their doorsteps. In the words of historian Drew Gilpin Faust, “loss became commonplace; death was no longer encountered individually; death’s threat, its proximity, and its actuality became the most widely shared of the war’s experiences.”

For white southerners, including Beall, going to war represented both the defense of sanctified abstract ideals and the salvation of family and community. It was the honorable thing to do.

In border areas like Jefferson County, though, which abstract political ideals deserved preservation depended upon who was asked. While a significant majority of white men served the Confederacy militarily, a sizeable minority of white men, women, and children chose the Union. If the number of county blacks who assisted the Union is included, Jefferson County’s loyalist count jumps. County residents, rebels and unionists alike, not only fought opposing

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105 Faust, 137-70; Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s—1880s*, 205-218.
forces from distant states, they fought against each other. Neighbors destroyed property and attacked each other as the Confederate and Union armies rampaged, redefining the nature of the distrust that compromised county unity in the 1850s.

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Like many of his white male neighbors, Benjamin Beall obeyed the code he honored by entering the Confederate military in the spring of 1861. He did not enlist immediately after the announcement of Virginia’s ordinance of secession, however. The young editor already served his community as an ensign in one of the county’s two militia companies headquartered in Charlestown. His unit, the Jefferson Guards (organized in 1858), was a part of the regional Fifty-Fifth Militia Regiment before the war. It is clear from his writing that Beall thought that his service was a major personal honor because he occasionally beamed about it in the *Spirit.* “The ‘Guards’ number 60,” Beall declared, “and we venture the assertion [that it] is one of the most handsomely equipped, if not the best drilled corps of the state.” It is likely that he participated in the militia’s response to John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry because the Jefferson Guards were among the first units to arrive on the scene. The men who served in the Guards patrolled the county after the raid in search of abolitionists, slave uprisings, and unionist malcontents. As such, the militia companies remained in a constant state of readiness if war flared between the sections. Because Beall actively participated in the pre-war exploits of the Jefferson Guards, the young newspaperman directly experienced the messy intra-state hostilities over slavery that so often roiled his region of the country.106

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A majority of the Jefferson Guards’ men officially entered the Confederate army in May 1861, when Virginia’s militia companies were transformed statewide into regular infantry units. Beall resigned his ensign’s commission, re-enlisting as a private instead. The Guards and another Charlestown militia company, Botts Greys, formed the nucleus of the commonwealth’s second volunteer infantry regiment. Three other countywide companies of volunteer soldiers joined the same fledgling regiment, ultimately contributing approximately half of the initial manpower. Five additional companies from neighboring Berkeley, Clarke, and Frederick counties completed the Second Virginia Volunteer Infantry Regiment—one of the five regiments that comprised the famous “Stonewall Brigade” created by valley native and noted artillerist Thomas J. Jackson. Eighty-two different occupations were represented by the 789 men that accompanied Beall into the Second Virginia’s ranks. While working-class farmers and laborers accounted for more than one-third of the regiment, other professions included tradesmen, lawyers, educators, clerks, and students. Prominent Jefferson County slaveholding families sent relatives to the regiment, as well, including one Hite family member, who served in Botts Greys as a private. The southern urge to stand steadfast behind the white community’s collective will resonated so strongly that one soldier, Addison Munsall from Clarke County (located directly below Jefferson), related that he was a teacher up North before his military service.  

Antebellum political affiliations mattered little when the call rang out for Confederate military volunteers. As the champions of southern rights, Democrats like Beall undoubtedly flocked to county enlistment centers throughout the spring of 1861. Yet, a fair number of pre-war Whigs appeared in the unit’s enrollment records, along with their Democratic neighbors.

Once among the most impassioned union defenders, southern Whigs reluctantly joined their erstwhile rivals to resist overt acts of northern tyranny when Lincoln’s national summons for troops circulated. Jefferson County Whigs (and to a certain extent, some Democrats) resolutely called for secession when the national government no longer served their interests. Former Shepherdstown Whig congressman Alexander R. Boteler’s son joined the Second Virginia. The younger Boteler likely shared his father’s opinions of the war and the Lincoln administration. “You know with what devotion I have loved the Union,” the elder Boteler mourned in an article printed by the Virginia Free Press. “How faithfully I labored with those who struggled to maintain it upon its original Constitutional basis of justice and equality, and how reluctant I was to abandon hope of its reconstruction. The coercive policy of this perfidious Administration and the malignant alacrity with which that policy has been responded to by all parties in the North,” had transformed American democracy, “into a weapon of oppression,” and no longer, “a shield of safety over our heads, but a sword of subjugation at our hearts,” he cried. To remain in the Union was the most devastating cut of southern pride imaginable. Boteler declared that the, “only alternative now left us is either base submission or revolutionary resistance.” Other prominent, pre-war Whigs built the regiment, as well. Lawson Botts, a renowned local lawyer and John Brown’s former defense attorney, helped the outfit by merging Botts Greys and serving as captain for several months. Even Benjamin Beall’s adversaries at Virginia Free Press served with him in the same rifle company, including William B. Gallaher, who ran the family’s newspaper after the Civil War.108

Jefferson County’s striking volunteer numbers proved that the unconditional support of southern social hierarchy crossed diverse socioeconomic lines. The response to the crisis was

unsurprising. The southern code of honor and military culture inspired both Whigs and Democrats to fight for disunion, as Bertram Wyatt-Brown said, because white men valued the noble qualities of, “valor, courtesy, duty, loyalty, [and] virtue.” “For white southerners in revolt, duty . . . meant self-sacrifice to family, community, race, and region, against outside forces of evil and ruin,” he observed. Ruinous northern encroachment undermined the, “right of community self-government,” through which the, “white man’s right to hold human property and dispose of it as he saw fit,” was preserved. Some men believed that Christian duty commanded a spiritual obligation to fight for the Confederacy and the social order it advocated. A synthesis of belief and community fortitude rallied southern men to the cause of independence. The preservation of southern social hierarchy in the name of stability ultimately drove men of dissimilar political inclinations to unite under the Confederacy’s banner.

After several months training on the heights around Harpers Ferry and quietly defending the county from potential Union army incursions, Benjamin Beall’s regiment engaged in its first real battle in late July outside the city of Manassas Junction on the banks of Bull Run. For the ensuing forty-eight months after the First Manassas (Battle of Bull Run), the Second Virginia fought continuously throughout the eastern theater, participating in renowned actions like Gaines Mill, Second Manassas, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and the Siege of Petersburg as part of the Army of Northern Virginia. Their leader, General Thomas J. Jackson, had earned a reputation for tactical brilliance, and the units’ soldiers were proud of their accomplishments under his command. They were especially proud to be known as “Jackson’s Foot Cavalry,” an honor derived from their victories over large Union armies in the Shenandoah Valley in the spring of

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109 Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s—1880s*, 208.
110 Ibid, 214.
111 Ibid, 214.
1862. Henry Kyd Douglas of Shepherdstown in Jefferson County briefly spent time as a member of the Second Virginia, who was honored by his service. In his post-war memoir, Douglas revealed the pride that Beall undoubtedly shared. Of the Confederate victory at the battles of McDowell and Port Republic in May 1862, Douglas reminisced that:

“How in thirty days his [Jackson’s] army had marched nearly four hundred miles, skirmishing almost daily, fought five battles, defeated four armies, two of which were completely routed, captured about twenty pieces of artillery, some four thousand prisoners, and immense quantity of stores of all kinds, and had done all of this with a loss of less than one thousand killed, wounded, and missing.”

Beall and Douglas must have been elated that their participation in the campaign drove, “the Federal Administration in Washington to the verge of nervous collapse. Surely a more brilliant record cannot be found in the history of the world,” Douglas gleefully boasted.112

Yet, their pride mixed with an equally palpable despair, which arose from the darker side of war. As the number of dead swelled, soldiers on each side tried desperately to justify overwhelming casualties. Both armies shared Judeo-Christian traditions, which recognized death as a sublime experience that exalted in the Almighty and eternal salvation. The shock of battle, however, defied all pre-existing beliefs, and opened raw physical and psychological wounds that tormented survivors as the war dragged on. The soldiers of the Second Virginia Regiment were not unscathed by savage casualties, having an attrition rate of 26 percent and a nearly equal number of combat dead. Long-time neighbors, friends, and family had perished before their eyes on the battlefields. Assuming that Beall remained with his unit long enough, he would have witnessed the carnage that resulted from a bloody clash with the illustrious Union Iron Brigade

112 Bushong, 142-145, 366; Frye, 2nd Virginia Infantry: The Virginia Regimental Histories Series, 5-8, 31-42, 51-57; Quotes taken from; Henry Kyd Douglass, I Rode with Stonewall: Being Chiefly the War Experiences of the Youngest Member of Jackson’s staff from the John Brown Raid to the hanging of Ms. Surratt, 11th ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1940), 92.
on the open fields beyond Brawner’s Farm on August 28, 1862. At five o’clock that afternoon, the Second Virginia’s exhausted men engaged in a brutal four-hour-long shootout with the famous westerners, where the firing line between the two forces closed to within 100 yards. Beall’s regiment only had 130 men on hand heading into the fight, and lost 39 of their volunteers when darkness forced a halt. A regimental history by Dennis E. Frye recalled the anguished words of soldier Tom Gold, who wrote, “One we go, a long line of gray, firing as we advance. From somewhere in front, the bullets come thick and fast, the smoke hanging low. We see nothing. At last we reach a fence. We halt—all seem to be falling—the rain of bullets is like hail.”  

In the heated collision, it is likely that Beall watched the mortal wounding of highly respected Colonel Lawton Botts, who had been promoted that summer to regimental commander. In the chaos, Botts led the regiment atop his horse in plain sight of all his men. The federals, however, saw him, too. At the height of the battle, a shot from a federal musket pierced the colonel’s cheek, knocking him from his horse. While Botts initially survived the wound, he hemorrhaged to death several weeks later. North and South continued to fight for the next two days, and the Second Virginia lost an additional 43 soldiers.

Desertion increased as men died in the ranks. Frye’s statistical analysis of the regiment determined that a quarter of the 1,631 men that served in Beall’s unit deserted at some point during the war. William A. Blair reminded that Confederate conscription functioned as another fulfillment of the chivalrous pledge to protect home and family. Well before the “hard war” arrived in Jefferson County, the impulse to break ranks and return home dominated soldiers’ minds. Henry Kyd Douglas noted that when the regiment encamped outside Winchester,

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113 Frye, 2nd Virginia Infantry: The Virginia Regimental Histories Series, 39.
114 Faust, 6-30, 55-60; Frye, 38-42. (It should be noted that the Frye’s statistics only deal with wounded or killed. If casualties from capture were included, then the regiment’s total is just under fifty percent.)
Virginia in early 1862, soldiers from that city audaciously defied orders to remain in camp and attended Sunday church services with their families. Reasons for desertion changed over time due to the evolving personal circumstances of Confederate servicemen. As the war appeared increasingly like a lost cause, formerly dedicated soldiers left to take care of their families, believing that was the most honorable pursuit at that point. At the beginning of the war, Beall and his wife, Martha, were the parents of a toddler, Mary Louise. Census records indicated that he was responsible for his wife’s elderly father, Donovan, as well. With a family at home of both young and old, Beall may have felt compelled to return to Charlestown to protect his family against marauding guerilla’s and reckless Union soldiers. Desertion would have been tempting because the Second Virginia periodically returned to Jefferson County in every year of the war. If Beall remained with his unit at the start of Jubal Early’s Valley Campaign in 1864, he would have been alarmed by Union soldiers’ wanton havoc all over Jefferson County.

The insecurity of southern soldiers over their families was justifiable, especially if their loved ones lived in the middle of an active warzone. Given Jefferson County’s unique placement at the mouth of the Shenandoah Valley, the area’s Confederate families repeatedly endured the war’s hardship because of the perennial fighting there between the North and the South. The Shenandoah Valley counties long occupied a place of strict, strategic importance in the Union army’s military plans. The valley’s rich agricultural history made it an immediate target of federal strategists because of the region’s ability to provision the rebels. The Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountains also formed a natural barrier that made it easy for the Confederates to hide and organize sizeable military incursions that threatened Washington. Thus, the valley

quickly developed into a hotbed of fighting between the Union and Confederates for the area’s control. Jefferson County’s proximity to two rivers and two heavily used railroads made it a prime location from which to stage military operations. Both armies struggled often and mightily over it, and Harpers Ferry alone changed hands eight times throughout the war.¹¹⁶

Jefferson County civilians were thrust into the war as active participants when the armies clashed with one another on their doorsteps. The war unmercifully transformed the county’s towns, rural villages, and isolated crossroads into plundered, desolate landscapes. When the Army of Northern Virginia desperately fought for survival on the banks of Antietam Creek in September of 1862, Shepherdstown instantly morphed into a massive field hospital for thousands of wounded Confederates, who lived through the slaughter that had transpired a few miles north in Maryland. In a letter written a month later, Henrietta B. Lee recalled that:

“The fight near Sharpsburg filled our town to overflowing with wounded and dying men. Every vacant house, every church and nearly all private homes have been full. I had eleven [soldiers] and with their attendants sixteen . . . O child of my heart, how I long for quietness and rest.”

