‘Christian Patriots’: The Intersection Between Proto-fascism and Clerical Fascism in the Antebellum South

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Abstract

This article examines the convergence between clerical fascism and proto-fascism in the Antebellum South of the United States. The author employs Roger Griffin’s theories of palingenetic ultranationalism and clerical fascism to understand the worldviews of Southern intellectuals. The author argues that a cadre of Southern theologians rejected the liberal heritage of the United States and redefined the relationship between the individual and state. Southern clerical fascists reconceived of an alternative modernity that reflected God’s precepts. Slaves, laborers, and slave masters all had a mandate to guide secular and spiritual progress. Furthermore, these Southern clerics believed the best hope for securing God’s order was to be found in the birth of a new Southern society – the Confederate States of America. This study builds upon the works of other historians who discerned the illiberal and authoritarian qualities of the American South while also contributing to delineation of the protean qualities of clerical fascism.

Keywords

Fascism – clerical fascism – Christianity – Antebellum South – Civil War – Henry Thornwell – George Fitzhugh
1 Introduction

When the Confederate States of America seceded from the United States, they aimed to preserve the chattel slavery they believed was guaranteed in the constitution. Most Confederates stylized themselves as the true torch bearers of the American ideals of freedom and liberty. However, amongst these voices were those who sought a radical break with the past. A group of intellectuals aimed to go beyond modernizing slavery to embrace an alternative vision of modernity. These were the Southern proto-fascists whose writings heralded the darker and less free world of the twentieth century. In the Antebellum South, most of these individuals were also Christians who reconciled their faith in progress and modernity with Christianity. This confluence between proto-fascist and theological visions for the future has long been overlooked in the historiography. This study asks: how and why did the ideas amongst the clerical extreme converge with the South’s most radical and extreme positions?

Analyses of the Antebellum South’s fascist qualities began with Harvey Wish and his study of the Southern intellectual George Fitzhugh. Subsequently, Louis Hartz discerned a ‘Reactionary Enlightenment’ amongst radical thinkers of the South who utilized ideas unknown to the American tradition. Roel Reyes followed in this discourse in highlighting how the pro-slavery defence of Southern extremists produced a proto-fascist vision of an alternative modernity. Unfortunately, Roel Reyes, along with Wish and Hartz, neglected how Christianity permeated the Southern extremist world. Many other scholars continued to research the South’s illiberalism, although fascism was omitted completely in their studies. They merely broached core components of what in this article is seen as the Southern proto-fascist worldview. In Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese’s Slavery in White and Black and Mind of the Masterclass, the authors touched upon notions of collectivism, corporatism, multi-racial slavery and anti-individualism, yet they did not discern the fascist qualities of these sentiments. Fox-Genovese and Genovese downplayed the revolutionary nature of these intellectuals’ redefinition of individual liberty and rejection of human rights. Thus, they did not expand upon this alternative modernity which sought to revolutionize Southern society. Even the scholars who took a much broader view of Southern thought did not examine the ideas of an alternative modernity. William Freehling underestimated the

1 Wish 1943, viii, 188–192.
2 Hartz 1952, 34.
3 Roel Reyes 2019, 307–330.
4 Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2008; Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2005.
revolutionary illiberalism of Hughes and Fitzhugh as ad-hoc arguments rather than part of a more systemic world view. This was all the more surprising since he gave attention to the notion of the broadening ‘Christian Paternalism’ which violated the norms of Southern equality between whites.\(^5\) Similarly, Michael O’Brien, in his in-depth analyses of the philosophy of Southern clergymen, did not discern the more political dimensions of their ideas. O’Brien illustrated slavery and political views in relation to Southern theology, but not to notions of progress and illiberal viewpoints.\(^6\) Studies into the South’s vision of a revolutionary alternative to modernity still need to be written.

Furthermore, there are gaps in the field of fascist studies. Leading fascist historian Roger Griffin laid out a framework for understanding the relationship between fascism and clerical fascism. Griffin conceived of clerical fascists as either theologians who sanctioned a portion of fascists goals yet remained distant from its secular and totalizing nature or clergymen who integrated fascist values into their religious worldview.\(^7\) Other historians have argued that there were components of fascism specifically appealing to the clerical worldview. Aristotle A. Kallis demonstrated that national identity, disorientating modernity and faith in salvation formed the historical forces which shaped clerical fascism in interwar Europe.\(^8\) Furthermore, Anton Shekhovtsov asserted that notions of order, chaos, nostalgia and a belief in a coming redemption put the fascist notion of palingenesis at the core of clerical fascism.\(^9\) It remains to be seen to what extent these theories of clerical fascism are visible across cultural contexts and time periods. Situating this study of clerical fascism in the Antebellum South has the potential to illuminate the protean and core characteristics of fascism and clerical fascism.

This article explores the affinities between the South’s proto-fascism and theologians’ notions of a radically new modernity. I use Griffin’s definition of fascism as a form of Palingenetic Ultranationalism.\(^10\) The Southern proto-fascists rejected liberal aspects of modernity and sought to substitute their own illiberal modernism that conformed to the protean qualities of Southern society. The ‘proto’ used in this way indicates the lack of shared similarities to the external characteristics of interwar fascism, that is, its historical and socially contingent qualities – such as dictatorship, propaganda and mass engagement.

\(^5\) Freehling 2007, 154.
\(^6\) O’Brien 2004.
\(^7\) Griffin 2007a, 217.
\(^8\) Kallis 2007, 230.
\(^9\) Shekhovtsov 2007, 273.
\(^10\) Griffin 2007b, 348–349; and Griffin 2008b, 27–31.
‘Proto-fascist’ is simply a nineteenth-century application of Griffin’s notion of ‘post-fascism’ which he used to explore neo-nazis and post-World War II fascist movements. Since the more secular aspects of the South’s proto-fascism were explored by Wish and Roel Reyes, this study emphasizes the palingenetic ultranationalism among a cadre of Southern theologians. Therefore, I supplement this use of fascism with Griffin’s model of ‘clerical fascism’ defined as:

The ideology and political praxis of clerics and theologians who either tactically support fascism as a movement or regime while maintaining a critical distance from its totalising, revolutionary, and basically secular objectives, or integrate elements of fascist values and policies into the way they conceptualise their mission on earth as devout believers in a divinely ordained world.

Clerical fascism is a term which explicitly refers to professional theologians thereby excluding lay Christians with fascist perspectives such as George Fitzhugh. Just as how palingenetic ultranationalism can be used to understand proto, interwar and post fascist ideas, so too, I argue, clerical fascism can be understood in much the same way. The Southern theologians studied in this analysis espoused ideas best described as clerical fascism.

