

Pictures Frozen in Time: Determining Whether or Not Confederate Currency Vignettes Functioned as Proslavery Propaganda

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Abstract

Recently scholars have begun to reassess the importance of monetary imagery as a reflection of subjects integral to past societies. This study attempts to determine if the Confederate States of America utilized their vignettes to promote the institution of slavery. Using Grover Criswell's seventy defined varieties of Confederate notes issued between 1861 and 1864 as a sample, I engage scholars Richard Doty, Michael O'Malley, and Jules d'Hemecourt who argue that these bills functioned as a significant form of proslavery propaganda. With statistical examination of this material I suggest that such allegations are false and possess little physical evidence. My examination of this material challenges these allegations by studying the frequency that such scenes were employed and finding that they represent a very miniscule portion of the vignettes utilized by the Confederacy. My analysis shows that these notes generally promoted the "Southern cause," but did not promote slavery to any significant degree.

Paper dollars are one of the most widely used and accepted forms of transaction in modern-day American society. While cheques and credit cards are both equally popular instruments of exchange, cold hard cash is still the preferred means of commerce for many businesses throughout the country. Note collecting has also started to emerge as a burgeoning field of interest the world over as old bills' beauty and rarity gradually gain more appreciation. But this was not always the case. As recent as the early twentieth century, paper money carried with it predominantly negative connotations of instability and untrustworthiness. These suspicions were not unfounded since, from the time of its creation, America's currency was synonymous with runaway inflation, bank failure, and overall economic collapse.

To be sure, paper notes of the United States have experienced a diverse history; but do we ever question what types of cultural nuances are hidden beneath their surfaces? More importantly, do we ever wonder what kinds of stories these distinctions might be able to tell us about past societies? This article aims to show how our money's iconography may aid in answering such inquiries. As American Studies expert Heinz Tschachler explains, "pictures on currency often reflect the ideas and identities about political sovereignty that [were] prevalent" at

the time it was issued.¹ Numismatist Richard Doty agrees, stating that while notes today appear remarkably similar, those of the past were “actually intended to communicate with its audience and not simply to serve as an aid to commerce.”² In short, old paper bills are useful historical tools because their portraiture showcases the items and ideals that were once important to our nation and its peoples. But whose aspirations are *really* represented by these displays – the public or the individuals in charge? This essay suggests the latter group to be the primary motivator due to the noticeable interrelationship between political rhetoric and the scenes present on monetary scrip. Yet, although government officials may select the pictures, they are still intended to convey popular (public) sentiments. Therefore, “one of the recurrent themes found on our early paper is the construction of a national identity.”³

Nowhere is that claim more applicable than during the American Civil War. From 1861 to 1865, the Confederate States of America produced over one billion dollars in Treasury notes, each utilizing multiple pictures, known officially as *vignettes*. While the variety of such imagery ranges from the naturalistic to the whimsical, the majority of tableaux appear to focus on the southern way of life through representations of agriculture, patriotism, and victory. That concentration indicates that C.S.A. Treasury notes functioned as promoters of these “Confederate causes” by displaying symbols that spoke to the mentality of its audience, and the aspirations of Jefferson Davis’ cabinet.

Still, a smaller subset of portraits depicts African Americans, closely associated with the cultivation and harvesting of cotton. Scholars have, in turn, argued that the ideological justification and support of slavery formed the primary basis for these vignettes. Essentially, they assume that the institution itself was being promoted through the bills’ exchange, thus making them convenient vehicles for chattel advocacy and advancement. Accordingly, the following essay challenges these assertions by examining the frequency with which “slave scenes” were employed and determining that they represent a very miniscule portion of the Confederate vignette inventory. While their relative rarity may suggest that printers, engravers, and Confederate Treasury officials labored with insufficient time, resources, and manpower, it might also signal a currency system that emphasized subjects *other than* slavery. But in order to understand how the “Blueback” came into being, one must also realize the sordid background surrounding these specimens.⁴

Like most nations, early settlers of North America desired a monetary standard based exclusively on precious metals, such as gold and silver. Minted in the form of coins modeled off the Spanish dollar, this crude form of cash became the accepted monetary system among the Colonists. However, faced with a deficit of resources to mass-produce these tokens, as well as

¹ Heinz Tschachler, *The Greenback: Paper Money and American Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 95.

² Richard Doty, “When Money was Different,” *Common-Place Website*, Vol.6, No. 3 April 2006. Accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-06/no-03/doty/>.