Shepherdstown residents hastily offered their homes to the throng of wounded, but were soon overwhelmed by the sheer demand for care. The town’s few physicians tried to assist Confederate military surgeons stationed in the area, but there were too many men to treat. Amputated limbs and the dead overflowed, transforming churches, shops, and dwellings into makeshift morgues. Nursing the wounded was so arduous that the town’s water supply was almost exhausted by wretched soldiers, and locksmith Elijah Rickard padlocked the municipal pump. Some civilians, including the teenage daughter of a local doctor, Julia Quigley, died as a

result of airborne pathogens that derived from nursing the wounded and deteriorated sanitary conditions. Civilians also died of indirect gunfire from across the river. Mary Bedinger Mitchell of Shepherdstown remembered how a friend almost died carrying gruel to a wounded shelter in an old cotton factory. “I had just taken it [the gruel] to her, and she was walking across the floor with the bowl in her hands,” Mitchell recalled, “when a shell crashed through a corner of the wall and passed out at the opposite end of the building, shaking the rookery to its foundation, filling the room with dust and plaster, and throwing her upon her knees to the floor. The wounded screamed, and had they not been entirely unable to move, not a man would have been left in the building.” Henrietta Lee wailed, “It seems to me this war has crushed our humanity from the hearts of men. O that it might please God to end it and give us back our loved ones to our homes and hearts again.”117

While their fathers, husbands, and sons like Beall bitterly engaged Yankee soldiers, civilians in Jefferson County were battered by the Union army. As the Union’s tactics moved toward “hard war,” civilian property was demolished in areas with a large guerilla presence. Valley natives’ intransigence eroded the patience of Union occupational forces, which attempted to re-assert federal authority over the rebellious population. Virginians throughout the Shenandoah Valley continued to provision Confederate forces, operate as spies, and sabotage infrastructure to disable Union supply logistics throughout the region. Confederate guerillas caused tremendous frustration for Union soldiers because of their ability to melt back into the

civilian population after raids. Rebel-partisan warfare was especially problematic in areas of the Lower Shenandoah Valley, where accomplished guerilla chieftains like Turner Ashby and John S. Mosby executed daring raids on Union encampments with impunity. At first, most federal officers and enlisted men approached southern whites conciliatorily in places like Jefferson County, where the preservation of privacy and property rights were strictly respected in hope that good will would pacify cantankerous locals. But these acts of subterfuge continued unabated, however, through each phase of federal occupation. By the spring offensives of 1864, federal politicians and high-ranking United States’ military officers changed their perspectives on fractious civilians and commenced psychological operations by confiscating and destroying their property. The Union military also imposed rigid restrictions on basic civil liberties to break the fighting spirit of antagonized locals. Union forces regularly pillaged the countryside, commandeering agricultural products and buildings that had military value. In some cases, the deliberate destruction of property had no strategic significance whatsoever, but was malicious reprisal for starting the war. Included in the wreckage was the newspaper office of Benjamin Beall’s competitor, the Virginia Free Press, which federal soldiers torched, along with all the costly printing equipment inside.¹¹⁸

An intense campaign aimed at inflicting “hard war” on the valley began in earnest when Union General David Hunter and his successor, Phillip Sheridan, commanded all Union military units in the region. General Hunter also targeted prominent Confederate sympathizers by ordering the First New York Cavalry led by Captain Franklin G. Martindale to incinerate their homes in ruthless retribution. Henrietta Lee, the Shepherdstown lady that nursed the legion of

wounded after Antietam, was among the unfortunates, who witnessed the destruction of their homes. Despite pleas by the ailing Lee that her house was built by a revolutionary war veteran, Martindale resolutely fired the elderly woman’s Bedford plantation estate. Destitute, Lee and her family were refugees, who fled Shepherdstown for the remainder of the war. Perhaps the most personal attack perpetrated by frustrated Union occupational forces on recalcitrant whites in Jefferson County was the burning of Andrew Hunter’s Charlestown home on July 17, 1864. Andrew had been backed by Benjamin Beall in the secessionist movement and was cousin to General David Hunter, who ordered the conflagration. In addition to destroying the manor, Martindale ransacked the property, arrested Hunter in Harpers Ferry, and incarcerated him there for a month. As historian Chester G. Hearn remembered, Andrew Hunter, “throughout his imprisonment, he continued to wear a gold ring given to him years before the war that said, ‘With deep affection from Cousin David.’”

When Confederate guerillas led by the infamous Colonel John S. Mosby continued their bold raids throughout the summer and fall of 1864, including an audacious train heist that robbed the federal army of some 168,000 dollars in greenbacks, Sheridan ordered his subordinates to re-double their efforts in routing partisans and valley locals. By the latter half of the year, an irritated Little Phil implemented a series of draconian measures aimed at restricting the movements of Jefferson County’s residents, and sapping what remained of their will to fight. Sheridan ordered the commander of the Harpers Ferry Military District, Brigadier-General John D. Stevenson, to arrest anyone suspected of involvement in stealing supplies from military depots scattered around Jefferson County, and to treat them as spies if necessary. Traffic into

and out of the county was prohibited and was only allowed by a rare pass from the Union headquarters in Harpers Ferry. Free movement for business beyond county limits ground to a halt since federal officials required that alleged rebels swear an “Oath of Allegiance” to the United States, which was verified by a signature on the back of a testimonial statement. To prevent counterfeits and control the flow of information to partisans, Union officers read and censored personal mail. Breaking the rules risked imprisonment without trial and possible deportation from the county. An alleged rebel’s worst fear was confinement in Fort McHenry for the duration of the war if accused of espionage. Cautious Union army officials eventually controlled the supplies that were available to residents, and limited trips outside of Jefferson County to six hours twice a month. General Sheridan, however, saved his most formidable threats for the immediate area around the Baltimore and Ohio railroad—tamper at your own peril! “Those people who live in the vicinity of Harpers Ferry are the most villainous in the Valley, and have not yet been warned much,” Sheridan sternly advised. “If the railroad is interfered with, I will make some of them poor.” It was clear to the few remaining residents of Harpers Ferry (and all of Jefferson County) that military malevolence imposed hard northern justice on a southern population whose rights were under attack.120

Northerners were despised for stirring the galling black resistance to white hegemony in Virginia. The antebellum resistance aroused in free and enslaved blacks during the 1850s gathered serious momentum during the Civil War. With the semi-permanence of Union forces in the valley beginning in 1862, most blacks across the region abandoned their enslavement en masse for the safety of federal lines. Throughout the spring of 1862, when federal presence in

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the area was robust due to Stonewall Jackson’s exploits farther south, slaveholders like Beall in Jefferson County incessantly reported the disappearance of their slaves. James Lawrence Hooff and his wife, Ann, used slave labor to operate a 300-acre farm that was the envy of the county. When the two awoke one day in March, they realized that everyone on their farm had vanished. “When we got up, we found every woman and child gone,” James Lawrence Hooff admitted in disbelief. “[They] took our wagon and moved everything . . . several of the neighbors’ servants gone at the same time.” David Hunter Strother, then on the civilian staff of Union General Nathaniel P. Banks, commented on the massive slave escapes in Jefferson County. “An excitement was produced in town by the arrival of a wagon load of Negro women and children with bag and baggage bound for free country . . . numbers of men have flocked into town more or less every day since our occupation.” The number of blacks that fled through Harpers Ferry increased exponentially throughout the year as Union forces advanced down the valley, allowing the chance for escape. By the end of the summer, it was estimated that nearly 2,000 blacks had run away to Harpers Ferry. Union soldiers sometimes openly liberated slaves from county farms, especially following the implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation, though most blacks seized their own freedom.  

Blacks were capable of much more than seeking safety in the North. Many of Jefferson County’s former slaves remained in Harpers Ferry and actively worked to subvert the Confederacy by taking up arms in the fight, and Union soldiers were happy to receive their assistance. While in the Upper Valley in 1864, David Strother remarked that:

“The Negroes take the first opportunity they find of running into our lines and giving information as to where their masters are hidden and conduct our foragers to their retreats . . . Negroes were continually running to us with information of all kinds and they are the only persons upon whose correct truth we can rely.”

Similar circumstances repeated in the Lower Valley, as well. A Union army report in December 1862 revealed that two former slaves reported to local commanders in Harpers Ferry that a considerable Confederate force under the command of Generals Jackson and Longstreet had bivouacked near Charlestown. In addition to reconnaissance, blacks also performed a variety of essential tasks for the Union army around the federal camp in Harpers Ferry. African Americans were teamsters, sutlers, clerks, and laborers, among other occupations. Perhaps the greatest support that Virginia blacks provided to Union soldiers was in the completion of General George B. McClellan’s massive fortifications surrounding Harpers Ferry in the winter and spring of 1862 and 1863. At McClellan’s behest, an additional 2,000 emancipated slaves from eastern Virginia were transported to Harpers Ferry to help construct the mile-and-a-half long series of redoubts and trenches around the town. The work was backbreaking because immense pieces of stone, timber, equipment, and eventually weaponry were lugged up steep inclines that overlooked the county. Blacks not only labored to win the war, they were paid for it! The foundation of freedom was slowly laid for the county’s former slaves, much to the chagrin of local whites.122

The most meaningful black resistance was the enlistment in the federal army of 154 free and formerly enslaved black Americans from Jefferson County. While most joined the United States Colored Troops, a few joined New England volunteer regiments out of Connecticut and Massachusetts, including Peter Washington, a 21-year-old coachman, who served in the vaunted

122 Eby, 280; Frye, Harpers Ferry under Fire: A Border Town in the American Civil War, 112-15. Geffert, 72-5. Although, it is important to note that some slaves did remain with their masters in Jefferson County during the war. See, Geffert, 71.
54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. Of the 154 black recruits, 22 died from wounds, disease, or drowning during their service terms, and another nine were wounded and survived to return home. The arrival of black men attached to the 19th USCT at Henrietta Lee’s front door just outside Shepherdstown revealed one way that Jefferson County’s enslaved men enrolled in the Union army. In April of 1864, the 19th USCT arrived in Jefferson County and immediately recruited intensely among the enslaved population. As the regiment marched through the county, small detachments of soldiers fanned out in the towns and villages that dotted the countryside. A squad of black soldiers appeared at the Lee plantation, looking everywhere for three slaves, William, Thompson, and George. The appearance of black soldiers in blue uniforms visibly shocked the Lee family, especially when news arrived that the regiment planned an encampment on the property. The elderly Henrietta Lee eventually mustered up enough courage to confront them, inquiring why they were searching around the grounds. “We were sent here for your three young colored men. We’re gathering up recruits,” one of them replied. The Lee’s apparently hid William, Thompson, and George, thereby preventing their enlistment—at least that is the tale that was told in Jefferson County. In spite of the Lee family legend, George and William eventually signed up for military service on their own, although in different regiments. Nevertheless, black recruiters were one of the means by which blacks ended white authority over their lives.123

Importantly, whenever significant numbers of southern troops appeared in Jefferson County, they bitterly opposed black resistance and frequently sent captured black Union soldiers back into slavery. For example, on September 12, 1862, General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson

arrived in Harpers Ferry with a force of 20,000 men to seize the federal garrison there. When 12,500 Union soldiers finally surrendered, many of the area’s freed slaves fled north, but not all of them escaped. An estimated 1,000 free and runaway slaves, who sought refuge in Jefferson County, were rounded up by Jackson’s men during their brief possession of the town, and sent deep into the south to work for farms and businesses.  

Union policy in occupied Jefferson County was never completely uncontested. The army’s unspeakable evil was frequently protested, and in some cases, successfully prevented the ravaging of private property. David Hunter Strother, the same federal soldier who observed Jefferson County slaves’ flight to freedom, managed to protect his neighbors regardless of their partisan attachments. While Strother, nicknamed “Porte Crayon” because of his artistic ability, hailed from nearby Berkeley County, he had many Jefferson County friends and was a nephew of Charlestown’s Andrew Hunter. Strother helped valley natives everywhere, including Jefferson County. In late May 1862, Strother encountered Union soldiers plundering Charlestown after a skirmish temporarily pushed General Jackson from the area. As he stood vigil over his uncle’s house, he noticed roving bands of soldiers looting buildings and setting fire to the town hall. He enlisted the aid of troopers from the Eighth New York Cavalry to prevent the fire’s spread throughout town, which was successful. Despite the loss of merchandise from a dozen shops, Strother saved the town hall, and alleviated a bit of his neighbors’ suffering.  

David Hunter Strother was able to work his magic because he was a Union soldier attached to the reconnaissance party that explored Charlestown from the federal base of operations in Harpers Ferry. He originally served as a civilian topographical aid to Union

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124 Geffert, 74-5.
125 Eby, 47-8, 280.
commanders in the Lower Valley, eventually joining the federal army and attaining the rank of colonel. He represented the region’s noticeable unionist minority, who followed their loyalty to the nation. A pre-war Whig and personal friend of Alexander R. Boteler, Strother embraced the conservative Whig tenets of law and order. He was completely hostile to fire-eating secessionists and the push for racial equality trumpeted by many northern abolitionists. From events at the Virginia Convention, as well as the aftermath of the John Brown Raid, Strother deduced that, “from a rationally conservative republic, we have in thirty years degraded into a howling democracy, as a gentlemanly drinker degrades into a bestial lot.”  

One of his contemporary biographers concluded that Porte Crayon, “believed that the solution for the United States was a stronger central government and a candid acknowledgment of inequality in human society.” Strother’s mercy only extended so far. When Captain Martindale burned his cousin’s home, he tersely declared, “I am sorry to see this warfare begun and would be glad to stop it, but I don’t pity the individuals at all.”

Unlike many of his neighbors, in earlier years, Strother spent significant time in the North because of travel and education, so he had more than a passing familiarity with it. His father, John, was a strong unionist patriot after a lifelong career as a United State Army officer, beginning in the War of 1812, and the son was duty-bound to preserve that heritage. A southerner at heart, Strother was pressured to conform socially as a southern gentleman. His dichotomous decisions to support the Union and shield his community from federal vandals

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127 Ibid, 21.
128 Eby, 280.
revealed that he was caught between his loyalty to the southern code of honor and his nation. He did his best to help both under trying circumstances.\textsuperscript{129}

Why was unionism attractive to southerners at all? Because defiance of southern community was unusually intimate, the reasons for Union loyalty varied. In the Shenandoah Valley, unionism attracted a fair share of prosperous, well-educated, middle-class southerners, who were lawyers, businessmen, or active in local antebellum politics. Preserving lucrative northern connections, including the use of railroads that ran through federal territory, was particularly important in the Lower Valley. Also, many unionists were tied to the North through family connections or a prolonged residence there. As such, they were less prone to believe the conspiracy theories that incensed their neighbors. Because of their secure, elevated positions in the community, unionists in Virginia’s northern regions typically identified with the antebellum Whig Party, and believed strongly in the legal protection offered by a strong national government. (Pre-war Democrats, including a former mayor of Harpers Ferry, Solomon V. Yantis, were loyalists as well, although such cases were extremely rare.) They ardently believed that the Whig proposal for legal secession was just as radically dangerous as abolition. Like David Strother, many loyalists were convinced that secession meant evil and ruin for southern society. However, they did not subscribe to the Lincoln administration’s humanist philosophy, believing that government was meant to serve the country’s \textit{white} population alone. While a majority of Upper-South unionists never owned slaves before the war, they almost universally opposed racial equality, but resisted the Confederacy because they detested slavery. Class distinctions, therefore, were important to some southern unionists because they were certain that the war was initiated by slaveholders, who wished to tighten their grip at the expense of non-

\textsuperscript{129} Berkey, 19-27.
slaveholding whites. It is important to note that a minority of loyalists approved of abolition because of deeply held religious principles. The Upper-South’s Amish and Mennonite communities, especially in the Shenandoah Valley, resisted the Confederacy because their Christian traditions saw slavery as morally bankrupt. And, in the end, there were unionists for whom it was all an exercise in pragmatic opportunism.¹³⁰

In total, at least 1,600 of Jefferson County’s men served in the Confederate military. Beyond the Second Virginia Infantry Regiment, there were enough volunteers to raise additional military units for the rebel army, including companies for the Twelfth Virginia Cavalry (originally part of the 7ᵗʰ), an independent battery of horse-artillery, and several mounted detachments that served with guerilla units in northern Virginia. Yet, as Strother’s story disclosed, not all of the county’s white residents harmonized with Benjamin Beall’s political views during the war. A significant minority of the county’s white population served the federal army, like Strother, but unlike their rebel neighbors, loyalists’ less frequent appearance in Jefferson County complicated regimental organization. County resident John H. Giddy enlisted in a regiment of United States regulars in 1862, and unionists also joined volunteer regiments from different states. Pension records revealed that at least a dozen of the county’s white men marched with the federal units that passed through as they trudged south. The closest that loyalists came to a uniquely “Virginian” regiment were the new “West Virginian” regiments that formed in the northwest corner of the new state at the outbreak of war. Samuel K. Beebout, Joseph N. Gonter, and Samuel L. Merchant all headed west to Wheeling to join the First West Virginia Infantry. A local twentieth-century historian suggested that a larger group of loyalist

whites enrolled in Company C of the Third West Virginia Cavalry when an enlistment office opened in Charlestown in the winter of 1863. The fight against Confederate irregulars, like Mosby’s Rangers and Elijah V. White’s White Comanche’s, advanced when unionist guerillas, the Independent Loudon Rangers, emerged. While it was difficult, unionists had opportunities to challenge their Confederate neighbors.¹³¹