I argue the Southern proto-fascist and clerical fascist discourse converged on palingenetic ultranationalism. These members of the intelligentsia and clergy rejected liberal modernity in favour of an illiberal modernity that redefined the notion of rights and the relationship between the individual and state. A cadre of preachers and theologians combined their religious faith with secular objectives of saving the nation and race. In their eyes, to save slavery was to also to save key institutions of the Church. In this pursuit, they espoused revolutionary ideas which sought to remake both man and state in the birth of the Confederate States of America. This article begins by reviewing the more secular aspects of the South’s proto-fascism embodied by George Fitzhugh, George Frederick Holmes and Henry Hughes before proceeding to identify the clerically fascist dimensions of the Southern theologians James Henley Thornwell, John Bailey Adger, Thomas Smyth, James Shannon and William J. Sasnett.

11 Griffin 2008a, 181–202.
12 Griffin 2007a, 217.
Antebellum Palingenetic Ultranationalism

The Confederate States of America was an ephemeral breakaway state best understood as a nation which attempted to modernize its form of conservatism. It sought to embrace industrialization and the latest trends in science while maintaining its republican principles of limited government and natural rights. It was liberal in the sense of preserving its enlightened-republican values and promoting the individual rights of slaveowners while also being illiberal in protecting the institution of slavery. These national objectives derived from the liberal heritage of the South. The South began with an intellectual culture steeped in Enlightenment values. As time progressed, newly incorporated perspectives rivalled enlightened sentiments. Southern historian Michael O’Brien described the intellectual transformation as undergoing two distinct and subsequent phases. One of these was: ‘Romantic and much more interested in collectivity …’ while ‘The last moment was bleaker; its cadres formed a sort of early realist generation who knew that life compelled choices and that all choices entailed loss. One might have God, or power, or belonging, but not everything, and not for everyone.’ It is the latter two phases (1830s–1860s) which are relevant as the proto-fascists derived their intellectual outlook from and published extensively in this era.

The South stood at the crossroads of modernity. The United States was industrializing and the North challenged the economic, demographic and cultural might of the South. The key grievance between the two regions was slavery. Southerners grappled with reconciling their Enlightenment heritage of rights, limited government and slavery. Many Southern intellectuals emphasized the biblical basis for slavery but this posed difficult and often radical problems, as the Bible sanctions slavery but does not limit it to a single race. Does this mean white people can also be enslaved? While mainstream Southern society circumvented these contradictions of rights and liberties by denying slaves their humanity, others sought to remake Southern society in a revolutionary manner. A cadre of the most radical pro-slavery writers endeavoured to modernize and expand slavery by embracing an illiberal vision of modernity. These writers vociferously attacked the efforts to eliminate slavery and women’s rights movement intertwined with the abolitionist cause. Cumulatively, the Southern extremist vision encompassed a radical reorganization of society, the creation of a new type of ‘individual’ and the support of a palingenesis to

13 O’Brien 2004, 11–12.
see its fruition. The individuals who held these radical views were the South’s proto-fascists.

Foremost amongst the proto-fascists was the Virginian born George Fitzhugh. Harvey Wish was the first historian to identify Fitzhugh’s fascist orientation. Indeed, Fitzhugh regularly spoke of the need to create a ‘new world’ of ‘rigorous government’ and described his philosophy as ‘a new reactionary movement’. Fitzhugh implored his fellow Southerners to recognize the true nature of Southern society as one that validated the superiority of slavery for all lower classes regardless of race. Fitzhugh understood that the survival of slavery would entail more revolutionary reconceptualizations of society. He praised the slavocracy as dominated by a new master race that would continue to ascend to the heights of human nature while advocating a more collectivist vision of society which recognized no individual rights. This vision entailed a reorganization of the economy that sought a third way, away from the North’s capitalism and socialism.

In these radical visions for modernity, Fitzhugh was not alone. He was joined by the likes of George Frederick Holmes and Henry Hughes. The Southern intellectual George Frederick Holmes rejected America’s liberal heritage in favour of a radical alternative. He wrote: ‘A new revolution is even now in progress... a second Phoenix, brighter and more glorious than its predecessor ... all philosophy, speculative and practical, has been thrown into the furnace, and the ferment is now in progress, which will effect its transmutation.’ In other writings, Holmes attacked the legacy of the Enlightenment and its exaltation of the individual. He propagated a sort of determinism, void of individual liberty, where man was born into society and thus had duties and obligations to fulfil. Holmes spent a considerable amount of his intellectual career in the pursuit of a new science that would arrest the decay posed by liberal social movements. Above all, Holmes was obsessed with reconciling order with progress. Sociologist and Confederate colonel Henry Hughes was arguably the most forward looking proto-fascist. Historians have described Hugh’s proposed new social system as ‘postmodern capitalism’ comparable to

14 These ideas are more fully developed in Roel Reyes 2019 but it is necessary to reiterate them here.
15 Wish 1943, viii, 188–192.
16 Fitzhugh 1856b, 93. See also Fitzhugh 1860b, 678; Fitzhugh 1857, 34, 140–141 156, 293; Fitzhugh 1856a, 693.
17 Fitzhugh 1860c, 138.
18 Ibid. 1860c, 138; see also Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2008, 289.
19 Holmes 1842, 194.
20 Wish 1941, 700, 705–707.
the modernization programs of twentieth-century America.21 One historian noted that Hughes ‘emphatically rejected the past, including the South’s, as a guide for present and future’ and argued that his unification of authoritarianism with progress was his most distinct contribution to Southern thought.22 Hughes aspired to refine the paternalism of the South.23 He not only believed human society to be perfectible, but perfection was the most important right for society: ‘Existence and Progress are ultimate rights. They are the final and supreme objects of social organization. They are its end and aim. All other rights are incidental.’24

Southern proto-fascists developed their ideologies as a rejection of American liberalism. They believed society now faced decay, anarchy and destruction and that a radical solution was needed for Southern salvation. They all advocated a government that could order society in the name of building a new nation. In the worldviews Fitzhugh, Holmes and Hughes espoused, the individual was a mere building block towards an alternative modernity that had shed America’s ideals of human rights, democracy and liberty in favour of a collectivist vision of national progress. They believed the masses should obediently fulfil their duties as slaves upholding the glory of the nation and race. Fitzhugh was joined by Henry Hughes in transforming the slavery defence of the South into a ‘utopian social system and ideal labor system.’25 They knew their ideas were radical and they were unapologetic about them. For example, Hughes prayed in his youth to become a despot.26 While mainstream Southern society wrestled with the reconciliation between the absolute despotism of slave ownership and notions of limited government, republicanism and individual rights, the proto-fascists had no qualms about vesting absolute power in the hands of the state to safeguard progress.