³ Richard Doty, *Pictures From a Distant Country: Seeing America through Old Paper Money* (Atlanta, GA: Whitman Publishing, 2013), 1.

⁴ The term Blueback refers to a treasury note. Some scholars prefer “Blueback” (because the backs of these notes were often colored blue) while others prefer “Grayback” I have placed the term in quotation marks to denote my preference.

the on-set of the Revolutionary War, the idea of promissory paper notes began to take hold. Unfortunately, without an organized bank to back these “Continental dollars” and the persistent problem of counterfeits, by the War’s close this “fiat currency” was found to be completely worthless.⁵ The responsibility of creating a regulatory organization, in turn, fell to the newly formed United States Treasury, led by Alexander Hamilton. It was Hamilton who was prompted to establish the First National Bank of the United States and to stipulate that its means of exchange be based solely off those *coins* authorized by Congress.⁶

Yet the founding fathers understood that having a metallic monetary system could be problematic and were accordingly vague in their constitutional wording on this subject. While the document expressly forbid states from issuing their own “bills of credit,” it was “cleverly silent on whether the new national government could do so.”⁷ Their rationale was multifaceted. While the United States for all intents and purposes was to be a “hard money” nation, the framers realized that an emergency might someday arise that would require a reintroduction of promissory paper money.⁸ This “emergency” did indeed occur, taking the form of the Civil War; however, that was not the only reason for the proliferation of scrip. Heavy and often dangerous to transport, specie could become burdensome for long distance transactions. Thus, the Supreme Court also allowed “commercial banks to issue currency on the condition that their issues were redeemable in legal tender” coins when so desired by the bearer, and “based on loans made by the banks for marketable assets.”⁹

With Andrew Jackson’s dissolution of the National Bank by in 1836, the nation entered into The Free Banking Era. While most Southern citizens, like Old Hickory, remained committed to specie, the demand for these tokens proved to be too great. Therefore, during this period individual states, cities, and companies began producing paper money in an attempt to counteract the two depressions that resulted from the President’s decree. With no official body in place to regulate these “wildcat” agencies, the U.S. government, due partially to the Supreme Court’s allowance, as well as the overall feeling that “banking be operated as a free enterprise,” was left powerless to maintain a consistent form of legal tender.¹⁰ While the *Banking Act* (1863) “provided for a uniform national currency and the elimination of State Bank paper” in the northern regions, it was not until 1878 that the National Banking System was restored to all of America.¹¹ Further, it was not until 1913 that the Federal Reserve Bank was created to uphold the monetary security we have today.

⁵ Richard Doty, *America’s Money, America’s Story: A Chronicle of American Numismatic History* (Atlanta, GA: Whitman Publishing, 2008).

⁶ See U.S. Constitution, (Art. I, Sec. 8, Sub Sec. 5) and (Art. I, Sec. 10, Sub Sec. 1). See <http://constitutionus.com>.

⁷ Doty, “When Money was Different.”

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Richard H. Timberlake Jr., “The Significance of Unaccounted Currencies,” *Journal of Economic History* 41, no. 4 (1981), 856.

¹⁰ Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, *Currency in the United States* (Kansas: Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas, 1995), 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

During the Civil War, however, both public (the Confederate government and individual states) and private (banks and business) entities were charged with printing up paper money, amounting to a tremendous array of bills. Grover Criswell estimates that between 1861 and 1865, \$1.7 billion were issued through various acts of the Confederate congress and an additional “\$215 million [...] were] issued by the individual states, counties, railroads, private banks and merchants.”¹² This total may seem rather daunting but, according to Criswell, the \$1.7 billion put into circulation by the Confederacy can be classified into 72 separate specimens. This figure is further pared down by Criswell’s determination that of those 72, two are “bogus notes” that were passed off as legal tender.¹³ The following essay investigates this relatively small sample of 70 notes in order to determine whether or not the Confederate government, the force of influence behind the Confederate states, was promoting slavery through their vignettes.