A few whites went uncommitted and waited out the war because there was little or no personal advantage in it. Their nonchalance did not last long, however. As casualties climbed in Confederate units, the congress in Richmond hurried to uncover additional manpower. Amid enormous controversy, the Confederate government passed a general conscription act, which forcibly dragooned reluctant, impecunious whites, who could not muster the financial or political clout to avoid the draft. William A. Blair revealed that many Virginian conscripts in the Army of Northern Virginia became stragglers or deserters within a few weeks of their enlistment. While sympathy for southern slavery’s preservation may have existed among conscripts, most of them left the army to avoid becoming cannon fodder. Jefferson County resident John H. Neer was forced into the Confederate military despite his unionist proclivities. At least, that is what he told the Southern Claims Commission after the war when he tried for reimbursement over destroyed property. In actuality, Neer had abandoned his unit at the first opportunity and eventually worked with the Union army as a guide and a sutler. He thus transited to another kind of common loyalist-rendered assistance—direct civilian services. Loyalists who were too old for

active military duty worked for the Union army as sutlers, teamsters, or artisans. Toward the end of the war, when Harpers Ferry was a bustling Union-army supply hub, loyalist Joseph Barry returned from his self-imposed exile to be employed as an army forage master at a wage of 75 dollars per month. By late 1864, the federals employed 289 county natives in 35 different professions.\textsuperscript{132}

Historian Stephen V. Ash said that, “Secessionists were certain that God, truth, justice, logic, and history were all on their side.”\textsuperscript{133} In Jefferson County, emotions ran red hot almost immediately after the commencement of hostilities. Thus, when word spread that their neighbors had cooperated with hated, corrupt Yankees, it fueled boundless rage in the defiant majority. The sentiment was especially intense among Democrats, who instantly pointed at contemptible loyalist Whigs who quickly became popular scapegoats. As such, they were punished by uniformed Confederates and civilians alike. A riot broke out between the arsenal’s armors in Harpers Ferry, when word that Virginia had seceded got out. A number of Harpers-Ferry loyalists offered to help the town’s federal garrison defend the facility, but when the garrison evacuated after rumors that grossly exaggerated the strength of approaching Confederate forces, militiamen mobbed the loyalists in the center of town. Benjamin Beall must have been present with the Jefferson Guards when a rope was slung around the neck of Jeremiah Donovan, an armorer of pronounced unionist sympathies. Loyalist Joseph Barry (who later fled the county for fear of violence) remarked that Donovan surely would have hanged had not militia commander Turner Ashby arrived to free him from certain doom. Other instances of mob violence swept the county shortly thereafter. Solomon V. Yantis, once highly regarded in his hometown of Harpers

\textsuperscript{133} Stephen V. Ash,\textit{ When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861—1865} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), 120
Ferry, was chased through the streets and almost hung alongside Dr. Joseph E. Cleggett because of their unionism. A slew of other prominent figures were accused of loyalist treason, and imprisoned for long periods. Confederate raiders led by Robert Baylor frequently terrorized the area’s unionists. In addition to intercepting and killing a local man named Rohr, Baylor nearly murdered young Jennie Chambers, whose father, Edmund, was a notable unionist and former Whig, highly respected for his proficiency as an armorer. When Baylor saw the girl signal a Union picket, who crept around the county to avoid capture, the partisan rode up yelling, “What did you wave at those (expletive omitted) Yankees for? I’ll put you down where you will never wave at another Yankee.” Baylor ultimately released Jennie Chambers, but the danger was real. Unionists of any age or gender risked retribution at the hands of anxious, seditious neighbors and Yankees.¹³⁴

Some unionists fled Jefferson County because of their frightening neighbors, and some remained and fought back against the men and women, who had endangered everyone by leading the community into secession. Such painful conflict destroyed longstanding relationships between friends and families. Porte Crayon shared the poignant tale of the intimate bond between David Strother’s family and the prominent McDonalds of Winchester, Virginia that was severed by the war. The McDonald patriarch, Angus, had forged a steadfast, years-long friendship with Strother’s father, John, which began when they were comrade-in-arms in the War of 1812. Confederates tasked Colonel McDonald with the arrest of the elderly Strother because of his unionism. The order disturbed McDonald terribly, and he labored tirelessly to free his


Interestingly, Hannah. N. Geffert discovered that Rohr was ambushed, rowing across the Potomac River from Maryland, while trying to free two slaves that Baylor had staged to prevent unionists from abetting slave escapes. The two slaves, Charles Stewart and John, were Baylor’s slaves. See, Geffert, 73.
friend from jail. A Confederate court eventually found Strother innocent, but the ordeal had severely compromised his health and he died shortly thereafter. David Strother was enraged by the news. Unaware of McDonald’s help on his father’s behalf, he felt completely betrayed by the arrest and imprisonment.135

Two years later, Strother got revenge, when Colonel McDonald was caught outside of Lexington, Virginia. General David Hunter charged Strother with the supervision of McDonald’s incarceration, which Strother made especially uncomfortable. The day after McDonald was captured, the two men met outside of Hunter’s headquarters, and the Confederate colonel hailed his union equal heartily. Strother turned a cold shoulder. McDonald tried again, only to be interrupted by a curt, “Do we know each other?” McDonald sadly replied, “Yes, I know you and you know me very well. And yet, Sir, you do not know me. No, you do not know me.” Strother, shaken, replied, “I think I do know you, Sir,” and walked away. In his diary, Strother clearly struggled to comprehend what had transpired, and was regretful over the encounter. Still, he believed that he was justified, when he was reminded of his father’s fate:

“After three years, the hour had at length come and this tyrannical old brute, who had treated my aged father with such wanton indignity, was himself a prisoner in my hands and I clothed with authority life and death. That single look was vengeance enough for me. I could see remorse in his countenance when he recognized me and his aged appearance filled me with pity. If I had followed my impulses at the moment I would have liberated him.”136

Strother saw McDonald as an unrepentant rebel, who had not only risked Virginia’s welfare through secession, but had personalized the war by killing his father. Strother, though, had ironically returned the favor, as McDonald expired later that year from his own prison tribulations. Colonel McDonald’s implacable family swore vengeance on the entire Strother

135 Berkey, 28-30.
136 Berkey, 31; Eby, 260.
clan. Angus’ son, Edward H. McDonald, threatened Strother’s wife directly, and nine other sons tried to burn down his home. The crisis abated when the patriarch whispered that his dying wish was that his sons drop the feud, which they did. Years of abiding family connections, however, were hopelessly sacrificed on the altar the Civil War. It was a tragedy re-enacted again and again between unionists and secessionists throughout the valley.\textsuperscript{137}

Unionists reaped other consequences because of their commitment to the union. While the war birthed vendettas between neighbors, it also strained families. The choice between secession and union \textit{could} be a cohesive family decision, but it also opened fissures when they split over political questions that were dear to the heart and integral to personal identities. Charles Andrews had difficulty controlling the secessionist impulses of his son, Matthew, who was enrolled in law school at beginning of the war. In letters home, Mathew Andrews indicated plainly that he intended to join the Confederacy. In response, Charles and his son’s fiancée, Anna Robinson, tag-teamed the young man into repudiating enlistment. The father was an especially tedious adversary, whose frequent correspondence with his son inflicted unionist beliefs and entreated Matthew’s duty as his child to honor his wish to stay out of the war. As matriarch, Matthew’s mother, Sarah, was stuck in the unenviable position of preserving a positive family dynamic, while attempting to keep both father and son happy. When enlistment mania infected his law-school classmates, Matthew felt especially compelled to join. Charles Andrews was effective in correlling his rebellious son because Matthew ultimately refrained from signing up.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{137} Berkey, 31-2; Eby, 259-61, 284-5.
\textsuperscript{138} Anne Murrell Taylor, \textit{The Divided Family in Civil War America} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005) 17, 22-3, 42.
David Strother endured a similar situation with his Charlestown relatives, although it ended poorly. When Strother visited the home of his uncle, Andrew Hunter, he utterly shocked the avid state’s-rights advocate when he strolled into the library wearing union blue. The Hunters had been convinced that Strother’s work with federal army commanders meant that he had been imprisoned. The fantasy collapsed, however, when his aunt saw the uniform. She was so shaken that she wildly called for her daughter, while incoherently babbling her disgust at Strother’s appearance. Encounters with Hunter relatives elsewhere in the valley revealed that his extended family had all but disowned him because of his choice of allegiance.\(^{139}\)

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All this transpired as Benjamin Beall served in the Confederate military. Given the scant number of original enlistees that remained in the Second Virginia by the time of its surrender at Appomattox, it is evident that Beall most likely returned home sometime during the war. He would have seen the steady stream of northerners into Jefferson County, who were markedly hostile to the obstinate southerners that sabotaged Union war efforts. He would have seen the bleak, desolated countryside, destroyed towns, and pillaged businesses. He very well may have looked at the scorched office that was once the *Virginia Free Press*, a place where he began his publishing career, despite disagreements with its owners. Since Beall was also a slaveholder, the emancipation of slaves and their sharp resistance to the racist social order probably pushed his fury even higher. With defeat looming in the early months of 1865, rebellious southerners were resigned that their fate was inevitable. With all that Beall and his community experienced, the idea of renewal seemed daunting. The unionists that lingered in Jefferson County were

\(^{139}\) Berkey, 27-8.
extraordinarily suspicious of men like Beall, who already distrusted them. Men like Beall, in turn, deeply distrusted the unionists for their cooperation with a hated enemy. As the nation moved into Reconstruction, Beall and other former southern-rights advocates struggled desperately with emboldened unionists over the ashes of Jefferson County’s antebellum social order.
At five P.M. we left Sharpsburg in an open buggy under a sky that threatened rain. Black clouds and thunder-gusts were all around us,” American author John Townsend Trowbridge reminisced of a trip to Jefferson County after the Civil War. It was an apt description of the shattered world he had wandered. Trowbridge and his companions found Jefferson County devastated, and its white residents embittered by the Confederacy’s failure. The town of Harpers Ferry was no longer the “pleasant and picturesque place” about which antebellum visitors had rhapsodized. Blaming its condition on the “folly of secession,” Trowbridge said that instead of a lovely town, “freshets tear down the center of city streets, and the dreary hill-sides present only ragged growths of weeds. The town itself lies half in ruin . . . of the extensive buildings which comprised the armory . . . you see but little more than the burnt-out, empty shells.” Charlestown was the same. Amid the decaying ruins and barren fields, Trowbridge (a northerner) remarked on the sullen people under the watchful eye of the Union garrison nearby. “They are all Rebels here, ---all Rebels,” exclaimed Trowbridge’s northern acquaintance then in Charlestown. “They are a pitiably poverty-stricken set; there is not money in this place, and scarcely anything to eat!” “My landlady’s daughter is Southern fire incarnate,” his friend indignantly remarked, “and she illustrates Southern politeness by abusing Northern people and the government from morning till night, for my especial edification . . . sometimes I venture to answer her, when she flies at me, figuratively speaking, like a cat.” As the two strolled toward the destroyed court house where John Brown was sentenced to death,
Trowbridge’s companion explained that, “the war-feeling here is like a burning bush with a wet blanket wrapped around it. Looked at from the outside, the fire seems quenched,” the friend cautioned. “But just peep under the blanket, and there it is, all alive, and eating, eating in.”

Years of hostilities over their idea of American identity had crushed whites in Jefferson County, and smoldering animosity over the last decade-and-a-half animated residents who were left to rebuild. With the Confederacy’s region-wide defeat in the spring of 1865, the dream of southern independence, founded on the conjoined concepts of state’s rights, racial slavery, and white supremacy and tenaciously advocated by Democrats like Benjamin Beall, evaporated. Recovery dominated those who remained in and returned to Jefferson County. Yet, fifteen years of acrimony over slavery hardened resentment of northerners, especially politicians and their loyalist allies, who controlled the municipal post-war political system. Back at his desk in 1865, a chastened Benjamin Beall tackled the problem in his first post-war issue of the *Spirit of Jefferson*. “Of the past four years, with their sad memories and bitter griefs, how shall we speak? We cannot approach the household from which some cherished idol has been torn,” he grieved, “and congratulate the living that the rude hand of war, which deprived them of their loved ones has been stayed, with the loss of the cause for which they fell.” He was disgusted and distraught by the post-war reality that must be endured. Despite sharing the community’s distress, Beall counseled that greener pastures waited:

“We can meet with manliness the fate which has overtaken us, and labor to make the Government under which we live, and to which we have honestly renewed our allegiance—conservative in its tendencies and just in its exactions . . . and in this we will have the cordial co-operation of many who differed with us while the struggle was pending.”

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Beall conveyed a delicate confidence that Jefferson County, despite its earlier divisions, could truly reunite and re-forge the old social order, where whites dominated blacks socially, politically, and economically through a decentralized system of governance and violence. The lingering antipathy that Trowbridge described as rife proved more resolute than Beall thought, and significantly complicated his hopes. The majority of whites in Jefferson County, who had followed the Old Dominion into rebellion, grew increasingly infuriated that loyalists and northern Republicans controlled county and national government. From their perspective, every political act committed by post-bellum politicians reeked of corruption. To Benjamin Beall and his *Spirit of Jefferson* readers, the national drive to enhance African-American social equality was the most outrageous political infraction of all, and it seemed as if the perceived tyranny rampant before and during the war had reached a crescendo in the late 1860s. National and local Reconstruction, then, was an emotional time for Benjamin Beall and other former rebels, in which efforts to reconstruct the county and the South evolved into a desperate battle to salvage what remained of the antebellum social order.141

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Among the first transformations that Beall and other Jefferson County southern-rights advocates withstood was the realization that they were no longer Virginians. Perhaps the greatest defiance of the Confederacy by local loyalists during the war occurred when they organized a plebiscite to enter into the newly created state of West Virginia. Long the dream of Virginians in the Trans-Allegany counties near the Ohio and Pennsylvania borders, the new state was the zenith of decades of political grievance that caused western Virginians to feel culturally

inferior to the rest of the state. Poor, isolated, and intimately connected with the North’s commercial interests, they resented the Tidewater and Piedmont slave aristocracy’s political clout, which dominated commonwealth politics. Desiring an equitable system of representation and taxation as well as legislative concessions that improved the region’s infrastructure, Virginians in the western region believed that they were second-class citizens in a state that supposedly championed white citizenship. Noticeable pockets of support for Republicanism materialized in the most northwestern corner of the Trans-Allegany during the late 1850s, due to the party’s inherent hostility to the southern “Slave Power” that posed a threat to whites in regions where slavery did not exist. Western Virginians had long been sympathetic to anti-slavery politics due to a collective belief that slavery prevented Virginia’s white men from climbing the socioeconomic ladder equally. As such, unionists from northwestern Virginia planned to grab most of the Trans-Allegany counties to form a separate state at the beginning of the Civil War.142

In the early-nineteenth century, the Shenandoah Valley’s inhabitants shared the resentment of the slaveholding aristocracy’s political power, and entertained abolition through African colonization. During the impassioned congressional debates in Virginia after Nat Turner’s rebellion, young Charles J. Faulkner, the stubborn champion of the white southern rights promoted vigorously by Beall in 1859, argued for the gradual emancipation of slaves throughout the commonwealth with the intent to involuntarily colonize them in Africa. The politician’s primary concern emanated from the thought that slavery, at the time, was a social and economic threat to both rich and poor non-slaveholders beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains,

which had the potential to foment violence aimed at the state’s white population. Resistance mostly softened, however, as more slaveholders moved into the Shenandoah Valley.  