In rejecting individual rights and promoting collectivism, the proto-fascists rejected their own Southern heritage. The South had long been influenced by Enlightenment liberalism and even made its own contributions to the American Enlightenment. John Locke drafted the constitution of the then newly founded colony of South Carolina. The Southerner from Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, wrote the American Declaration of Independence establishing the universal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Although

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21 Freehling 2007, 170–171.
22 Ambrose 1996, 22.
23 Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2008, 203.
24 Hughes 1854, 232.
25 Farmer 1999, 196.
26 Freehling 2007, 167.
the Southern fascists articulated a notion of slavery and rights in the same manner as Locke and Jefferson, they diverged in praising various forms of despotism and embracing alternatives to republican government. While Locke and Jefferson promoted rights, the Southern proto-fascists attacked them and questioned all but the right to own property in slaves. Locke believed the state should leave man alone, the Southern proto-fascists advocated state intervention; that is, more control of all members of society. It was Fitzhugh who wrote: ‘we propose not to govern society less, but to govern it more.’

Gone was the notion of limited government, leaving the individual free to pursue their own interests. In the eyes of the proto-fascists, the Southern slavocracy had a duty to ensure the progress of both race and nation. In their eyes, the progress of man and civilization were at stake. All displayed the solidity of their palingenic ultranationalism in supporting the rebirth of a new Southern nation in a war for Southern independence.

Antebellum proto-fascism was not a coherent ideology but a fragmented set of convictions at the fringes of mainstream Southern society. The proto-fascism of the South was similar to the loose collection of romanticism, racism, anti-semitism, eugenics and nationalism which existed in völkisch and right-wing circles before being coalesced, centralized, streamlined and sanctioned as official doctrine by the Nazis. That was the difference between the South and the interwar fascists. In interwar Italy and Germany, the fascists obtained political power and bent society to their will, excluding competing ideological notions. Within the Confederacy, the more radical and proto-fascist ideas remained marginalized despite the prominence of some of their proponents.

3 Rights Reinterpreted

A liberal modernity of increasing rights and equality for more individuals was a disorientating threat to the Southern proto-fascist sense of order. As a whole, Southern theologians broadly shared with their more secular minded Southerners the belief that God created and sanctioned slavery along with the conviction that abolition could only end in apocalyptic ruin. The Southern image of the ideal man was the paternalistic slave master who acted as father and guardian of his wife, children and slaves. Black and female equality offended most Southerners, effectively upending and de-centring

27 Fitzhugh 1860c, 138.
28 Farmer 1999, 200.
29 Gallay 1987, 369.
the traditional world of Southerners. Southerners both mainstream and extreme sought refuge from modernity’s discontents. This is where the secular and spiritual worlds converged. Initially, Holmes and Fitzhugh sought solace in Christianity before envisioning more revolutionary social arrangements. Southern clerics and proto-fascists shared the common enemies of equality, ‘free love’ and socialism. Consequently, some Southern clergymen sought similar solutions to these threats in attacking the basis of rights and individuality, offering a collective vision of society in which the individual would be subordinate to the dictates of society.

James Henley Thornwell was one of the South’s most influential theologians. He had an illustrious career as a Calvinist theologian, president of South Carolina College and one of the editors of the journal *The Southern Quarterly Review*. Like many other Southerners, Thornwell saw Northern culture as threatening the ideals of the South. His thoughts on society and slavery were but a minute fragment of his work. Nonetheless, the issues facing the South were enough to arouse Thornwell out of his pious ivory tower. Thornwell portrayed the social differences between the North and South through a Christian lens of good versus evil: ‘The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders – they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, jacobins, on the one side and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other.’

Thornwell’s distinctly Southern interpretation of abolition and race relations was shared with numerous other clergymen. Southern missionary to the Middle East and minister John Bailey Adger followed in his intellectual footsteps. Adger was a familiar correspondent with Thornwell, who frequently quoted him in his works and broached similar social topics. In a similar manner to Thornwell, Adger, too, believed that in defending slavery he was also defending the South against socialism. Thomas Smyth was a Presbyterian minister who wrote numerous works reflecting his beliefs on religion and society. He was also the brother-in-law to John Adger and similarly evoked Thornwell’s arguments to support his own positions. Smyth too believed that denouncing the Northern movements was to denigrate atheism, anarchy, mob rule and communism. James Shannon was a preacher and president of the University

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30 Faust 1977, 112–133.
31 O’Brien 2004, 1065–1066.
32 Ibid., 83–84, 534.
33 Thornwell 1859, 14.
34 Adger 1859, 117.
35 Adger 1899, 134.
36 Smyth 1910a, 542, 546.
of Missouri who likewise adhered to other Southern positions such as Manifest Destiny, Bleeding Kansas, slavery and eventually secession. Although a man of God, he considered himself driven by patriotism to the point that other church members believed he was too involved in secular affairs. His critics even called him a ‘priestly demagogue.’ In this cataclysmic struggle, these Southern theologians saw the possibility for an alternative social arrangement which could guarantee God’s social order. Thornwell implied as much when he questioned the basis of the South: ‘the real question is the relations of man to society--of States to the individual and of the individual to States.’

In questioning the relations of man to society, Thornwell imagined a new labour system. This was a third way between the dichotomy of socialism and capitalism. Thornwell was not content with meritocracy and notions of limited government. He was obsessed with perfecting Southern paternalism. Thornwell espoused a collectivist alternative to Southern society which rejected individual rights. Although Thornwell portrayed socialists as atheists, he also painted a very bleak portrait of liberal capitalism as a powder keg of class conflict. Thornwell believed the only way out of this cycle was in: ‘converting the labourer into capital ... in other words, by Slavery.’ Thornwell saw the implementation of universal slavery as the only path forward which could avoid anarchy and revolution: ‘That non-slaveholding States will eventually have to organize labour and introduce something so like to Slavery that it will be impossible to discriminate between them, or else to suffer from the most violent and disastrous insurrections against the system which creates and perpetuates their misery.’ Thornwell expanded the South’s paternalism to extend beyond black slavery and also encompass lower class whites. Such ideas violated the image of white equality that dominated the racial rhetoric of the South. Southerners maintained that white men were equal amongst their subordinates of women, children and slaves. Nonetheless, this notion of expanding paternalism lumped low class whites with other individuals deemed inferior. Furthermore, this idea violated the South’s exaltation of freedom and liberty. This was a paternalistic ethos for the white worker. This was duty and obligation instead of freedom.

