

South. A small handful of American historians has noted the effects of such ideas on the creation of a cult of southern "chivalry," yet none has understood that such was in fact a cult of irrationalism.

While Americans both North and South read the works of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, the emerging planter aristocracy of the American South lived, breathed, and worshiped at the altar of such lunacy. The most widely read writers in the South between 1830 and 1860 were Scott, Byron, Bulwer-Lytton, and Thomas Carlyle, the English writers who glorified the pre-industrial past before the advent of the nation-state and painted the portrait of an idyllic age of chivalric innocence which had never existed in reality. Drugged with this heady potion, the southern planter class viewed themselves as the natural descendants of what they came to view as the "best" of their imagined Anglo-Norman antecedents. For them the Ossian myth of the continuity of King Arthur and his Round Table would be resuscitated in the cultural outlook and social structure of southern "chivalry."

The chivalric romances whose spell had scrambled the brains of Cervantes' fictional hero Don Quixote a few centuries before, were revived to spread pornographic infantilism throughout a class idled by economic backwardness—with a power only rivaled by the hypnotic omnipresence of today's

television soap opera.

To understand how deeply rooted and pervasive such notions were, one need only look at what Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia did after its crushing defeat at Gettysburg. Less than a week after it was nearly destroyed in Lee's insanely "chivalric" effort to dislodge the Union forces with Pickett's Charge, the Army of Northern Virginia would be "entertained" on its return to Virginia by a full-scale jousting tournament provided by Stuart's cavalry—ordered by Lee to lift the morale of his shattered army—and complete with a full-blown mobilization of the local planter aristocracy to view Stuart's gallant "knights of the Confederacy." Such events occurred frequently throughout the whole of the South in the decade before the war, and even in wartime. Stuart almost lost his cavalry at Brandy Station in a surprise attack by Union forces that caught him and the better part of his officers at a gala ball organized by the local gentry.

### Simms and the 'border novel'

The pervasiveness of these deranged flights from reality can best be seen by examining one example: the work of William Gilmore Simms, the South's most prolific, and without question most influential writer, after the untimely death of Edgar Allan Poe. Between 1833, with the publication of

## Confederate Constitution upheld free trade, slavery

The so-called Confederate States of America was a political institution established to guarantee, as its two most important "rights," human chattel slavery and British free trade. This can be seen from the two clauses in its founding instrument that differ most radically from the Constitution of the United States (emphasis added):

"Article 1, Sec 8: The Congress shall have power—  
(1) To lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises, for revenue necessary to pay the debts, provide for the common defence, and carry on the Government of the Confederate States; but no bounties shall be granted from the treasury; *nor shall any duties or taxes on importations from foreign nations be laid to promote or foster any branch of industry*; and all duties imposed and excises shall be uniform throughout the Confederate States. . . .

"(3) To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian tribes; but *neither this, nor any other clause contained in the Constitution shall be construed to delegate the power to Congress to appropriate money for any internal improvement*

*intended to facilitate commerce; except for the purpose of furnishing lights, beacons, and buoys, and other aids to navigation upon the coasts and the improvement of harbors, and removing of obstructions in river navigation, and in all which cases, such duties shall be laid on the navigation facilitated thereby, as may be necessary to pay the costs and expenses."*

While the Confederate Constitution guaranteed the right of human bondage, it also barred any State or Territory, as well as the Confederate government, from passing any law that would allow for its eventual abolition:

"Article 1, Section 9. (3) No bill of attainder, or *ex post facto* law, or law denying or impairing the right of property in negro slaves shall be passed."

That the South's "peculiar institution" was of more importance than the much-vaunted principle of "state sovereignty" or "states' rights" was clear from the clause which established an internal fugitive slave law:

"Article 4, Section 2. (3) No slave or other person held to service or labor in any State or Territory of the Confederate States, under the laws thereof, escaping or unlawfully carried into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor; but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such slave belongs, or to whom such service or labor may be due."