But some embers over the prior debate still smoldered in Jefferson County, and helped initiate a vote to make Jefferson County part of West Virginia. In May of 1863, one month before the Mountaineer State’s admission to the union, the provisional legislature in Wheeling organized an election for Jefferson County’s white residents to determine if they desired secession from Virginia. State legislators in the West Virginia’s capital, Wheeling, coveted Jefferson County because of its wealth and economic resources, including railroad taxes and commerce. Unionists who remained in the county still resented Virginia’s eastern regions and decided that their future was better secured under a new state government that was empathetic to whites living beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains. They were a significant political majority that favored relocation into a new state because of mass military enlistments of eligible white voters into the Confederate army. Loyalist sentiment was further emboldened because the county remained firmly under Union military occupation at the time of the plebiscite. Thus, Governor Arthur I. Boreman made common cause with local unionists to orchestrate the vote. County unionists organized the event and restricted the official polling stations to Shepherdstown and Harpers Ferry, which served as garrisons for detachments of the Union army. Only 250 white residents voted out of a white population that cast more than 1,800 ballots in the 1860 presidential election. There were only two dissentions. When West Virginia became a state in June, Jefferson County residents were transformed into citizens of a *loyal* southern state.  

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143 Shade, 194-203.  
144 Bushong, 194-195; Otis, 141-3.
It was not long before Beall railed against such circumstances. Weekly issues of the *Spirit* attacked the inclusion of Jefferson County and its neighbor, Berkeley, in the new state because Beall, like many social conservatives and former rebels, thought that the counties were illegitimately added to West Virginia’s jurisdiction. In his opinion, West Virginia only existed because unscrupulous politicians had connived with the North to sunder the old commonwealth for entrenched political purposes. “From the day of our resumption to the present time, we have devoted our columns to expositions of this monstrous wrong,” Beall howled, “. . . and we have brought down on our heads the mighty wrath of all the perpetrators in this infamous act by our denunciations of their treacherous conduct.” He was unequivocal that his, “only regret is that we have lacked the ability to present our wrongs and injuries in a clearer light.”

In another article, Beall fumed that, “so far as the action of Congress can do it, the counties of Jefferson and Berkeley have been transferred to the State of West Virginia; and we venture the assertion that there are more sad hearts in Jefferson this day than ever before. Our people feel that they have been cheated out of their birthright,” he defiantly declared. “That an outrageous and shameful wrong has been perpetrated upon them . . . and that they are compelled to submit quietly to a government that has no legal and constitutional warrant for its exercise over them. Our people loved their old State with a love as tender and true as that of a child for its mother, and it is no wonder that this forcible tearing them away from the State of their love, has made their hearts fill with a sorrow too deep to find a voice,” he eulogized. White Jefferson County conservatives tried to resist Wheeling’s dictates by unsuccessfully convening local conventions to select delegates for Virginia’s state assembly. Beall and local whites hoped, however, that readmission into Virginia was real, when the assembly sued West Virginia over the constitutionality of the

transfer. Benjamin Beall’s unrestrained loyalty to the antebellum social order prompted his
defiant publication of the newspaper’s location as Jefferson County, Virginia, well into 1869. Until the case was resolved, the county’s anti-Republicans endured what they considered to be an unbearable situation.146

Inclusion in the new state of West Virginia greatly irked Beall, in part, because the
government was run by Republicans who channeled most of their power from the northwestern counties near Ohio and Pennsylvania. The Republican Party in Virginia was invisible during the Sectional Crisis, and Abraham Lincoln was virtually non-existent on ballots east of Appalachia in the 1860 presidential election. The only region in which any form of stable organization for the Republican Party emerged in the very northwestern regions of the state the mirrored the Old Northwest than it did the rest of the state. The few eastern Virginians, who openly embraced Republicans, were run out of the state by white Whigs and Democrats after threats of mob violence. John C. Underwood, a pre-war Republican, who later became a controversial scalawag, was chased out of his native Clarke County in 1856 by large numbers of Lower-Valley agitators. While antebellum northwestern Republicans and Whigs co-created West Virginia, a tiny number Whigs from eastern counties and west of the Trans-Allegany converted to the Republican Party after the war. This occurred in Jefferson County, as well, and the reasons for joining were diverse. Historian Eric Foner described native-born southern whites, who affiliated with the Republican Party post-war as, “men of prominence and rank outsiders, wartime unionists and advocates for secession, entrepreneurs advocating a modernized New South, and yeoman seeking to preserve semisubsistence agriculture.”147 Scalawags, as they were known,

were either conservatives, who hoped that social reform might ameliorate class differences, progressives interested in expanding government, or unionists hiding from reprisal by hostile neighbors. It is also likely that some scalawags turned Republican because it was personally beneficial. Yet, most of the enthusiasm for the Republican Party stemmed from the desire to displace the blighted planter aristocracy.\textsuperscript{148}

It is difficult to paint a complete portrait of Jefferson County’s Republicans due to scant Reconstruction-period municipal records, but a few surviving documents, including newspaper articles, contain important information. Like other Middle-South communities, where a two-party system thrived before the war, Jefferson County’s white Republican converts were either indigenous unionists or unionists from somewhere nearby. Most had been pre-war Whigs, as well. Hence, their numbers seemed larger than in areas farther south, where the Democrats dominated the politics of southern whites. Among their ranks was brave Jennie Chambers’ father, Edmund, whose devotion resulted in two imprisonments for alleged treason against the Confederacy and the destruction of his farm, Buena Vista, by soldiers on both sides. George Koonce, a Union-army sutler, who helped defend the armory from rebel forces as part of an \textit{ad hoc} pro-union militia company, was a Republican, along with attorney James W. Grubb, former captain of the Independent Loudon Rangers who relocated from nearby Loudon County. Local Republicans, however, were also past rebels or civilians with pro-Confederate sympathies, who swore allegiance during the conflict. Despite strict disenfranchisement of former rebels, waivers were offered if loyalty was pledged in good faith. John J. Sanborn of Charlestown, a Dartmouth College student who quit his studies to volunteer as a private in the Second Virginia Infantry

\textsuperscript{148} Foner, 297-02; Link, 161-8; 202-7.
before going AWOL in 1863, vowed fidelity and worked for federal agencies in the District of Colombia during the latter half of the conflict.149

Shepherdstown was a hotbed of Republicanism, which is unsurprising given the town’s penchant for Whig economics. In fact, the party’s nucleus was formed by renowned Shepherdstown clans, like the Chaplines and Billmyers. Newspaper accounts of Republican county conventions publicized the names of prominent Republican lawyers, like James D. Fayman, C.E. Stubbs, and Chapline family members. Merchants and other middle-class professionals, like David Billmyer, who operated a successful department store, Billmyer’s Corner, in Shepherdstown, were in the party, as was Harpers Ferry’s Edmund Chambers, whose faith in the armory’s mechanization and utter commitment to temperance, reflected the old centripetal ethos of community order championed by national Whigs. In spite of their commitments to remain in the party through Reconstruction, most of Jefferson County’s Republicans were not as eager for political and civil equality as their northern colleagues. Contrarily, many had owned slaves in the 1850s. Only a smattering of individuals exhibited abolitionist tendencies within the local Republican Party. Joseph A. Chapline was one such individual, who also may have been the only Virginia-born, pre-war Republican to live in Jefferson County prior to the war. Chapline, however, spent his time during the Sectional Crisis in Iowa, giving anti-Kansas-Nebraska Act speeches and serving as a Lincoln elector in that state. Chapline hailed from a slaveholding family, and was good friends before the war with several pro-slavery Whigs, including the editors of the Virginia Free Press. Judge Lewis Penn

Witherspoon Balch was another pre-war, Whig-turned-Republican, who became politically active in Shepherdstown until his death in 1868, although he moved to the area after the war to serve as a West Virginia circuit judge in 1865. He also expressed strong abolitionist sentiments in the 1850s, despite owning slaves in his youth and maintaining a strong, professional relationship with Chief Justice Roger Brooke Tawney.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the majority of West Virginia’s politicians (including those in Jefferson County) worked to implement key Republican objectives throughout the state, angering Confederate veterans returning from war. During the war, West Virginia’s Republican proto-Whig’s enacted legislation to resolve the widespread white poverty that was attributed to the policies enacting government decentralization by eastern Virginia slaveholders. Their policies reflected the political philosophy of Virginia’s antebellum Whig’s because the unique, pre-war economic circumstances of the commonwealth’s western regions were inspired by a deep reverence for the American system. Therefore, the new policies coincided with the national political achievements of the Republican-controlled Thirty-Seventh Congress that radically transformed the nation’s financial structure, public-land access, higher education, and infrastructure. West Virginia’s first generation of politicians expanded services that improved the social and economic situations of the white population through their ambitious Board of Public Works, and radically expanded a free public-education system to fight illiteracy and teach moral virtues. They took advantage of Vermont Senator Justin Morrill’s bill that allocated

federal funds for 30,000 acres of land for agriculture and mechanical schools. West Virginia University in Wheeling was born from such endeavors. To provide oversight, the legislature reorganized counties into townships and redistricted municipalities to enable voter participation in decision making.\textsuperscript{151}

The political activities of Jefferson County’s Republicans echoed economic policies aimed at achieving modernization that reflected not only state advancements in West Virginia, but those of Republicans throughout the South. The county government funded surveyors to layout new roads that connected towns, rural villages, and farms. They authorized new municipal buildings and relocated the seat of government from Charlestown to Shepherdstown in 1866, much to the mutinous population’s dismay. (J. T. Trowbridge’s travelogue implies that another reason for the move was to invest more power in local Republicans by positioning the county seat in a town known for its Republican sympathies.) Redistricting in Jefferson County imposed the township system countywide, which deactivated the charters of Charlestown and Harpers Ferry in 1869, enraging almost everyone who rebelled eight years prior. The Republicans even renamed a new town, (formerly a part of old Charlestown), Grant, after the great Union war general and recently elected president of the United States. Their most ambitious undertaking, however, was a revised county public-school system, an aspiration of the area’s antebellum Whigs. Grand plans required fuel, so the need for funding was acute. Thus, in addition to post-war central planning, the local government spent a significant amount of time raising taxes. The County Board of Supervisors modified the tax codes on everything from toll fees that preserved and expanded the existing road network to personal-property assessments that

\textsuperscript{151} McPherson, 450-53; Otis, 153, 156-7; Tax Books for Jefferson County, 1859—1867, Microfilm, A&M No.: 3192, Reel No. 22, Thornton Tayloe Perry Collection, West Virginia University; “Slave Census Statistics for Bolivar and Harpers Ferry, 1850—1860,” Excel Sheet, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.
increased tax revenue. County Republicans also introduced new taxes that doubled as social
c constraints. Canine control was long a concern in the Old Dominion because farmers feared
packs of dogs that preyed on livestock. Because wealthier farmers typically owned more dogs,
smaller farmers, white and black alike, occasionally found their land indirectly compromised by
their more affluent neighbors. So, Republicans taxed dogs, too, in May, 1867 through a
licensing program that acted as a political statement. One dog cost fifty cents, while six cost
more than ten dollars.\textsuperscript{152}

Like other southern counties undergoing Reconstruction, Jefferson County’s
conservatives thought that Republican political activities were intolerable, and howled about
alleged egregious county and state extravagance. In a July, 1867, \textit{Spirit} article, Benjamin Beall
sarcastically savaged the dog tax by declaring that it actually prevented livestock protection. He
pretended to own a fox, which busily killed neighbors’ animals until it was confronted by a pack
of dogs. “As we gazed upon his lifeless form yesterday morning, and thought of what he was
and what he might have been,” Beall mocked, “we felt indignant that our Board of Supervisors
had repealed their dog tax law, for we knew that “Joe’s” dead carcass was worth a host of meat-
consuming, sheep-killing, egg-sucking dogs.” But, he was absolutely straightforward when he
attacked Republican economic policies. “The radical party is perhaps the only party that ever had
an existence, that did not possess in its organism some redeeming feature, or that had not
something good to counterbalance in part an immense amount of evil,” Beall raged about the
county’s spending on a new Shepherdstown jail. He spewed such venom over the expenditure,
which was, “more loathsome than the black-hole of Calcutta,” because he believed that the

\textsuperscript{152} Bushong, 203-6; Link, 150-1; Otis, 153; Trowbridge, 71-2; “Supervisor’s Court,” \textit{Shepherdstown Register}, Aug.
25, 1866; “Supervisor’s Court,” \textit{Shepherdstown Register}, Sept. 17, 1866; “Supervisor’s Court,” \textit{Shepherdstown
Register}. May 25, 1867; “Supervisor’s Court,” \textit{Shepherdstown Register}, June 29, 1867; “Internal Improvements:
county Board of Supervisors intentionally squandered an additional three thousand dollars on the building to pocket the money for themselves. “To provide for their future comfort,” a paranoid Beall fumed, “the county is taxed, TAXED, TAXED, until the groans of the victims are beginning to drown. Stand up ye leaders before the bar of public opinion, and receive your sentence in the scorn of a people whom you have deliberately plundered, that your pimps might fatten upon the spoils which you have levied for their benefit,” he demanded. Akin to the array of southern Democratic newspaper editors during Reconstruction, Beall was clearly exceedingly antagonized by revamped Republican economic policies that he believed were the actions of corrupt, self-interested politicians.153

All he could do in the end was pen idle threats in the Spirit of Jefferson’s columns. In Reconstruction-Era West Virginia, ex-Confederates like Beall could not vote. The specter of Confederate soldiers’ return caused the politicians in Wheeling to fear that Jacksonian sympathies would undercut the legislature’s direction. Because West Virginia had never officially rebelled against the Union, the state’s Republicans could not rely on federal military aid to keep former Confederates in check. The lack of army protection meant that former rebels theoretically had a serious chance of removing Republicans from authority in Wheeling, and reversing many of the wartime changes in the state. The state’s many Republicans feared that perhaps emboldened rebels could reunite West Virginia with the old commonwealth! As in other southern states where military occupation never occurred, West Virginia’s Republican Party had to discover strategies that prevented citizens who were considered traitors from returning to power. To that end, Governor Boreman and other West Virginian politicians mimicked the

policies of southern loyalists across the entire South by passing laws that disenfranchised all of the state’s soon-to-be ex-Confederates. When the first “test oath” administered at the polls was seen as too lenient, Governor Boreman demanded a voter registration law that allowed a committee of three state representatives to judge voter validity based on strict evidence of wartime loyalty. The registrars presided over local, state, and national elections, operating through a system of political appointments that represented each town in Jefferson County. By 1867, the registration law’s modification denied the right of suffrage based on a presumption of treason even if the oath of allegiance was sworn. Otis K. Rice, a chronicler of West Virginia’s history, noted that when the first voter registration law hit the books in May of 1866, some fifteen to twenty-five thousand voters were directly disqualified, and many more were denied at the polls at Election Day.154

Beall and other southern-rights whites resisted political actions, which they interpreted as forms of corruption instigated by social pariahs. The political realignment in Jefferson County peaked when Democrats locked arms with formerly seditious Whigs, who now sounded like the southern-rights zealots that they once abhorred. All across the South, southern Whigs eventually opted for the Democratic Party’s racial dogma because it was the only champion of white southern rights at the onset of Reconstruction. The inter-regional disputes over expansion of the previous party system ultimately paled in comparison to the threat that the post-war Republican Party posed to southern white supremacy. Jefferson County’s Whigs mirrored like-minded white southerners and became ardent Democrats. While most who joined the conservative movement to stop county Republicans were former rebels, a few loyalists, including Solomon V. Yantis, sided with them, as well. Because of his loyalist status, Yantis had the franchise. Socially

154 Foner, 60-1, 185-97; Otis, 156-7.
conservative whites presented the former Harpers Ferry’s mayor as a candidate for state offices under the neo-Democratic “Conservative Party” banner in a few elections from 1865 to 1870, and Yantis himself was heavily involved with organizing political conventions for the local Democratic Party.  