These Southern theologians hardly made a distinction between slaves and labourers. Thornwell believed: ‘The labourers in each case are equally moral, equally responsible, equally men.’ He further noted that while labourers petition

37 Harrell 1969, 161.
38 Thornwell 1850, 14.
39 Freehling 2007, 757.
40 Thornwell 1873, 540–541.
for a master, slaves simply have a fixed master – both slave and labourer were to fulfil their godly duties as dictated by either their fixed or transient master:

The Providence of God marks out for the slave the precise services, in the lawful commands of the master, which it is the Divine will that he should render – the painful necessities of his case are often as stringent upon the free labourer ... Neither can be said to select his employments. God allots to each his portion – places the one immediately under command – and leaves the other not unfrequently a petitioner for a master.\textsuperscript{41}

Thornwell rationalized slavery in that it became not the ownership of another human being but rather, the ownership of another human being’s labour. Thornwell reflected a common sentiment among the most extreme Southern clergymen. Although Adger neither endorsed nor rejected universal slavery, he tacitly supported this position: ‘equal rights to equal things for all men, is neither a possible nor a desirable form of the social state; that all communities have actually to use the involuntary labor of most classes of their people’.\textsuperscript{42} Shannon added to the belief in widespread servility when he wrote: ‘God at various times instituted ... bondage of different grades, including domestic slavery.’\textsuperscript{43} Shannon accepted the subordination and denial of rights to lower class whites. He considered low class whites bound to a lesser degree – a lighter form of slavery. Although not quite as revolutionary and disdainful about liberalism as his Southern peers, William J. Sasnett was a Methodist clergyman and university president who believed in a servile labouring class being forced to work. He argued for coercive labour for the able-bodied poor. Sasnett called them ‘undeserving’ and wrote about how they were to be elevated through labour and Christianity in the same manner as slaves. With these beliefs it is no wonder slavery of all grades was rationale enough for him to express: ‘Slavery, both abstractly and concretely, is defensible on the ground of both philosophy and Scripture.’\textsuperscript{44}

Fitzhugh, Hughes, Thornwell and other similarly minded Southern clergymen believed that a wage labourer was just another type of slave. Although many Southern clergymen made a racial distinction between whites and blacks with the latter being particularly suited for slavery, it was only a superfluous difference meant to cater to Southern opinion. The writings of these

\textsuperscript{41} Thorne\textsuperscript{well} 1850–1, 122.
\textsuperscript{42} Adger 1859, 103.
\textsuperscript{43} Shannon 1849, 27.
\textsuperscript{44} Sasnett 1856, 160–162, 210.
authors make clear there is effectively little to no difference between the low white labourer and the black slave. They were both part of the servile class upholding Southern society and ensuring its progress. This is because these Southern clergymen saw blacks as equal humans. Therefore, any argument to keep blacks in slavery was an argument to keep all in slavery. This was a belief that ran against mainstream opinion in the South. In general, Southerners purported that blacks were especially suited for slavery. Although, many would pay lip service to the notion that blacks were specially adapted to slavery while paying homage to the sameness between poor and rich whites, the arguments for social inequality, the dissolution of individual rights into a sea of obligations and the exaltation of a collectivist vision which secured slave master supremacy continued. Furthermore, rather than sustaining the belief in white egalitarianism and equality, arguments for black suitability for slavery strengthened the master class’s sense of superiority – that the master was a pedigree above lower class whites.

It was not enough to extend the logic of coercive labour to all members of society, clerical fascists also attacked the protections which shielded them. Erasing the individual rights of the masses served to secure slavery for elites and expand their umbrella of paternalism. Additionally, criticizing such notions of rights and equality created the space to justify alternative organizations of society. Thornwell noted: ‘It [Slavery] is a relation of man to man – a form of civil society, of which persons are the only elements and not a relation of man to things.’ This belief that man was not beholden to promises or abstract ‘things’ such as equality, universal rights, or constitutions was also shared among other clerics in the South. The notion of ‘relation’ was derived from the British moralist tradition. It emphasized duties to God and to society. It was particularly attractive for the South as a society based on the obedience of women, children and slaves. However, the notion of ‘relation’ trended in a liberal direction, partly forming the basis for the clergy’s attempts to reign in the behaviour of the slave masters and their abuses. Nonetheless, the Southern clerical extreme used this understanding as a basis to continually erode the foundation of Southern and American liberalism. As Thornwell questioned the relation of man to society, he also reconceptualized the notion of rights. He refuted the abolitionist argument that slavery violated human rights and the

45 Thornwell 1850–1, 118. See also Adger 1848–9, 572; Smyth 1910c.
46 Horsman 1981, Chapter 7.
47 Merritt 2017, 171; Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2008, 220.
48 Thornwell 1850–1, 118.
49 Holifield 1978, 146–149.
spirit of Christianity. He redefined the relationship between the individual and society to that of obligation and obedience rather than the timeless standards of justice championed by the Enlightenment. In Thornwell’s conception, man is born into society. This is clear from Thornwell’s reconceptualizing the meaning of natural law and natural rights, thus redefining the basis of liberalism: ‘Natural law, in its widest sense, (lex naturae) is applied to those rules of duty which spring from the nature and constitution, of man.’ That is, ‘from his constitution as a social and responsible being’. The only natural rights Thornwell salvaged was the right to property (slavery) and the right to revolution (secession). Thornwell reinterpreted the mutual relationship between men in society. He moved away from a liberal social contract centred on individual rights to a new social contract of obedience bounded by a paternalistic ethos in which the individual rights of the lower classes were dissolved. This was most evident when Thornwell, as seen above, expressed that labour must obey ‘the lawful commands of the master.’ In this new conception, the law was not a timeless standard of justice but the arbitrary will of the master. Although Thornwell attempted to replace classical liberal standards of justice with Christian morality, he continued to wrestle between vesting absolute power in the hands of the master with absolute power in the hands of the state to regulate the master.