The notes’ obverses often contain multiple images, typically illustrating a “central” vignette and one or more “peripheral” vignettes. For the purposes of this project, reverses were ignored since they are often blank or made up of only simple geometric designs. The data has been broken down into six subsets based on the type(s) of image(s) that are displayed on each bill, as well as by the series dates, which correspond to the various acts of the Confederate congress. These categories are defined and labeled as follows. Scenes showing individuals of African ancestry who may (or may not) be part of the chattel system, hereafter called “Black/Slave” vignettes.¹⁴ Scenes such as ships, trains, canals, blacksmiths, sailors, and farmhands, otherwise referred to as “Industrial/Commercial” vignettes. Scenes showing fictitious individuals related to Greek and Roman mythology known as “Allegorical/Mythical” vignettes. Scenes showing generals, members of government, Southern women, and former presidents, which are titled “(White) Heroes/Officials” vignettes. Scenes showing seats of power throughout the Confederacy in the form of “Buildings/Capitols.” And scenes showing seemingly unrelated portraits of children, Indians, design medallions, and stylized monetary values, which are labeled “Worth/Whimsy/Other” vignettes.¹⁵ (See Table 1).¹⁶

In total, there are only seven Confederate-issue “slave notes” in existence. The majority of these specimens showcase African Americans engaged in activities closely associated with the production and harvesting of cotton.¹⁷ Types 4 (a \$50 note) and 41 (a \$100 note) display two slaves weeding cotton, while Types 13 (a \$100 note) and 35 (a \$5 note) illustrate two slaves loading cotton onto a wagon and ship, respectively. On Type 23 (a \$10 note), two slaves are taking cotton to market on a wagon, whereas on Type 29 (also a \$10 note), one slave is picking

¹² Grover Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money* (Port Clinton, OH: BNR Press, 1996), 38.

¹³ *Ibid.* Neither one of these notes depicts a slave scene.

¹⁴ See Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), xi. “American tradition equates whiteness with freedom while consigning blackness to slavery.” But, while most slaves were indeed black, not all blacks were in fact slaves.

¹⁵ Christian M. Lengyel “Confederate Vignette Classification System.”

¹⁶ Lengyel Classification using Criswell notes: 1-70.

¹⁷ Tschachler, *The Greenback*, 88-9.

	# Of Central Images:	# Of Peripheral Images:	# Of Total Images:
“Slaves/Blacks” 1861-1862:	6	1	7
“Industrial/Commercial” 1861-1862:	12	13	25
“Allegorical/Mythical” 1861-1862:	16	23	39
“(White) Heroes/Officials” 1861-1865:	17	41	58
“Buildings/Capitols” 1862-1865:	8	0	8
“Worth/Whimsy/Other” 1861-1865:	12	4	16
Totals:	71	82	153

Table 1: The Numbers of Categorized Vignettes¹⁸

the crop itself. The outlier is the \$10 Type 30, also known as “General Francis Morton’s Sweet Potato Dinner,” where a slave is seen serving his master out in a field.¹⁹

While the noticeable interrelationship between blacks and cotton is undeniable, it does not necessarily indicate an emphasis on slavery. Indeed, “more than 4 million 500-pound bales of cotton were grown each year, which was 80% of the world’s supply.”²⁰ Eugene Genovese estimates that by 1860, “about 75 per cent of the South’s cotton crop went abroad,” and that cotton, not grain, constituted the main source of Southern income.²¹ It would, therefore, be reasonable to represent this industry on Treasury notes since they were originally used for the crops’ purchase.²² Unfortunately, most of the available iconography illustrating cotton fields also happened to illustrate those who typically *worked in* them. Could it be that the primary goal of these notes was to showcase King Cotton and just happened to include slaves as an aside?

¹⁸ Christian M. Lengyel. “Number of Categorized Vignettes.”

¹⁹ Grover Criswell Notes: 4, 13, 23, 29, 30, 35, 41. See appendix for example of these notes. Types 23 and 35 were “barrowed plates” from the Bank of Charleston.

²⁰ Arlie Slabaugh, *Confederate States Paper Money: Civil War Currency from the South* (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2012), 15.

²¹ Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 159.

²² See Raphael P. Thian, *Reports of the Secretary of the Treasury of the Confederate States of America*, 1878. Eventually, the Confederate Treasury issued “cotton certificates” and special bonds for the crops’ exchange; however, at the outset of the Civil War many found it convenient to utilize Treasury notes.

Perhaps, but that has not stopped scholars from speculating that a more negative set of interpretations can be drawn from these bills. In recent years, these authors have set out to prove that Confederate currency contains “coded” support for the system of slavery – literally, economically and allegorically.