Jefferson County Republicans followed the dictates of the law by rigorously monitoring the names of hopeful voters for suspected rebels, who appeared to be potential sociopolitical risks. County registrars believed that disenfranchised former rebels were traitors to the community, and remained unfazed by cries of political inequality bellowed by conservative whites. The registrars purged dozens, sometimes hundreds, of voters at the polls, who were either proved or accused of rebellion against the federal government. In many cases, potential voters with a rebel past adamantly refused to take the “test oath” required for registration. The registrar’s screening vigilance had a profound effect on the conservative inability to win elections despite great effort. Republican candidates for county and state legislative positions also challenged elections in court, claiming that their conservative adversaries won through the political support of unabashed secessionist traitors. Following a highly contested election in 1866 for a series of municipal and state offices, for example, Republican candidates, nearly defeated in every race, eventually brought suits against successful Democrats (called “Conservative Unionists”) to the sitting members of the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors. Attempting to eject the recently elected Solomon V. Yantis from his seat in West Virginia House of Delegates, George Koonce charged that a significant number of voters from Charlestown were improperly vetted, thereby allowing formerly disloyal citizens to influence the election. The all-

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Republican Board of Supervisors sided with Koonce and discounted the Charlestown votes from the final tally. Led by Henry Clay McWhorter of the House of Delegates’ Committee on Elections, West Virginia’s legislature upheld the board’s actions, declaring Yantis the loser. By the following February, Yantis had lost his seat to Koonce. Similar dramas materialized from election results for Prosecuting Attorney, and Assessor. In the end, Republicans won every election until 1870 due to their administration of West Virginia’s voting laws.156

Beall’s fury grew as Republicans won the elections. “Where there is an unrestrained and licentious abuse of power—illegally obtained—by the few to prejudice the many,” Beall fulminated. “Where the finer sensibilities are sunken and the coarser instincts of man’s nature are fully developed, society loses its equipoise, and men find position and place, who are scarcely one removed in advance of brute creation.” He railed against the voter registration law, as well:

“And to this very condition of things are we tending at the present. Three men in Jefferson County sit in judgment upon the political rights of nearly two thousand freemen. —Of this two thousand, three hundred and sixty-eight are allowed a voice in the selection of their magisterial and executive officers, whilst more than fifteen hundred are stripped of the privileges of the elective franchise, and made hewers of wood and drawers of water, for the coarse and indecent pigmies, who are raked up from political cess-pools and elevated to places of emolument and trust.”


While it is almost impossible to determine if local Republican’s personal corruption actually tainted elections, it is clear that the idea caused serious division, which endangered Jefferson County’s reunion. To someone who had campaigned tirelessly for white political rights, political disenfranchisement must have been a shocking breach of honor by regional Republicans. Beall was horrified that not only had Republicans seemingly betrayed Jefferson County, they had also violated Virginia’s cultural foundation that championed white supremacy through decentralized government. To former rebels, everything from increased property taxes to the reorganization of county government seemed placed Jefferson County under a jurisdictional thumb that was a partial re-manifestation of the troubled politics of the 1840s and 1850s.157

While Beall attacked Republican institutions statewide, he reserved his most powerful assaults for county officials who administered the new laws. For Beall, they epitomized the corruption of West Virginia’s entire legislature, along with the congressional representatives in the Thirty-Ninth Congress. With tactics similar to those used against dishonorable political foes, Beall personally lambasted his enemies, highlighting the great rift that continued between the county’s white residents. “Every movement made by the radicals of this county . . . seems inspired by the devil, and executed by his most accomplished emissaries,” he seethed about recent voter registrations for a May 1866 election. “They do nothing right, and outrage decency in all their undertakings.” Summoning his most potent imagery, the attack continued:

“Politically, they are worse in their inflictions upon the community, than were the locusts which destroyed the substance of the Egyptians, or the potato rot in Ireland. In fact, there is nothing between the vault of Heaven and the charred gates of Satan’s Kingdom, that is the equal of this party, except itself—and we very much doubt if the Plutonian regions were surveyed whether anything worse could be found within their confines.”

A favorite tactic of Beall’s was hurling staggering, vicious assaults like those used before the war that were compelled by a correlation of alleged Republican-Party corruption with perceptions of insolent self-interest. His editorial content conveyed that the negative perceptions of neighbors who were political rivals deteriorated against the backdrop of the previous fifteen years political turmoil.158

Corruption, however, certainly occurred within Republican coalitions running state governments throughout the entire South, with some politicians, both white and black, engaging in illegal or unethical activities to enhance their own careers at the expense of others. Historian Eric Foner found that with the expansion of government responsibilities, “officials regularly handled unprecedented sums of money, corporations vied for the benefits of state aid, and communities competed for routes that would supposedly guarantee their future prosperity.” It was a scenario that Foner maintained was ripe for, “conditions that offered numerous opportunities for bribery and plunder.”159 Republican political rings developed, where petty political bribery and the mass embezzlement of state funds for investment in the private sector were common occurrences throughout the Reconstruction South. Despite Beall’s attempt to

158 “The Board of Registration,” Spirit of Jefferson, May 22, 1866. Candid insights provided by several Freedmen’s Bureau agents operating in Jefferson County reveal that both the Board of Supervisors and various county registrars operated under constant duress dealt by conservative whites, indicating that their acts of corruption alleged by Beall may have been justifiable acts of self-protection. In a letter written to his superiors, Lt. Augustus F. Higgs sardonically stated, “It is a lamentable fact, that the representatives of the radical party in this county are men who can neither command the respect nor good will of their neighbors…the standard bearers of the radical party in this place are unworthy of the position, as they can neither make themselves respected or feared, they hold all the offices and are afraid to execute the law. The constable of the town (Charlestown) comes down to me on the eve of the Election (fall of 1866) for troops to protect the voters at the Polls. A Justice of the Peace fears a riotous demonstration in case he should attempt to arrest a white man on the complaint of a negro, and assures me that only an armed force can prevent him from being mobbed.” Earning his eternal contempt, Higgs believed that the local Republicans needed a stronger collective backbone—a task easier said than done. See: Letter from Lt. Higgs to Maj. Gen. J.M. Schofield, Oct. 31, 1866, in John Edmund Stealey, III, “Reports of Freedmen’s Bureau Operations in West Virginia: Agents in the Eastern Panhandle,” West Virginia History 42 (1980-81), 108-10.  
159 Foner, 385.
paint Republicanism as inherently responsible for broad corruption, Democrats were just as susceptible to illegal political activities. The opportunities offered by the rapid growth of state governments were too irresistible for some politicians. While it is difficult to truly prove that a significant amount of the alleged corruption in Jefferson County was perpetrated solely by Republicans, it is not entirely out of the realm of possibilities that some may have tried to take advantage of their newly obtained political powers.160

Despite the accounts of bribery, fraud, and embezzlement, most accusations of corruption were simply rooted in personal anger at the cultural changes driven by local Republicans. It is likely that most of Beall’s allegations stemmed from embitterment at Republicans and neighbors, who betrayed the white community before and during the war. He, therefore, targeted Republicans with especial vigor because of the humiliating “inflictions” that were repeatedly heaped upon white southerners in Jefferson County and the South beyond. Although Beall focused primarily on individuals and events that transpired in a weekly news cycle, two individuals seemed to have earned his near-constant, undivided attention, Joseph A. Chapline and George Koonce. Both men aided the Union army and helped construct West Virginia’s government, serving continuously in the state legislature until the start of the 1870s. Chapline and Koonce also coordinated Republican political behavior at home in Jefferson County, as well. The Spirit’s editor targeted them unmercifully because he thought that they were in power through gross violations of white civil rights that had finally come to fruition since the beginning of the 1850s.161


Beall believed that the county seat was moved by Chapline because it enabled the politician to concentrate power his own neighborhood. “In our whole zoological catalogue, we have not the name or habits of an animal that
While there were a plethora of examples throughout the *Spirit* that were biting, satirical caricatures of Chapline, Koonce, and their allies, the most interesting was an onslaught of serialized assaults in 1867 called, “Our Big Show.” Running weekly from April to September, Beall described the daily activities of Republicans countywide as a great circus performance, where the political activities were likened to animals. Beall criticized the characters of Chapline and Koonce, but he also targeted northern migrants in the county, who soon labored alongside notable scalawags to structure the Republican Party’s local apparatus. He employed a number of literary devices to describe his vision of county Republicans, going so far as to depict their actions in his own interpretation of a Shakespearian play, which he called, “The Way We Do It.”

The second installment was singularly devoted to Chapline. “Versatility of talent is an essential requisite with every candidate for public favor, and this requisite our subject possesses in an eminent degree,” Beall sarcastically commented. To show how Chapline was a social pariah and scoundrel, the editor recounted the tale of an alleged deal during the war with Baltimore firm Renehan and Kirwan for goods that were paid for with a bad check. The firm brought Chapline to trial several times, but Beall supposed that the radical Republican used his status as a unionist to escape responsibility. By the time Beall wrote the article, the case was up for review again in the circuit court that served Jefferson County. If Chapline was found guilty, he slyly teased then,

> “it might become an ugly affair if said Governor [Thomas Swann of Maryland] should construe the transaction, as some uncharitable people will, as obtaining goods under false pretenses—and acting upon such construction, should make a requisition upon the Governor of this State for the corporeal part of said Joseph.”

would not suffer by comparison to with this Massachusetts off shoot.” Of course, Beall meant that Shepherdstown was as much a Republican center of support as the New England state.
“We should lament such a result,” he joked, “for in that event, our business as a showman would be broken up. We can’t carry on our menagerie without this specimen, but we should acquiesce if the ends of justice require it.”

Beall’s disdain for Chapline was so intense that he was intrigued by a death threat against the politician publicized by the local branch of the Klu Klux Klan in April of 1868. The Klan arrived (at least publically) in Jefferson County by March of 1868. Founded in Tennessee during 1866 as a social club for former southern rebels upset over Republican control of the state, the organization rapidly evolved into a terrorist paramilitary group that spread virulently throughout the South. Verbal threats, random murders, and public lynching of white and black Republicans alike was the nefarious Klan calling card as it strengthened during Reconstruction. The Klan’s violence grew so ferocious that Washingtonian Republicans passed a special legislation, the Enforcement Act of 1871, which targeted the fraternity with federal prosecution for its blatant violation of new civil rights laws. Until then, however, southern Republicans were left to fend for themselves if federal troops were too far away. Jefferson County Republicans were largely defenseless, as well, by 1868, as the only federal protection in the immediate vicinity at the Freedmen’s Bureau had dwindled due to budgetary cuts. A larger garrison was impossible because Jefferson County technically belonged to a loyal southern state that never lost its status as such, thereby prohibiting federal military occupation. While the Klan in West Virginia never grew to the size or malevolence seen in southern states like Louisiana or Mississippi, the organization was popular enough to occasionally deliver threats like the one aimed at Joseph Chapline. Beall conspicuously reprinted the Klan’s first threatening message in April of 1868,

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162 “Our Big Show,” Spirit of Jefferson, April 30, 1867. For the article containing Beall’s play, see; “Our Big Show,” Spirit of Jefferson, Sept. 3, 1867. The first issue featuring “Our Big Show” presented a list of the main characters throughout the state that Beall frequently assaulted during Reconstruction.
which said, “Joseph A. Chapline—You are notified that being under the ban of Div. No. 2, K.K.K., Den No. 3, you are ordered to leave the State inside two days, or you will be suspended—not from office—but by the neck, from the nearest tree at hand, when you are caught.” The Klan menaced three other Republicans a month later, Dr. Stephen Balch, Anthony Turner, and District Court Judge Ephraim B. Hall, who had energetically administered laws that aided blacks. While none of the Republicans publically identified by the Klan was ever hurt, Anthony Turner was scared out of the state. Despite Beall’s notable posting of the Klan’s intimidation, it remains uncertain if the newspaper editor joined the ruthless group.163

Beall’s columns must have had some sway over the local population because Chapline burst into the Spirit’s offices some months after his court case was covered in the newspaper. Beall was not there at that time, but Chapline declared to those who were that he did not commit larceny. He loudly informed the printers that the paper was a “vile sheet” and that he would inform the courts of the, “repeated exposition of the villainy of himself and the party.” “But we have only fairly commented on you Joe; by the time we get through with our exposure, we expect the fire will have entirely consumed you, and other of Boreman’s small fry,” was the response. Chapline’s threats were not empty. The paper had already been the target of censorship by the West Virginia’s legislature in 1867 and other newspapers joined the fray against the Spirit. The neighboring Berkeley Union warned the “rebel editor” of the Spirit that,


The local Bureau office had around 15 to 20 men on hand at the height of its operation, but those numbers diminished significantly by 1868. The Freedmen’s Bureau operated in the county despite the fact that it was part a loyal state because it was believed that white residents, many of them rebels, would sabotage the black community after the war. Jefferson County was one of a few area counties, where a substantial number of blacks lived and attracted the Bureau’s attention. Neighboring Berkeley County and Kanawha County on the Ohio River also had a large number of blacks that the Bureau wanted to help. Blacks were far more isolated in the rest of the state, making federal assistance too difficult. See, John Edmund Stealey III, “the Freedmen’s Bureau in West Virginia,” Jefferson County Historical Society Volume 68 (December 2002): 19-73.
“loyal men will be protected from . . . malicious assaults.” Beall gained statewide allies in the war of words, however, who were willing to support his style of reporting. In response to the Union’s criticism, the Wheeling Register fired off an open letter called, “Manly Retaliation,” which declared that, “we could not have believed that there was an editor in the State, who was sufficiently the pimp and tool of revenge to outrage female reputations for the satisfaction of a pack of skulking scoundrels.” The Register concluded that, “we hope the Spirit of Jefferson will continue the exhibition of the ‘Big Show,’ and that it will add this new beast to the collection.” Clearly, the dueling unionists and formers rebels were not as close to a ceasefire as Beall hoped they would be at the end of the war.\footnote{164 “Our Show,” Spirit of Jefferson, June 18, 1867; “Our Big Show: The Monkey’s Stirred,” Spirit of Jefferson, June 25, 1867; “Manly Retaliation,” Spirit of Jefferson, July 2, 1867.}