Thornwell was not the only Southern clergyman who reframed rights away from the ‘Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.’ Others among the clerical extreme made similar shifts away from the American Declaration of Independence to embrace a new image of society. Shannon displayed his lack of loyalty to the ideals of equality and the State of Nature embedded in America’s founding: ‘By what authority can any community deprive the individual of the natural liberty, which God gave him? I answer, by the authority of God himself.’ He went on further to illuminate his vision of Southern society as a relation of men to men, not to laws or compacts: ‘our unparalleled blessings of civil and religious liberty, result not so much from the form of our free institutions, as from the intelligence and virtue, which are their indispensable support.’ Although in this statement Shannon laid the groundwork for the coming Civil War, he reflected the Southern clerical attachment to and perception of classical republican values. John Adger also questioned the ideals expressed in America’s founding. He, too, ruthlessly rejected the American notions of individual rights: ‘Civil polity is not a device of man, but the

50 Thornwell 1850, 21.
51 Thornwell 1854, 37.
52 Shannon 1849, 26, 30–31.
institution of God, nor is it the result of a compact between the individuals of a multitude ... It is pure fiction to assert that the state of nature ever was a state of individual independence ... Mankind from the beginning never have existed otherwise than in society and under, government.\textsuperscript{53} In challenging the State of Nature, Natural Laws and Natural Rights, the radical notions of these clergymen challenged the foundation of American society, both North and South. Since they believed black slaves and poor whites should play their part in the social body, Southern radicals needed a justification to keep all in subjugation. Discrediting the notion of universal and individual rights and redefining the relationship between the individual and state justified the degrees of bondage for the unworthy. The emphasis on duties and obligations meant that clerical fascists conceived of freedom not through individuality but through society. Though these Southern clerics spoke of rights and liberties, they also spoke of regulated liberty, limited freedom and different grades of bondage, while most advocated the rejection of rights. They were part of the much larger trend in Southern society of reappropriating the American heritage of rights and liberties to suit regional illiberal policies such as slavery.\textsuperscript{54}

4 Faith, Duty and Unity

With this reconceptualizing of rights and the relationship between the individual and the state, not even slave masters were free to pursue their liberty. Slave masters were stewards of the ‘rights’ and humanity of the slave. Hierarchy, duty and obedience were not only reserved for the lower classes but cut across classes and were truly universal in Thornwell’s eyes: ‘The slave is to show his reverence for God – the freedom of his inward man – by a cheerful obedience to the lawful commands of his master; – the master, his regard for one who is his master in heaven, by rendering to the slave that which is just and equal.’\textsuperscript{55} Essentially all members of society were a form of bonded labour. Labourers and slaves may suffer the wrath of the master for failing their duties, just as a master would face God for the inability to live up to his duties. Everyone had a master who punished them. A similar conception was held by Shannon who reduced familial relationships to just another type of slavery (in a manner much like Fitzhugh). Shannon explained how society was bound by mutual duties and relations between men based on God’s ordinances:

\textsuperscript{53} Adger 1848–9, 569.
\textsuperscript{54} Crider 2009, 317–332.
\textsuperscript{55} Thornwell 1850, 37.
the relations of master and slave are correlative, and the duties of these relations reciprocal. Both legally and morally, the master as truly belongs to the slave for the performance of a master’s duties, as the slave belongs to the master for the performance (when able [author’s italics]) of a slave’s duties. In this respect, each may with equal propriety be said to own the other.56

Sasnett illustrated the sentiment which believed in duty and obedience for all: ‘the faithful execution of the duty with which Christians are thus charged, cannot fail to press upon every reflecting mind with all the weight and sacredness of a most solemn obligation.’57 The pre-eminence of the slave master is what combined the secular with the profane world. The extreme views of these theologians held that slave masters transmuted the will and dictates of God through their duties.58 With everyone, slave and master alike, pursuing their socially determined obligations according to the wills of their masters, society united into a cohesive being.

Many of these conceptions of a widespread multi-racial servile class were remarkably congruent to the proto-fascists. Hughes, in particular, believed in an authoritarian welfare state which could secure the ultimate goal of progress.59 He considered obligatory labour to be one’s contribution to social progress. Consequently, Hughes loathed the deployment of labour for individual and private interests.60 In his eyes, the state existed to enforce these mutual commitments. There was an overlap with George Fitzhugh who wrote: ‘The gentlemen of the South … have the lofty sentiments and high morals of a master race … Their time is occupied in governing their slaves and managing their farms – they are slaves themselves to their duties.’61 This was a vision of state power which overrode the individual rights of slave masters. For Thornwell, moral obligation was a core component of both the slave and master. Predictably, these Southern clergymen faced hostility from the plantation elite for attempting to limit the slave master’s natural rights. Since Thornwell believed blacks were full human beings, he argued that slave masters had an obligation and duty to treat them in a Christian manner.62 Smyth also believed blacks were fellow human beings, yet his perspectives on slavery alienated

56 Shannon 1855, 16–17.
57 Sasnett 1856, 172.
58 Thornwell 1850, 20.
59 Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2008, 171.
60 Ambrose 1996, 87–88.
61 Fitzhugh 1860a, 155.
62 Freehling 1991, 397.
practically everyone in North as well as South. Smyth correctly surmised that the mainstream South used biological racism to justify slavery and thus deny blacks their humanity. At the same time, he considered abolitionism a Satanist plot. Nonetheless, like Thornwell, he believed that humanity could make true progress under the institution of slavery precisely because it was one of God’s creations.\(^63\) This vision was inclusive and expansive as Smyth believed that the self-denial and labour of all upheld Christian doctrine. For these Southern theologians, masters needed to respect the authority of Christ and, if need be, also the state.

Proto-fascist and clerical fascist conceptions converged on the belief that every member of society was duty bound to further the nation’s progress by a set of pre-ordained dictates. Everyone was obliged to work to the full capacity of their social position. In praising a society of relations and collectivity, while denigrating the notion of universal rights, the clerical fascist worldview challenged the rights of slave masters in attempting to reform the institution. The individual rights of slave masters was where the last bastion of individual rights and the Enlightenment heritage of the South rested. By arguing for the humanity of slavery and the slavery of wage labour while also attacking individual rights, the South’s fascists removed the last vestiges of liberalism in the South. Such a departure from the liberal heritage of both North and South heralded an alternative modernity in which individuals were stepping stones towards a more Godly state.

The clerical extreme emphasized duty because slave masters could also fall victim to slavery. Slave masters had to regulate their freedoms, maintain the public order and care for their slaves. Any lapse of these commitments invited a form of bondage Thornwell called ‘moral bondage.’ This was when anyone became a slave to sin. As Thornwell wrote: ‘This slavery to sin is true slavery.’\(^64\) Thornwell could simultaneously balance the rejection of universal rights with the introduction of universal slavery by falling back on spiritual slavery as an archaic concept that flourished in antiquity. Freedom, in this conception, was based on being liberated from one’s passions and emotions. This idea survived through Christianity with the notion that sinners were slaves to sin.\(^65\) Thornwell considered this type of ‘moral bondage’ to be a worse fate than physical (chattel) slavery. In his eyes, freedom from spiritual slavery was freedom through Christ and thus true liberty. This true freedom could only be attained through the elevation which slave masters could provide. He wrote: ‘This freedom ...