Beall also challenged rival newspaper editors, although his confrontations with them differed from pre-war tussles. The Gallahers of the Virginia Free Press no longer functioned as Beall’s professional adversaries, as they united behind conservative and Democratic candidates in state and national elections. While nowhere near Beall’s verbal intensity, the Gallahers plainly thought that Republicans across Jefferson Country were dissolute lunatics. Instead, another newspaper printed out of Martinsburg in Berkeley County attracted most of Beall’s wrath. Run by a valley transplant from Michigan, who became a radical state senator, John T. Hoke used his Berkeley Union as a political mouthpiece for Republicanism in that part of West Virginia. Hoke was a true radical Republican, promoting the party’s ethos vigorously throughout the state. It is one of the few things that were guaranteed—Hoke and Beall were
bound to butt heads. Hoke raced to defend Joseph Chapline and the Jefferson County Republicans against Beall’s entertaining editorials, “Our Big Show.” “There is a point at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue,” Hoke thundered, “and we will inform the benign, kind, loyal, reconstructed rebel editor . . . that other animals will be shown up if this thing is not stopped.” “We dislike exceedingly to enter into personalities,” he continued, “but we want rebel editors to understand that loyal men will be protected from their malicious assaults.” “A word to the wise, &c.” Beall immediately volleyed, characterizing Hoke’s article as a “cowardly attempt” to bully, and condemned the brutish editorials that attempted to bring justice to people who preyed on the rights of others. “We are not to be intimidated or turned aside from our purpose,” Beall chided.165

John H. Zittle, editor of the *Shepherdstown Register*, attracted Beall’s vigilant eye to a lesser extent. The *Register* was Jefferson County’s third newspaper, started in 1849 as a Whig outlet. After Zittle purchased the paper in 1853, the *Register* barely reported news with a clear-cut partisan edge. In his inaugural address, Zittle wrote, “In regard to religion and politics, we will retain neutrality—avowing no particular sect, denomination or party—with full liberty to speak our sentiments upon whatever subject the occasion may demand.” Even so, Zittle slipped in hints of his avid Whig inclinations. “Whatever shall add to the strength and well-being of the Union, shall have our ardent and zealous support . . . everything of a contrary spirit or tendency shall be openly rebuked and promptly opposed by the fair and honorable use of all the means within our acquisition,” he proclaimed. Like the Gallahers, Zittle was friendly with Joseph A. Chapline early in the Sectional Crisis before the former’s conversion to Republicanism. His

Whig tendencies, however, did not translate into loyalty because Zittle followed the Gallahers into secession when he joined Shepherdstown’s volunteer company in the Second Virginia. After the war, attorney Chapline occasionally used space in Zittle’s paper to publish the specifics of local party conventions. Zittle himself was not a Republican, but it is clear that the former rebel maintained an amiable relationship with his Shepherdstown neighbor unlike many other ex-Confederates. Whenever Beall stung Chapline or other Republicans, the lawyer sought refuge in the Register, and used its pages to reprimand the Spirit.166

For Beall, the Register’s patronage by Shepherdstown’s sizeable Republican contingent was a betrayal by his former Confederate comrade-in-arms, Zittle. In the first appearance of the “Big Show,” Beall concluded his character assault on Chapline by implicating the Register in the culprit’s grandiose, corrupt schemes. “A WORD TO THE REGISTER,” Beall blared in bold letters, “we want our friend of the Register to advertise our “big show,” which he can best do by copying the above article.” Then, Beall delivered an ultimatum. “He must either take sides with us, or come out openly as a Chapline organ. His half-and-half course does not suit us. If he fails to join us, we shall appeal to his conservative patrons to drop his paper and take ours. So, look out ZITTLE!” Incensed by the accusations levelled against him by Beall, a man that he had fought alongside during the Civil War, Zittle uncharacteristically fired back at the vindictive editor through the columns of his own paper:

“We are not willing to cringe & humiliate our-self to gratify a few patrons. Our Press is our own, has been paid for long since out of our own pocket, and is trammeled by no one, free and independent, hence we run it according to the dictates of our own judgment. Unfavorable as the issues of the late war terminated for us, we have now no other alternative by to submit manfully, with dignified spirit, until Time alone works out a change,” Zittle shot back.

166 “Salutary,” Shepherdstown Register, Nov. 26, 1853; An indication of Chapline’s responses in the Register can be found in “The County Seat Again,” Spirit of Jefferson, Apr. 16, 1867.
He cautioned Beall against, “agitating this source of bitterness that separates our people,” and, “refer to the example and precepts of our late prominent and noble Southern Generals, whose words and opinions have some influence, and who have gone to work to lessen, rather than widen our present differences, advising every person ‘to mind their own business.’”

The Republican Party’s push for enhanced political and civil equality drew Beall’s supreme consternation. National momentum built behind unprecedented civil-rights legislation that lifted up black Americans. From 1865 to 1870, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments elevated African Americans to equal citizenship with their white neighbors. A slew of additional reforms, including the Civil Rights Act of 1866, authorized the federal government to ensure that the states obeyed new federal laws. National agencies like the Freedmen’s Bureau expanded south to protect black legal rights, and to provide educational and economic opportunities for emancipated slaves, so that their transition to freedom occurred smoothly. West Virginia’s radicals eventually passed many of these policies, as well, bringing about racial equality detested by its white population through improved civil and political rights. While the state constitution was not amended until 1869, Beall believed that the Republicans would compromise what was left of his cherished white hegemony by allowing blacks the same sacred virtue of citizenship. “Radicalism, in its eagerness to return to power, and in its utter disregard of the rights of others,” Beall agitated, “is about placing in the hands of an inferior race an instrument with which they may render asunder the very fabric of government, and destroy the last vestige and only remaining hope of republicanism, in the true and legitimate interpretation of that blessing.” He conceitedly queried:

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“How many of the thousands of negroes, who are to be entrusted with the ballot have an intelligent idea of the duties which their new relation imposes, and how many are prepared to enter upon those duties with a just comprehension of their weight and magnitude?”

For Beall, “the right of the franchise has gone too far, and the liberties and happiness of all have been imperiled, it not overthrown, as consequence.” As Shearer Davis Brown suggested, “The Old South, with its glorification of individual freedom among members of a white ruling race lording over an underclass of black slaves, had a distinctly dishonored cast.” Southern men like Beall never considered that blacks were capable of self-government, since whites saw them as a servile social group, who never displayed the qualities sufficient for the responsibility. White southerners, of course, had for centuries benefited from the political, economic, and social subjugation of blacks, and were averse to letting their advantages disappear through policies that promoted racial equality. It was not that the imposed labor system made it difficult for blacks to demonstrate those qualities as some abolitionists argued. It was that Beall believed the fault was inherently biological. “Poverty should be no bar to suffrage,” Beall maintained, “but ignorance should, and then if a man neglects the cultivation of the gifts which God has bestowed upon himself, rests the blame [upon himself] and not upon others.” For Beall, blacks could never fully realize the exercise of political rights.  

The editor’s belief stemmed from biased observations of black post-emancipation behavior. Beall thought that local blacks were indolent and thus undeserving of the federal aid granted to them by agencies, like the local branch of Freedman’s Bureau, which aimed at elevating them to a position of political and civil equality. When the Harpers Ferry Bureau office opened in 1865, a revolving door of army officers and evangelical missionaries assisted

168 Bowen, 93.

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black recovery by providing rations, redistributing confiscated land, and assisting in the creation of a permanent county school system that provided an equal opportunity for education. Perhaps the greatest contribution that the Bureau and its local allies gave to blacks living in Jefferson County was access to higher education because it oversaw the purchase of several buildings at the former arsenal in Harpers Ferry for use as a college. In 1867, the Bureau donated 6,000 dollars to the Freewill Baptists, who raised another 10,000 dollars to buy the old offices of the Ordinance Department in the Camp Hill neighborhood of Harpers Ferry. Before the Bureau went defunct, it contributed another 11,500 dollars to assist the Freewill Baptists’ organization of the school.  

Whites like Beall deeply resented the Bureau’s actions, especially land redistribution, whereby abandoned land was given to blacks with or without the consent of the original owners. In Jefferson County, the return of white residents who abandoned their property during the war compounded the controversial subject of land appropriated by Bureau supervisors. Beginning in September of 1865, the Bureau confiscated 22 different properties from whites who had left the county and repurposed them as homes for destitute blacks and for government use. Pressure from the Johnson administration against confiscation forced all Bureau operatives to eventually

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Stealey spoke extensively of the additional services provided by the Bureau in Jefferson County during the agency’s brief existence in the area from 1865 to September, 1868. During its time, the Harpers Ferry office had a total of four primary supervisors: Captain and Major W. Stover Howe, Captain George H. Wells, 1st Lieutenant Augustus F. Higgs, and Captain Jacob Clement Burbanker. Men from the 193rd New York Volunteer Infantry helped administrate the county as Bureau operatives, too. Despite a revolving door of supervisors, whose control of the local office rotated between the Bureau’s Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. national branches, they were able to give blacks access to legal advice and protection, help with the construction of elementary schools exclusively for black students, and transportation to communities with job opportunities. The Bureau even operated a Freemen’s Court for several months in 1865 and 1866 to settle disputes with white bosses and render judgments on crimes alleged to have occurred between whites and blacks. A more peculiar function of the Bureau was the financial assistance it offered to a few destitute whites, specifically single mothers with children. For a case discussing the issuance of rations to whites, see; Letter from Lt. Higgs to Maj. Gen. Fessenden, in: Stealey, “Reports of Freedmen’s Bureau Operations in West Virginia: Agents in the Eastern Panhandle,” 105-6.
surrender most of the properties under their control, including the Jefferson County branch.

County Bureau officials made it difficult for returning whites to recover their land, however. White residents petitioned for the return of their property for several weeks, occasionally employing a local, licensed lawyer to present their case in writing to a Bureau official. S.A. Cox, who operated out of Solomon Yantis’s store, usually acted as a legal intermediary between the Bureau and aggrieved whites. Most of the properties were returned to their rightful owners by the summer of 1866, with only a single location once belonging to Michael E. Price given to Mary A. Beal in January, 1867.\footnote{Monthly Report of Lands, In the State of Virginia, For the Month of Sept., 1865,” Assistant Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Microfilm RAC.VA.R50.95, RAC.VA.R50.96, Copy of the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park; J.H. Remington, “Monthly Report of Lands, 9th District, Department of the Potomac, In the State of W Va., For the Month of September, 1866,” Department of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Microfilm RAC.VA.R50.714, RAC.VA.R50.715, Copy of the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park; Letter to Lt. Higgs to Cpt. McDonnell, Jan. 19, 1867, RAC.VA.R26.130, RAC.VA.R26.130cont, Copy of the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park; A letter written to Cox can be found here: Letter from William A. Chapline to S.A. Cox, Nov. 1, 1865, Microfilm RAC.VA.R53.401, Copy of the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. An example of a typical advertisement for Cox’s services can be located in page four of the Sept. 23, 1865 edition of the Shepherdstown Register.}

More important to Beall was that blacks took control of their work life by voiding exploitative contractual employment obligations, while engaging in social activities the young editor considered deviant. In his invaluable study of Reconstruction, Eric Foner revealed that the actions of emancipated blacks that challenged labor relations after the war showed resistance to white control that men like Beall hoped to reinstate. Since white post-war economic policy sought to re-impose authority on former slaves through restrictive labor contracts, blacks either cancelled deals or failed to sign at all to negotiate better working conditions. Foner suggested that such actions, “arose from black families’ determination to use the rights resulting from emancipation to establish the conditions, rhythms, and compensation for their work,” as they
were unable to in slavery. Lieutenant Augustus F. Higgs, who served as the superintendent of
the local Bureau office the longest, frequently reported that while labor was in high demand,
blacks still had difficulty in obtaining a respectable wage. As late as the end of March, 1867,
near the end of his tenure in Jefferson County, Higgs crestfallenly reported to his superiors, “tis
needless to dwell particularly on the colored people of this town. They are as bad as can be and
nothing but a revolution or something similar will change this state of affairs.” A few months
later in May, he stated that many of the able-bodied blacks had been transported by his Bureau
office further north, where the potential for better employment opportunities existed. Outside of
departation, he never seemed to interfere in the economy by arranging fair labor contracts
between whites and blacks, unlike other Bureau operatives. For those that remained after the
exodus, Higgs implied that most blacks sharecropped on white farms, which he identified as
“shares,” or acquired small properties, and a standard wage of 120 to 150 dollars per year.

Historians like Steven Hahn recently demonstrated that among the noteworthy social
transformations that occurred within the black community throughout the South was mass
political mobilization. Perhaps the greatest action undertaken by blacks was involvement in the
secretive Union Leagues that sprang up across the region. Often assisted by sympathetic whites

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172 Foner, 140.
the Eastern Panhandle,” 113-4.