\(^{63}\) Holifield 1978, 152–154.
\(^{64}\) Thornwell 1850, 28.
\(^{65}\) Davis 1988, 74–75, 87.
which the Apostle enjoins upon slaves – when he exhorts them to obey their masters in singleness of heart as unto Christ ... To obey under the influence of these motives, is to be slaves no longer.' He explained: 'It is the freedom which God approves.' The threat of ‘moral bondage’ is how Thornwell could have downplayed the nature of physical slavery and the significance of individual rights. In his perspective, for slavery to be truly involuntary depended on the moral disposition of slaves and how well they followed the Bible.

Nonetheless, according to the clerical extreme, physical slavery was a just punishment for mankind’s Fall. The notion of a fallen world was a Christian conception that made it conceivable to reject the American liberal legacy along with extending paternalism, obedience and servility to encompass slaves, white labourers, women, children as well as masters. For these Southern clergymen, mankind was born into a fallen state. The degrees of bondage experienced in this life were evidence of this. In this way, the clerical extreme was able to rationalize such evils such as moral and physical slavery. As Smyth noted: ‘The only equality is that all men are born in sin.’ Adger used this explanation: ‘slavery is not man’s natural state, but a result of the fall ... as one of the allotments of Providence to man, as having sinned and so forfeited liberty and every other blessing with life itself.’ Characteristically, Thornwell expanded this notion of fallen state to include the lower class whites while simultaneously rejecting their rights: ‘The distinction of ranks in society, in the same way, is an evil; but in our fallen world, an absolute equality would be an absolute stagnation of all enterprise and industry.’ This notion of man’s fallen state was used to protect the institution of slavery. Nonetheless, this was not a vision that saw Southern society as stagnant. In these conceptions, it was possible for the slave, the labourer, the family and the master to ensure social progress by dutifully discharging their obligations as assigned by their positions in society. Through the fulfilment of these precepts, Southern society could strive ever closer to reflecting the will of God.

The constituent aspects of the South’s clerical fascism was a composition of a myriad of sources. The foremost influence was Christianity. The literal interpretation of the Bible played a central role in rejecting liberalism. Biblical arguments were a major source for rejecting most abolitionist arguments outside of racist-scientific explanations. Many Southerners believed the Bible to be

66 Thornwell 1850, 28–30; author’s italics.
67 Smyth 1910a, 545–546.
68 Adger 1848–9, 571.
69 Thornwell 1850, 32.
70 Freehling 1991, 388.
the literal truth and these Southern theologians routinely expressed their conviction that the Bible did not criticize slavery but, on the contrary, admonished slaves to be obedient. Nonetheless, such dogmatism is not to imply that the clerical fascists were stuck in the past. They believed their alternative visions to be aided by the latest scientific theories. By the 1850s, Holmes’, Fitzhugh’s and Hughes’ ideological dispositions were, on one level, an attempt at conceiving an alternative to new European schools of thought. In particular, they saw much promise in the newly emerging field of sociology. Sociology offered hope for curing the diseases of the social body. For them, these ills were anything that challenged the Southern hierarchy. However, European sociologists were too rational, irreverent and godless for their tastes. Part of the proto-fascist’s aspirations for modernity were produced through an attempt to reconcile modern sociology and slavery with Christianity.71 George Fitzhugh, Auguste Comte and other sociologists used organic metaphors to describe society – where each part discharged its duty for the functioning of the whole organism.72 These influences were apparent in the clerical extreme. Thornwell personally knew and corresponded with George Frederick Holmes.73 Furthermore, Thornwell was known to use organic metaphors to describe society.74 Thomas Smyth displayed an awareness of Comte and the American sociologist Joseph Le Conte’s work.75 This is significant because Southern schools of sociology usually deviated from enlightened-liberal values.76

Many of the proto-fascist notions promulgated by Southern intellectuals were quite unpopular. For most Southerners, the concept of Southern paternalism was a doctrine intended to apply exclusively to blacks, women and children. Predictably, these arguments for an expansive paternalism were made by Southern elites. The non-slaveholding Southern population would not have agreed nor submitted to the type of bondage promoted by the South’s radical thinkers.77 Nonetheless, Southerners occupied a low position firmly under the grip of a Southern oligarchy. Although some historians noted that the strongest arguments supporting white inequality and an exalted slave master class came from South Carolina, other historians discerned the much more widespread character of these sentiments.78 The emerging doctrine

71 Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2005, 586.
72 Lyman 1988, 101.
73 O’Brien 2004, 535.
74 Thornwell 1850, 41.
75 Smyth 1908, 439; see also Smyth 1910b, 177.
76 Wish 1941, 700–701.
77 Freehling 2007, 757, 1016–1017.
78 Sinha 2000, 12–13.
in the South which postulated multiracial slavery as the best form of labour organization was also popular beyond the proto-fascists. Furthermore, while South Carolina’s oligarchy retained firm control of the democratic process, the voting disenfranchisement of poor whites was ubiquitous throughout the South. When historians of the South speak about the end of slavery, they also speak of a ‘dual emancipation’ in which whites too were liberated. In the wake of Union victory, lower class whites began to experience new social, economic and political opportunities that had been mere rhetoric before the Civil War.

The clerical extreme conceived of a society in which the greater good of the collective far outshone that of the individual. They sought a new society which redefined the rights and relations of the individual to society. Poor, slave and master alike all had the duty and obligation to contribute to social progress. Both slaves and masters were to curtail their liberties and rights for the recreation of God’s kingdom on earth and in preparation for the eternal kingdom of the afterlife. Each member was to perform the labour roles they were born into. Such a conception recalls the values embodied by a Nazi boarding school that posted Paul de LaGarde’s quote: ‘That man is not free who can do as he likes, but he is free who does what he should do.’ Because these Southern theologians saw blacks as fellow humans, a rationale to keep blacks in slavery was thus a rationale to keep all in slavery. The rationalization of inequality and hierarchy, along with the attacks against socialism, justified the degrees of bondage for the white lower class and the extraction of duties from slave masters. Clerical fascists sought unity in collectivism because they feared the social strife, revolution and upheaval they saw in increased calls for equality in the American North and in Europe. The Southern clerical-fascist vision sought to protect Southern society from the decadence and destruction of the North by breaking with past traditions and hierarchies. They synthesized the secular and spiritual worlds in conceiving of slavery as part of God’s creation. In that mindset, to protect and modernize slavery was to perform God’s work on earth. The core goals for the proto-fascist vision were in congruence with Christian principles.