Higgs, a native of St. George’s, Bermuda, was wounded at the Battle of Chancellorsville, while a member
of the Union’s 67th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment. After serving the remainder of the war in the Volunteer
Reserve Corps, he joined the Freedmen’s Bureau due to his pre-war abolitionist affinity. The Bermudian operated in
Jefferson County from June 1866 until June of the next year, and, while the young Lieutenant (he was 23 at the time
of his stay in Jefferson County) spoke dejectedly of the county’s labor relations, he rarely arranged labor contracts
between local whites and blacks. See: Stealey, “Reports of Freedmen’s Bureau Operations in West Virginia: Agents
many of whom either served the Freedmen’s Bureau or were northern evangelical missionaries, blacks flocked into their neighborhood Union League eventually transforming them into social clubs. These fraternal organizations functioned as political havens, where local blacks prepared for the franchise and coordinated Republican support. Many Union Leagues also operated as headquarters of black militia, which protected political expression from nascent white terrorist groups. Jefferson County blacks covertly mobilized a political Union League lodge with the help of two white northern immigrants, Dr. Nathan Cook Brackett of Maine and Daniel Ames of Massachusetts. Brackett and Ames represented the “carpetbaggers” in Jefferson County’s Republican Party because the two were northern migrants, who recently arrived to help with regional post-war reconstruction. Brackett, Ames, and their northern cohorts were far more invested in improving the condition of the local black population. Blacks could note vote in Jefferson County until 1869, but that did not stop the two northerners from establishing a lodge in the event that the franchise came. The men acted upon strong abolitionist convictions in many ways, including their direct participation in the creation and administration of Storer College, as well as a series of free schools that provided an elementary education for black children. With the help of enthusiastic blacks, like George L. Weaver, Brackett and Ames travelled across Jefferson County to towns like Bolivar outside Harpers Ferry to inform African Americans about the citizenship rights that they were entitled to receive. They organized meetings as early as October 1866, and continued their work despite Beall’s catch-up coverage in 1867.174

“As a journalist, we conceive it to be our duty to notify the public that we are in possession of information,” Beall alerted his subscribers, “which justifies the belief that an

attempt is being made, by a secret oath-bound association, to array the black man against the white race, in our own community.” The “Massachusetts interlopers” as Brackett and Ames were called, “would gladly inaugurate here in this Valley, a war between the races.” Beall believed that chaos was the only outcome possible from black political suffrage. “A WORD TO THE NEGRO,” Beall cautioned boldly at the end of an article, “the less you have to do with these men the better for you. They are not your friends. They are cowards who will shrink from danger, when danger is at hand. Come out from underneath them, and conduct yourselves as men, and you will discover who are your real friends.” In an earlier warning aimed at Brackett, Ames, and the black community that supported them, Beall threatened any who, “instill into the negro mind malignant feelings against his best and only friend, his former master . . . that should their machinations culminate in a crisis . . . a swift and sure retribution will overtake them. The negro has but one barrier between him and utter destruction and annihilation, and that barrier is his old master.” The threats failed to intimidate local blacks. When it did not work to sweeten the deal, Beall offered a two-dollar award to any black man, who was willing to abandon the New Englanders.175

Beall’s response to the Union League’s activities was emblematic of his fear and anger over what he saw as the final upheaval of the antebellum social order. In striving to command their lives through economic, political, and social independence, blacks directly threatened the subjugation culture that largely defined the South. The important family unit that served as the community linchpin for white southerners was imperiled by the diminished ability of whites to

control blacks for their own benefit. It did not help overwhelmed whites like Beall that neighbors, once-trusted friends, and family members, united with local blacks and the hated Yankees to advance new cultural developments. Beall, then, took to his newspaper to marshal support against the social transformation that he considered detrimental to everyone in Jefferson County—not just whites. He published a letter written under a pseudonym, “More Anon,” which declared that such behavior was an intrinsic characteristic of African Americans. “They are but children now,” he wrote, “and need tender watching or they will perish for want of someone to feed and clothe them.” The words were not intended to be charitable. For Beall and More Anon, blacks were better off with their former masters because they would receive adequate care and their dangerous qualities would be checked. “It must not be forgotten, that a negro will be a negro, do what they will. All the water in the Potomac, and all the soap in Cincinnati, and all the brushes in England will not make him white.” More Anon continued, “the Bible says ‘a servant of servants ye shall be,’ and they always will be a distinct race and occupy an inferior position in society.” As Beall clearly indicated through his patronage of More Anon’s article, Republicans supposedly could never justify the politics of social elevation on a platform of universal suffrage. To substantiate his claim, Beall often filled the Spirit with tales of reckless crimes allegedly committed by blacks, and regaled with fictional stories of the faithful slave to convince subscribers that the Republican agenda had allegedly exacerbated racial tensions.176

Like their white allies, Beall scrutinized Jefferson County’s blacks for any deviancy that could be exaggerated, agitating his readers against black social advancement. When a race riot broke out in Charlestown in July 1868, for example, he quickly blamed the black community for instigating the violence. In his account, two young black men left a local general store and

176 “Shepherdstown Correspondence,” Spirit of Jefferson, Jan. 9, 1866.
entered into an insulting verbal exchange with some nearby white boys, and one of the whites threw a piece of sausage at the blacks. Words evolved into a physical altercation, and the two groups began fighting in the street. The black men retreated into their neighborhood, where they called out for help. Soon, thirty blacks and half a dozen whites met each other in the street, yelling. When reporter James Gallaher of the Virginia Free Press was struck by John Jackson’s rake, a massive brawl erupted and numbers on both sides escalated dramatically, topping out at hundred participants. The fighting was so intense that Captain Jacob C. Burbanker of the Freedmen’s Bureau frantically wired his superiors in Washington to send twenty troops immediately to Charlestown. While no one was killed, several people were injured in the brawl.

Local justices, Samuel Ridenour and Nathaniel Myers, let the few who were arrested off with light sentences, although the blacks arraigned in court were given larger fines. Despite the dispersal of the rioters, ominous race relations percolated beneath the surface. Beall attributed, “the riot of Saturday afternoon . . . to liquor, for without it the negroes would have never assumed the defiance which they did . . .” Because tensions erupted immediately after the spring harvest, and the black workers had exercised their right to spend their pay on alcohol, Beall presumed through negative stereotypes that the local blacks caused the fighting not white belligerence.


Once in a while, Beall did not completely condemn the African-American community. There were some cases in which the editor begrudgingly praised the public political activities of local blacks. When they held a political demonstration in Charlestown in October 1869, Beall commented that, “last Thursday was a gala day with our unbleached American citizens, and they enjoyed it hugely; but in a manner creditable to them, and in a style which would have reflected no discredit upon any community.” Unfortunately, Beall’s esteem for such displays as few and far between. For the article, see: “The Colored Celebration,” Spirit of Jefferson, Oct. 26, 1869.
In the face of impending black political enfranchisement, their improved socioeconomic condition in the county, and the perennial control of local, state, and national legislatures by Republicans, Beall’s language became increasingly frantic. When a series of legal contestations instigated by defeated Republican candidates leaned in their favor, Beall fumed in the Spirit that, “one by one the pillars which have hitherto supported the government, are being pulled down by the hands of Radicalism, and the temple is now ready to crumble.” He interpreted some of the legislative gains made by the northern Democratic Party to have, “fired the Radical Congress with a spirit of desperation to rule or ruin, and in their madness they are determined to plunge the country again into civil war, cold, cruel, and ruthless.” “In this event,” he mused, “we may expect that at least a struggle will be made to regain the supremacy of the Constitution, and hurl from power the miscreants who have disgraced the American legislature by the most unblushing and tyrannical usurpations known to the annals of history.” Beall misconstrued the appearance of Republican Party fractures at various levels to mean that the opposition was ripe for exploitation in the upcoming presidential elections. Despite a personal veneration of President Andrew Johnson, who Beall had always believed was “wise, statesmen-like, and magnanimous,” the journalist eventually backed the 1868 presidential ticket of Horatio Seymour and Francis Blair. In Beall’s view, the election of Seymour and Blair might end detested Republicanism in the nation's capital. Their victory might even mean the beginning of the end of Reconstruction in Jefferson County! “To those who can do so, by any possibility, we cannot urge too strongly the importance of registering on Monday next,” Beall pleaded with his readers. In spite of the local registrar’s intransigence and obstruction of Charlestown’s voting, Beall insisted that, “We hope that this will not prevent those who have any show of success, from making the effort to secure the elective franchise, of which too many of our people have been so long deprived.”
another article, Beall appealed to the honor of Jefferson County’s delegates to mobilize votes. “Now, we have no desire to find fault with those whom we want to regard as friend and allies, but have you, Executive Committee, been doing your duty? Have you made any effort to concentrate the strength of the party in the county, and to have it registered and brought to the polls,” he queried. “You have been sleeping long enough, while the temple of liberty is crumbling around you!”

Despite his tireless, passionate campaign, Ulysses Grant won the presidential election and became the Eighteenth President of the United States. Not only had Seymour and Blair lost, the ticket that former mayor Solomon Yantis ran on lost to Republican William Stevenson. The election, Beall melodramatically eulogized was, “disastrous, overwhelming, and complete.” He tempered hopes that President Grant would curb the radical elements within the Republican Party. “We indulge no such hope,” Beall confessed. “He has been in a position for the past three years, where he could have stifled the voice of fanaticism . . . but it never occurred to him to attempt to heal the wounds of the country. Grant is a man to be used,” Beall mourned, “and he will be used.”

When Beall’s political hopes were dashed, his frustration manifested in various ways throughout the Spirit. He channeled a portion of his rage into chronicling the alleged acts of corruption by the Board of Registrars. He was thorough in his investigation, searching for evidence to indict corrupt board members, so that they could be removed from office. In 1869, Beall derisively asked if there had actually been an election in the state. At this point in West

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Virginia’s politics, the Republican Party had fractured into two camps—radicals and liberals. One of the most divisive problems that caused the breach, however, was the decision to leave ex-Confederates disenfranchised while African Americans received the right to vote through the Fifteenth Amendment. While some Republicans were content, others realized that the implementation of black suffrage could only be achieved through the enfranchisement of all the state’s residents to avoid arguments of partiality before the law. Despite the black community’s miniscule size statewide, West Virginia’s moderate Republicans (who treated the Republican Party there as a neo-southern Whig organization) felt threatened by the possibility of black political expression. A jaded Beall supported a new coalition of liberal Republicans, when local Democrats stopped standing for election. From his perspective, voting for a liberal Republican was better than electing a radical candidate, who was courting black votes for the first time. As usual, Beall’s candidates lost. Radical whites in Jefferson County managed to retain their presence in the county and state government, in part, from 581 new black voters that the registrars registered to vote. He theorized that their defeat derived from poll-book manipulation by the registrars, who were only interested in registering blacks and whites that were certain to vote Republican. “That they will be so manipulated seems certain if we judge the future by the past,” he commented. He earnestly believed that Governor Stevenson violated the state constitution to remove one of the registrars after the election, and insinuated that officials were preferred, who would falsify the vote for radical candidates. Beall was convinced that names were stricken from the rolls after the polls closed and then delayed by the post office. He even thought that the poll location was rigged, and assumed that placing it “seventeen miles from the county seat” encouraged voter suppression in spite of the fact that Shepherdstown was the Republican Party’s county epicenter. “The perpetrators of these acts in monarchical France
Local politics was not Benjamin Beall’s sole motivator. He had served as a soldier. He saw people he knew well die or heard about it, and he saw Jefferson County destroyed by the ravages of war. To sacrifice so much in service of the cultural values that he held so dear and yet lose stirred sorrow. Appearing in the Spirit beside the usual political diatribes was regular homage of the Confederate war dead. Until the end of Beall’s tenure as the paper’s editor, notifications of a new cemetery’s dedication, a commemorative list of names, or Memorial Day ceremonies directed by women’s organizations populated the newspaper. Among the most frequent memorials in the Spirit were stories about Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. In May 1866, Beall used the entire first page to present a memoir, originally published in the Richmond Medical Journal, which detailed the story of the general’s amputated arm and subsequent death from the ordeal. One of the greatest accolades that Beall ever published, however, was a reminiscence of the immense ceremony that dedicated the Elmwood Cemetery for the Confederate dead in Shepherdstown in June 1869. Like the Jackson story, the entire first page was used to recall speeches by Henry Kyd Douglas, Daniel B. Lucas, and Alexander R. Boteler. Boteler, the same man who Beall opposed because of his pre-war political affiliations, was featured in a place of distinction in several of the Spirit’s post-war reports. Beall respectfully

180 “Have We Had An Election?” Spirit of Jefferson, Nov. 2, 1869.

As it stands, there is no definitive method to determine how much corruption truly affected local politics. In his study of post-war Mobile, Alabama, Michael W. Fitzgerald concluded that a variety of economic circumstances led Republican politicians in municipal government into ethical gray areas. For more, see: Michael W. Fitzgerald, Urban Emancipation: Popular Politics in Reconstruction Mobile, 1860—1890 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2002), 86-131, 168-197.

Hannah N. Geffert also revealed that Jefferson County had the highest amount of registered black voters in the entire state. Only five other counties out of the fifty that constituted West Virginia had more than 100 registered black voters, illustrating the scarcity of the African American population across the state. See: Geffert, 106.
referred to him as “his honor” in a review of the cemetery dedication, and by the title “Colonel” the week prior, when the old Whig spoke at a conservative campaign rally. Like Yantis, Boteler was accepted by many of his neighbors because of his devotion to preserving the memory of shared sacrifice in the name of community. Boteler had served as an officer in the Confederate military, and a term in the rebel congress. His son also served in the Confederate army. His house was torched by Martindale, when Shepherdstown was ravaged. With the war fresh in mind, Boteler and Beall reconciled their differences, to unite against a common enemy—unionists and what they stood for. The Lost Cause ideal was in its infancy when men like Beall and Boteler came together at memorial ceremonies to grieve their dead comrades and mourn the cultural transformation that had consumed their world.181

The Lost Cause mythology that blossomed in Jefferson County shadowed Caroline E. Janney’s of interpretation the phenomenon. Disagreeing with previous scholars, she maintained that participants in community memorial observances did not selectively rewrite the war’s memory, neglecting its political inspirations. Instead, both Confederate and Union soldiers always remembered that the war was fought over slavery, and the lingering legacy of the conflict was the nation’s race relations. Janney argued that the memory of the war was so compelling to white southerners reeling in defeat that post-war tributes emerged immediately to soothe the psychological trauma, and fend off continuous assaults upon their culture by victorious northerners. In her discussion about death in the United States as a result of the war, Drew Gilpin Faust similarly asserted that the immediacy of post-war commemoration flourished throughout the entire country because civilians and veterans believed that it was their

responsibility to honor the dead for their unprecedented sacrifice. While commemorations in the South eventually laid the groundwork for national reunion later in the century (at the unfortunate expense of black participation in the war), the language of memory in the Reconstruction Era was filled with vitriol, which implied that devotion to the legacy of wartime sacrifice meant resistance to national Republicans and southern loyalists. Even southern cemetery tributes, like those in Shepherdstown, conveyed strict political messages that the white community internalized amid a shifting political scene that had turned the world upside down. Clearly, unity did not necessarily portend reconciliation, and articles in the *Spirit of Jefferson* well into 1870’s suggested that sectional healing was far away, if not impossible, for the county’s current white generation.182

Benjamin Beall struck with a vengeance, then, when the nascent, rekindled sacred bond was threatened. The once-renowned, two-term congressman, Charles J. Faulkner, committed an unforgiveable sin in the eyes of his neighbors shortly after the war. Faulkner, a lawyer, took the “test oath” in Jefferson County, so that he could reestablish his law practice. Beall permitted well-respected attorney Andrew Kennedy to attack Faulkner’s character and loyalty through charges that the congressman was present on the field with Jubal Early’s Army of the Shenandoah, when it arrived in Martinsburg in 1864. The heart of Kennedy’s accusation was that Faulkner lied to get his profession back at the expense of his honor and ethical commitment to the community. News of Faulkner’s disgrace spread quickly across Jefferson County, and his denials seemed like a rebuke of the cultural ethos that he pledged to protect as a southern

gentleman. Faulkner was so driven to defend his honor that he took out a page in the newspaper to express his stunned surprise at the accusation, and to validate the authenticity of his oath.