79 Fox-Genovese and Genovese 2008.
80 Merritt 2017, 174, 327.
81 Mosse 1999, 128.
Progress and Palingenesis

The South was obsessed with progress. Journals, such as *De Bow’s Review*, were established to promote the latest developments in science, technology and modernization. Many in the South believed that slavery underwrote the past and future prosperity of the United States. Prominent Southerners like John C. Calhoun championed slavery as the bedrock of progress. Prevailing opinion contended that slavery, property and agriculture were the basis of civilization and modern society. Southerners considered slavery the pinnacle of imperial governance and expected to see slavery adopted in Latin America and Europe. The intertwined relationship between progress and Christianity was firmly embedded into American national character. Manifest Destiny was the most visible expression of the interwoven advance of spiritual and secular progress during this era. Much of this optimism galvanized faith in the Confederate cause of seceding from the Union and fostered enthusiasm towards future possibilities.

In the Southern conception, the progress of the spiritual and secular were entwined. While the Bible could not be perfected, an increase in piety or the number of devotees was always seen as forward momentum. Thornwell considered the world to be a battle ground between Christianity and atheism in which ‘the progress of humanity’ was at stake. He was a forward-looking individual who attempted to steer the progress of mankind with his defence of slavery in a Christian context. Although Thornwell was hesitant to embrace secession and war, he saw opportunities in supporting the Confederate cause. Thornwell petitioned the Confederate congress to recognize Christianity. He even spearheaded the creation of a new Church in the Confederacy, one that would recognize the true principles of Southern society. Thornwell believed the Church contributed to the ‘progress and prosperity of society’ because he also believed that the ‘Church was organized in the family of a slaveholder’. He saw God as the ultimate master, ruling over the slave master. The latter was a dutiful patriarch who together with his obedient family of slaves – each fulfilling their pre-assigned tasks – fostered spiritual and material advancement: ‘As to the influence of slavery upon the advancement of society, there can be

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82 Sublette and Sublette 2016, 613.
83 Sinha 2000, 87.
84 Karp 2016, 57–58, 160, 234–235.
85 Horsman 1981, 82–84.
86 Thornwell 1850, 14.
87 Farmer 1999, 278–280.
88 Thornwell 1852, 4, 6.
no doubt ... [they] depend upon the fidelity with which the duties are discharged, in every condition of life.\textsuperscript{89} For Thornwell, slavery was the best means of guaranteeing order and developing man and society along a path toward God. Slavery was the product of a fallen world as much as it was its antidote.

Many of these sentiments were shared among the clerical extreme. Although they believed the Bible preserved the wisdom of the ages, these Southern theologians were not hesitant to embrace progress of this world as a means towards God. Adger heralded various degrees of bondage and servility as the only path towards progress: ‘subjection to government is a conscientious submission to the will of God ... all those various subordinations ... are necessary to the perfection of society and to the full development of humanity.’\textsuperscript{90} Sasnett was probably the most secularly inclined with his notion of progress embedded in biology. He exalted the future of race in believing that the (white) American race was constantly improving under the direction of God: ‘the American race, is the last and highest advance that has yet been made in this great providential scheme of progress ...’\textsuperscript{91} In his racist beliefs, Sasnett promulgated the most cutting edge racial theories that suggested white amalgamation mixed the best qualities of each white racial group.\textsuperscript{92} These forward-looking clergymen believed that salvation, order and progress could only be possible in the Confederate States of America.

It took faith in secession and nationhood to endorse the war for Southern independence. The clerical extreme believed that a reborn Southern society, a Confederate States of America, was the best means of securing secular and spiritual progress. Although Thornwell looked to avoid the disruption of war and to reform slavery, he advocated sacrifice for the greater good of the state: ‘The State becomes everything, and the individual nothing.’\textsuperscript{93} Although he wrote this in wartime and regarded this as a measure to meet the dire situation at hand, it is important to keep in mind how he radically redefined the notion of rights in favour of obedience and duty to others in society. Furthermore, Adger believed that a South united around slavery made Southerners ideal patriots for the new cause of palingenesis. The war for Southern independence served to unite: ‘the whole body in every church in all this fair, broad Southern land ... It prepares the whole people to stand as one man. It is a conviction that will make patriots, and if need were, martyrs.’\textsuperscript{94} Likewise, Smyth revealed his belief

\textsuperscript{89} Thornwell 1853, 40–41.  
\textsuperscript{90} Adger 1848–9, 569–570.  
\textsuperscript{91} Sasnett 1858, 323.  
\textsuperscript{92} Dain 2002, 233.  
\textsuperscript{93} Thornwell 1862, 7.  
\textsuperscript{94} Adger 1859, 102–103.
in a reborn South in becoming a fervent secessionist. Smyth began a sermon which reflected the interconnection between his spiritual and patriotic mission: ‘My brethren ... I am here in God’s name and stead to point out to ... our present and future course as christian patriots.’\textsuperscript{95} Shannon also had a strong inclination for palingenesis. Shannon had long been a revolutionary Christian who wanted to restore Christianity to its original state. In previous years he was involved in a militant paper but he later saw God’s cause in the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{96} Although he tried to save the Union by defending slavery, Shannon eventually embraced secession and the civil war. Shannon outlined his patriotism and devotion to the rebirth of a new Southern nation: ‘we feel justified in pledging our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor, to each other, to the State, and to our sister slave States’.\textsuperscript{97} Everything was to be sacrificed for the nation because the nation protected God’s institutions and God’s creation.

6 Conclusion

The combination of embracing an alternative modernity defined by collectivism, progress, Confederate nationalism and secession laid at the intersection between proto-fascism and clerical fascism in the Antebellum South. This was a convergence amongst the South’s most extreme illiberal thinkers within the Antebellum intelligentsia and clergy. Palingenesis was at the heart of both the more secularly inclined proto-fascists and the clerical fascist vision for the future. The clergy analyzed in this study were fiercely nationalist in supporting a new Southern nation and believed that rejecting a liberal modernity in favour of a society of duty and submission was in line with Christian principles. They believed this illiberal alternative would be the modernity which best protected God’s hierarchy and order and thus fostered everlasting salvation in the afterlife.

This fascist vision supported God’s mission on earth. As other fascist historians have noted, the major meeting point between the clergy and the more politically involved was an intense mythical nostalgia for a lost Christian golden age combined with the perception of destruction, atheism and communism as common threats.\textsuperscript{98} The historian of fascism Aristotle A. Kallis explained: ‘National identities steeped in religious particularism, reaction to the effects

\textsuperscript{95} Smyth 1910a, 545, 709.
\textsuperscript{96} Harrel 1969, 138–139.
\textsuperscript{97} Shannon 1855, 24, 29.
\textsuperscript{98} Shekhovtsov 2007, 272–273, 279.
of modernisation by retreating to old certainties, and perceptions of ‘crisis’
and ‘danger’ operant within an apocalyptic vision of salvation-through-re-
birth were some of the major spheres of convergence between fascism and
the church in interwar Europe."99 Indeed, Kallis’ depiction of interwar Europe
is remarkably congruent to the situation of the clerical fascists in Antebellum
America. Although his analysis described the interwar years, it also illustrates
the alliance between fascism and clerical-fascism in the Antebellum South. For
clerical fascists across time and space, any allies were welcome against these
forces and any victory was seen as a victory for Christianity.

7 A Note on Palingenetic Ultranationalism

One of the key contributing elements of Roger Griffin’s theory of fascism –
palingenetic ultranationalism – was in identifying fascism as a harbinger of
a specific type of modernity. In Modernism and Fascism, Griffin defined the
essence of the relationship between fascism and modernity: ‘Fascism is one
of the forms taken by political and cultural modernity, but it is simultaneously
a radical reaction against the political forms of ‘actually existing modernity’
...100

He explained how the loaded and abstract term of ‘Palingenesis’ intersected
with actual historical and social contexts: ‘... it is the modernist revolt against
Modernity that provides the historical context and causal explanation for the
palingenetic aspect of fascism’s ideology, policies, and praxis – its drive to con-
struct a new type of society and a new type of national character (‘Man’)."101
Thus, Griffin does not postulate fascism as a descriptor of its nature, but what
it sought to achieve in actuality. Given the definition above, palingenetic ultra-
nationalism is fraught with several disadvantages.

A common criticism against Palingenetic Ultranationalism is the abstract
nature of the theory. Marcel H. Van Herpen noted that the ‘...“palingenetic
form of ultra-nationalism” does not indicate the way in which the realization
of this national revival is envisaged.’102 Robert O. Paxton likewise noted that
the presumption of a ‘fascist essence ... does not lead very far.’103 This criticism
of the ‘ideal-type’ nature of generic fascism is complicated by its multifarious
interpretations. For most readers, the notion of fascism in the Antebellum South is quite unpalatable for the associations of fascism with dictatorship, popular participation and totalitarianism. It is here that Godwin’s Law – the probability of comparisons to Nazis grows larger the longer a discussion continues – or the Reductio ad Hitlerum – the claim that eventually – any argument will inevitably draw comparisons to the Nazis – comes into play. The main disadvantage of using fascism to describe the type of illiberalism of the Antebellum South is the term’s association with twentieth-century fascism. The hallmarks of interwar fascism – Führerprinzip and totalitarianism – were, in Griffin’s words, the ‘peripheral products of the historical conditions of interwar Europe rather than “essentially” fascist.’ Fascist scholar Aristotle Kallis noted the metamorphoses fascism underwent to become established political regimes: ‘The nature of a regime is defined by a plethora of additional factors – how it was installed, who supported it, in which political direction it evolved, how competing notions of future action were negotiated and formulated into official policy ....’ It is for this reason that I acknowledge that a full-fledged fascist regime such as the Third Reich is an ill-suited comparison to Antebellum radical illiberalism.

This brings up the issue of reification: discerning fascism where none existed. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that many groups commonly associated with fascism – such as the Spanish Falange, Romanian Iron Guard, or even elements of Putin’s Russia – rarely used such a term themselves. After all, the Nazis officially labelled themselves National Socialists while recognizing that they had much in common with the Italian fascismo. Then as now, the label was less important than their common vision for an alternative modernity. We have to ask whether the label ‘fascist’ is useful for discerning common elements between Antebellum and twentieth-century fascists. To a large degree, I believe this answer is yes.

The key advantage of palingenetic ultranationalism is that it encapsulates fascism in all stages of development and its numerous expressions: fascist intellectualism, movements, culture and regimes. The fascism of the Antebellum South was a fascist ideology espoused by intellectuals. It was neither a movement nor a regime. Therefore, the Antebellum South’s illiberalism is best compared to other fascist writings such as those of nineteenth-century ‘German critics.’ In these cases, fascism was contained primarily to the

104 Feldman 2008.
105 Griffin 2008b, 190.
106 Kallis 2000, 79.
107 Griffin 2008a, 186; for fascist aspects of Putinism, see Van Herpen 2013.
realm of intellectuals and writers. Like Fritz Stern who pointed out Germany’s illiberalism was not a coherent ideology but rather an amorphous ‘state of mind’ defined by a constant critique of liberalism, the South’s proto-fascism was not a coherent ideology but a similar mental state produced as a reaction to an intense cultural despair. The heuristic of palingenetic ultranationalism reveals the similarities in the rejection of liberalism in favour of an illiberal modernity. Specifically, this is why I believe Stern’s nineteenth-century ‘German critics’ are the most appropriate comparison. Although Stern considered the German critics’ ‘conservative revolution’ to be a distinct ideology from Nazi fascism, he ended his *A Politics of Cultural Despair* implying that it only led in such a direction. Stern even used the phrase ‘proto-Nazi beliefs’ to describe the ideas of these German intellectuals. Therefore, I used the term ‘proto-fascism’ to denote an embryonic form of fascism which had similar goals to the more advanced stages of fascism such as fascist movements and fascist regimes.

Although palingenetic ultranationalism can be stretched, I used it in the spirit of twentieth-century fascism to denote the promotion of an alternative modernity defined by a spirit of collectivity that explicitly rejected democracy, socialism and equality of race and sex. It is important to ask whether fascists, or those who experienced them first hand, themselves saw any similarities. For many Nazis, the South’s tradition of denying blacks their humanity served as a useful model for racial hierarchy in the Third Reich. Even the victims of Nazi brutality saw the similarities between the Antebellum South and Nazi fascism. A Ukrainian woman who came face to face with Nazi occupation wrote: ‘We are like slaves. Often the book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* comes to mind. Once we shed tears over those Negroes, now obviously we ourselves are experiencing the same thing.’ The kindred beliefs between fascism in the Antebellum South and in Germany are explicit among contemporary American right-wing extremists. The 2017 Unite the Right rally featured American neo-fascists carrying Confederate and Nazi flags together. Evidently American neo-nazis consider a close affinity between the Confederate States of America and Nazi Germany. I argue that this common spirit of palingenetic ultranationalism predates the

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108 Stern 1972.
109 Roel Reyes 2019, 309.
110 Stern 1974, 285.
111 Whitman 2017, 38.
112 Snyder 2015, 50.
113 Crider 2021.
Second World War, and that the rejection of liberal modernity in favour of an alternative and illiberal modernity first emerged in the Antebellum period.

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