Faulkner and Kennedy had a private confrontation, but remnants of their dispute resonated in the *Spirit*. “As the case now stands,” Beall observed, “the editor of this paper has no connection with it, further than to say, in justice to Mr. K., that the statements of the article referred to were based upon reports current at the time, and still generally believed.” His cautious calculation of the facts and the attention devoted to Faulkner’s deeds revealed Beall’s concern that a man of Faulkner’s eminence could precipitate such an event. It is ironic that Boteler’s stature rose after the war, while Faulkner’s fell.183

Illusions of the war’s aftermath were also shaped by wistful fantasies of the race relations shared by whites and blacks in the Old South. Through Beall’s editorial content, it is obvious that socially conservative, Jefferson County whites were similar to other southern white communities, regardless of regional location, in how they mourned slavery’s demise, and by extension, Reconstruction. Historian Alice Fahs discerned that southern literature written by whites during Reconstruction conjured nostalgic tales of benevolent slavery, where blacks were mercifully cared for by white masters. Seen through this lens, slavery provided sustenance and order for people, who were considered incapable of independent living. White authors pushed the delusion by proclaiming that tales abounded of faithful slaves, who refused to fight for the Union and escaped northern soldiers to return to their former masters, which was the exact opposite of what had actually happened!184

Benjamin Beall’s editorial content reflected such aberrations, alongside frequent anti-Republican diatribes and commemorative mourning for the confederate fallen. In late March, 1866, he reprinted an article that first appeared in the Richmond Dispatch that alleged to recount the sentiments of an elderly former slave, who lamented his new-found freedom. The story introduced the remarkably childlike Tom, who desperately needed his master and suffered enormously under freedom. “During the federacy, I used to hear the niggers always talking about freedum, saying Lincum would free us if the federacy went up,” Tom said.

“I prayed for that day to cum, cause I was told dat we would have everything we wanted; dat the yankeys would bring us money a plenty, and give us land whare belongs to the white folks, and told me we would not have to work less we choose; and said we niggers would be better off.”

“But how mistaken,” he wept. Instead of being in the care of his “Miss and Massy,” Tom declared that life was worse because he had lost the tender care of his masters, who were like family. “I has been free nearly nine month,” he cried, “and wuss off now den I ever was fore the vacunation.” While it is true that many slaves struggled financially after the war, it was not the result of a divorce between enslaved blacks and their master’s ownership. Caricatures of slaves like Tom, who most likely represented the typical enslaved farmhand, allowed newspaper editors like Beall and the Richmond Dispatch to cultivate the benign memory of slavery that many southern whites cherished in the mid-nineteenth century. By perpetuating pure nostalgia, southern whites like Beall not only believed that they had an effective way to halt the social change unfolding across their communities, but a way to elevate their defeated attempt at independence. Clearly, the Spirit of Jefferson’s editor drew comfort from the reprinted conclusion of Tom’s story: “He speaks but the experience of thousands.”

The height of Reconstruction in Jefferson County, 1865 to 1869, was for veterans like Benjamin Beall, the actualization of all the anguish of the previous fifteen years. Beall, and by extension the majority of whites living there, believed that the conspiracy perpetrated by northerners and the federal government to demolish southern society through denial of white political, social, and economic advantages by intractable government seemed to have fully played out. The activities that granted blacks racial equality through enhanced political, economic, and social rights undermined the south’s culture of racial subjugation—an act that conservative southern whites like Benjamin Beall found intolerable. Worse, neighbors who were opponents during the Civil War, worked to advance new cultural developments, suggesting to Beall that they had cast aside the community for foul political gain. Only the few unionists who joined unrepentant ex-rebels in the resistance to social change found that they were able to revive a sense of community with their white neighbors. With the war’s agony still fresh, former Confederates commiserated in defeat to find solace in their rapidly changing world. Instead of walking the path to reconciliation as Beall had hoped in 1865, Reconstruction seemed to prolong the county’s suffering. As long as Republicans remained in power, ex-Confederates were devastated, jeopardizing the hope of reconciliation between Jefferson County’s whites.
“With this issue ceases my connection with the Spirit of Jefferson,” Benjamin Beall wrote on January 11, 1870. “I part company with the readers of this journal with sincere regret,” he said, “but feel that the present is no time for the indulgence of sentiment. If my course has met with your approval, I am more than compensated for the struggles through which I have been called to pass, suffering as I have done, under all the disadvantages of adverse fortune.”

Evidently, “the adverse fortunes,” that Beall encountered was a looming bankruptcy from debts of almost two-thousand dollars incurred in 1867, while running the business. After his return from war, he apparently had trouble turning a profit. The constant struggle for payment of all monthly subscriber fees did not help, so the stories of the newspaper’s financial woes are likely far more complex. The paper was eventually sold to John W. Dalgarn and George W. Haines, who soon took over the daily functions of the Spirit. After attending a farewell dinner hosted by community well-wishers, Beall gathered his family and moved them three thousand miles across the prairie to the new state of Nebraska. Several months later, he returned to editing newspapers. This time he ran the Democratic Statesmen in the Nebraskan capital, Lincoln, but not for long. Poor health eventually ended his life, and he died by the end of the year at age thirty-nine.

Beall’s personality and political beliefs left a clear mark on the Spirit. “Having purchased the press, type, fixtures, good will and all the appurtenances of the office of the ‘Spirit of Jefferson,’ and being desirous of retaining all the old patrons,” the new editors promised, “our earnest endeavor to keep the paper up to its former standard . . . the principles of the Democratic-Conservative party . . . will govern its present conductors in an independent and consistent advocacy of the right.” Beall, however, alluded to other factors that contributed to his departure.
from the newspaper. “The change thus affected, is not altogether one of my own choice. Declining health, and the interest of my growing family, prompts me to risk a change for the better, and I surrender my post with reluctance.” Perhaps the stressful changes that he chronicled in the brief time that he published the *Spirit of Jefferson* really gnawed at him. Given his endless battle against the cultural forces that engulfed Jefferson County, it is also possible that he simply wanted a change that he felt benefitted his family.186

If the young editor had lived through the year, he may have felt more secure in Jefferson County’s future. Within months of Beall’s relocation, both the county and West Virginia’s local and state governments underwent a massive political takeover by ex-Confederates. It was simply a coup. West Virginia’s conservatives soared in political popularity at the end of the 1860s, as moderate unionists joined with former rebels to oust the statewide Republican Party over dissatisfaction with its emphasis on social equality. Fearing that the Republicans had grown too radical for the nation and the new state, white conservatives split from them and ran as Democrats for local and state offices. By the turn of the decade, white conservatives appeared in greater numbers in the state legislature with each passing election cycle. By 1869, Democrats and moderate Republicans pushed for leniency on ex-Confederates under the premise of eliminating radical power and encouraging interstate reconciliation. Social conservatives in West Virginia finally achieved their goal in the spring of 1870 through the success of a legal proceeding that restricted the ability of county registrars to monitor the polls for former rebels.

The developments in Wheeling coincided with rejection of the state’s Republican Party by registered voters, who wearied of the endless social equality stridently promoted by northern politicians. The consequence of the dramatic shift in political momentum in the 1870 elections was a Democratic takeover of all state and local levers of power by a huge margin; a movement that was finally completed in 1871 with the election of the Democrat John J. Jacob to the governorship. The newly empowered Democrats initiated a series of constitutional changes that eradicated the weakened legal constraints on former rebels, culminating in the new state constitution of 1872. Despite black political enfranchisement, social conservatives guaranteed white hegemony in state politics by also enfranchising unreconstructed whites. Like most southern states undergoing Reconstruction, West Virginia’s state government was completely captured by Democrats in the mid-1870s, who thought they were redeeming the state from social and political corruption.  

The conservative revolution in West Virginia swept across Jefferson County when Democratic candidates obtained every single county office. Based on voting patterns detailed in county newspapers in 1869 and 1870, voters determined by registrars to be loyal or at the very least reconstructed, were angered by the promotion of equal rights assured through a state government expanded by the Republican Party. The final straw for many moderate Republicans was the black exercise of their newly minted franchise granted by the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Jefferson County’s white Republicans unsuccessfully formed their own electoral ticket in 1870, as blacks and carpetbaggers tried to send Nathan Cook Brackett to the state legislature on their own platform. Brackett had trouble maintaining party unity behind his bid for office, however, as a large portion of the black community believed that their needs were

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best served by nominating another black. Black candidate George McKinney refused to cooperate with Brackett, siphoning more votes from the Republican Party that year. Given the sizable rift in among local Republicans, the Democrats returned to power. Almost immediately, local conservatives erased policies implemented by previous Republican regimes. They revised tax codes, reduced public spending, and even restored the old townships (including Harpers Ferry and Charlestown) that existed in the county prior to the start of the war. Perhaps the most blatant contempt of local Republicanism manifested in a prolonged brawl over moving the county seat back to Charlestown in October of 1871, when conservatives gained legal support for their efforts from a sympathetic West Virginia State Court of Appeals. Within the next two years, the Democrats and their conservative allies rapidly rebuilt or renovated several municipal buildings, like the old courthouse and a new jail.188

With the installment of white conservatives into political power in the early 1870s, the Civil War Era effectively ended in Jefferson County, concluding the trials of the last twenty years. The 1870s also marked the end of the Civil War Era across the United States. As southern whites in places like Jefferson County grew more successful at combating Reconstruction policies, northern whites wearied of the constant strain of racial politics. White northerners turned a blind eye to the rising wave of terrorism that racist paramilitary political organizations unleashed upon white southern liberals and politically active blacks, when groups like the Klu Klux Klan, the Red Shirts, and the White League viciously intimidated blacks and their white supporters to keep them from voting. Violence was a hallmark of many state elections, the most notorious of which were in Louisiana, the Carolinas, and Mississippi. The

greatest bloodshed occurred in Colfax, Louisiana, where whites murdered scores of blacks during the highly contested gubernatorial election of 1872, and the federal government and the northern whites did nothing. Political attention instead fixed on platforms that were less volatile. Northern Democrats marshalled significant support for a campaign called the “New Departure,” which emphasized national economic development as a means of finally reuniting the country. Democrats saw their presence in Washington increase rapidly over the mid-1870s, with the party controlling a congressional majority in 1876, and nearly elevating its presidential candidate, Samuel J. Tilden, to the White House. One by one, all southern states saw their Republican governments disappear under a wave of political corruption and domestic terrorism when the federal focus shifted from Reconstruction.189

White Americans facilitated the deliberate rehabilitation of the cultural woes that defined the Civil War Era by crafting a memory of the war that publically depoliticized its character. The Lost Cause illusion began among southern whites, who created an abiding, regional lore that glorified and justified the post-war violence meted to whites and blacks alike, while portraying themselves as victims of northern aggression in literary accounts. Encouraged by some of the South’s most prominent military officers, including Jubal Early and Daniel H. Hill, the war was recast in a fantastical tale that omitted slavery as the primary cause, and substituted a heroic narrative of chivalry in the face of overwhelming odds. Many northerners remained resolved, however, that the war was fought to expunge the evils of slavery, often using their own post-war commemorations to voice this side of the story.190

189 Foner, 412-44, 469-99, 549-87.
190 Janney, Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation, 103-59.
Others, however, chose conciliation and accepted the southern interpretation of events. Even high-profile northern personalities like Horace Greely, once the most defiant abolitionist and vocal cultural critic of the Old South, helped bail out Jefferson Davis in 1867, and transformed the former confederate president’s post-bellum political career in the name of burying the past. The most stubborn white northerners eventually avoided discussing the political aspects of the war due to newly emerged social constraints. Soldiers from both sides of the conflict facilitated this new cultural phenomenon, as both blue and the grey veterans increasingly praised wartime conduct that downplayed, if not outright ignored, the direct political causes of the war. Jefferson County was vulnerable to the same national impulses. In 1883, for example, it welcomed a large contingent of union veterans, who were members of the Sheridan’s Veterans’ Association, into Harpers Ferry and Bolivar as they made their way up the valley to Winchester. Instead of castigating the men who burned the valley in 1864, Jefferson County’s residents let the veterans tour the Bolivar Heights battlefield and remove bricks from the John Brown Fort as souvenirs. Whites in Jefferson and across the United States put the war behind them, but at the expense of the social upheaval caused by slavery.  

Remnants of Republican administrations survived in Jefferson County because the desire for a strong public-school system attracted countywide support. While the push for racial equality fell short during Reconstruction, the county saw a fair share of social mobility among its black population in comparison to other southern communities. Storer College, Reconstruction’s greatest legacy, provided a top-notch education and assisted students with employment and real estate purchases well into the twentieth century. Jefferson County’s black citizens founded

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independent churches and other organizations, like their own Masonic Lodge and a local branch of the Odd Fellows, by the end of the 1870s. Black newspapers circulated, too, including one run by Reverend John Williams Dungee called the *Harpers Ferry Messenger*, and another by J.R. Clifford called the *Pioneer Press*. Some blacks even established lucrative businesses that afforded a comfortable lifestyle, like the Lovett family, who ran a popular hotel in Harpers Ferry.¹⁹²

Despite the transformations, blacks in Jefferson County dealt with poverty and racial segregation that denied them their rights as American citizens. They were also harassed by the Klu Klux Klan when it reemerged in the 1910s and 1920s. The county’s Democrats had grown so strong that by the 1900 presidential contest, their candidate, William Jennings Bryant, received 2,729 votes to William McKinley’s 1,207. Because the registered black vote that year totaled 933, they were clearly a minority in a social environment that encouraged political racism, and therefore expected little support from their white neighbors. Their remarkable perseverance in the face of white aggression demonstrated that reconciliation in Jefferson County was never completely whole. While blacks experienced new forms of racial subjugation well after the war, they had also obtained more freedom that attracted the ire of local whites. Jefferson-County whites, thus, scornfully reminisced about the removal of the county from Virginia, and were distraught when the Lost Cause ideology was publically challenged. Periodic disputes between whites and blacks over the significance of the war emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, with both sides erecting monuments and engaging in elaborate public commemorations that quickly inflamed passions. Perhaps the

greatest manifestation of suppressed resentment was exemplified by the conflicting emotion surrounding a “faithful slave” monument placed in downtown Harpers Ferry in 1931, the Heyward Shepherd Memorial.193

Amid Jefferson County’s rear-guard action against Reconstruction’s advance, the worst flood in county history devastated the population. In October of 1870, homes, businesses, and entire neighborhoods were destroyed by the rising waters of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers. Both whites and blacks were ruined by the catastrophe. In the chaos, the community arose to aid their neighbors, regardless of race or social station. Daniel Ames, the carpetbagger who was harangued by Benjamin Beall in the Spirit of Jefferson for organizing local Union Leagues, was lionized by the same newspaper post-Beall for his for his bravery, while rescuing white and black families armed only with a basket. The fact that the Spirit printed positive articles about local Republicans signaled that Jefferson County was changing.194

The dramatic return of Democrat Redeemers marked the beginning of the end of the Civil War Era for Jefferson County’s white and black population. By listening to Benjamin Beall’s voice, it is possible to discern the way that a diverse southern community nestled in the cultural borderland of the Upper Potomac River disintegrated during the Sectional Crisis and the Civil War, as well as how that community tried to reunite when the fight ceased. The second-party system bred misgiving and hostility between whites over different political philosophies, and raised questions about the pillars that supported white southern society. The strife of the

Sectional Crisis over slavery ultimately thrust Jefferson County into war, an event that untethered the white community, as well as escalating the tension felt among local whites and blacks. Thus, when Reconstruction began after the war, whites who had marched into disunion bitterly resented their society’s rejuvenation by neighbors and outsiders. For white, southern men like Benjamin Beall, who bled for a specific vision of Jefferson County, the actions of neighbors, family, and Yankee migrants along with the newly-empowered African American community was interpreted as the ultimate dishonor to endure. Time and survival forced renewal, and generationally filtered heritage turned nostalgic. Benjamin Beall’s words allow us to peer down the years to gain a glimpse of how southern whites and blacks throughout the Middle South endured the cataclysm of the Civil War.
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