Three dominant viewpoints emerge concerning this matter, each detailing an ulterior motive on the part of the Confederacy. The first of these is found in the recent monograph, *Pictures from a Distant Country: Seeing America through Old Paper Money*, written by numismatic expert Richard Doty. In his text, Doty asserts that “imagery did not spring to life in a single creative act; rather, it evolved over time reflecting a growing national sentiment and a growing skill in creating and disseminating a particular way of looking at the world.”²³ That outlook manifested itself in many ways; however, the author believes it was most pronounced in depictions of slaves on American money. Accordingly, Doty explains that slaves experienced a three-phase system of incorporation onto Southern bills, which attempted to promulgate the chattel system at home and in the Northern states.

The first phase included a blatant reworking of the printing plates by retouching known vignettes to “feature slave workers rather than free ones – turning white into black, if you will.”²⁴ The second and third parts were far subtler. Instead of just darkening existing images, new scenes were created that intimately linked blacks with agriculture rather than industry. Doty believes note makers had sound reasoning for doing so: “those in the North would be concerned with the wage and class threat represented by such people, while their counterparts in the South would be concerned with much larger matters still: if a slave proved intelligent enough to operate a machine, what was the justification for keeping him in bondage?”²⁵ Eventually, an even more refined set of tableaux began to emerge. While “the new depiction[s] continued to center on agriculture [...] the visage of the slave changed,” now reflecting *contentment* and *satisfaction* with his work.²⁶ These were the vignettes that circulated just prior to and during the Civil War, which, in Doty’s opinion, could not have been better timed. Technically, any note could circulate anywhere; “if a banker in the South chose to place an image *sympathetic* to slavery on his currency, Northern as well as Southern people would see that image,” thus adding validity to the latter’s convictions.²⁷

Although very skilled at making the distinction between public and private-issue bills, Dr. Doty sometimes loses sight of their significant differences. In his work the author occasionally refers to “Southern currency” as if the term applies to both groups, when in fact it does not. Throughout the Civil War both the Southern Banks *and* the Confederate government produced their own series’ of notes. While the Confederacy maintained their money “was ‘the accepted currency of the whole country,’” individual cities, banks, and businesses continued to

²³ Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, 122.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28. For examples of this phase see Farmer’s Bank of Onondaga \$1 note, printed in 1852 vs. Bank of Howardsville \$50 note, printed in 1861; or The Adrian Insurance Company \$1 note, printed in 1853 vs. Planters Bank of Fairfield \$5 note, printed in 1855. See *Pictures from a Different Country*, 122.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33. Emphasis added by the author.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

follow “free banking” regulations, and circulated scrip simultaneously.²⁸ As a result, the catalogue of monetary images becomes increasingly complex. By periodically merging these two divergent groups together historians, like Doty, are only causing greater confusion. Further, Doty’s statement about blacks being kept away from industry is not verifiable. According to Eugene Genovese, Secretary of the Treasury “C.G. Memminger wrote to [James H.] Hammond arguing that Negroes, not whites ought to be employed in the factories because a white proletariat would represent the greatest possible threat to the regime.”²⁹

More importantly, once the war began, business between the North and the South was effectively destroyed. Although “the border between the two sections remained extremely porous through the spring – and even longer in some places,” it gradually became more difficult to get goods from one section to the other.³⁰ If the South had wished to spread the “positive sides” of slavery through their currency, they chose the wrong time to do so. Even *before* fighting commenced, Northerners were wary about accepting Southern paper money because of its fluctuating values.³¹ Eugene Genovese explicates: “for years following the bank failures of 1837 the banknotes of New Orleans moved at a discount of from 10 to 25 percent,” and other banks’ scrip often closely followed suit.³² The North’s reluctance only increased during wartime, when Union forces *deliberately* tried to devalue the Confederacy’s Treasury notes. Heinz Tschachler explains how the “Greenbacks were exchanged, at first clandestinely, then quite openly, at a ruinous discount on Confederate notes.”³³ By the time General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Northern monies had depreciated the “Blueback” to such an extent that they were practically worthless.³⁴

Another aspect of this debate is outlined in Michael O’Malley’s *Face Value: The Entwined Histories of Money & Race in America*. Here the author argues that specie (coins) and slaves shared several commonalities that ultimately led to the latter’s immortalization on currency.³⁵ Slaves not only had worth as labor, they also “had value in capital [...which] allowed Americans to speculate and experiment with money.”³⁶ O’Malley explains that, “like the idea of gold’s intrinsic value, the supposedly non-negotiable racial difference of Africans stabilized value in exchange; [...] racial value anchored monetary value,” and forever bound the two systems together.³⁷ This bond was only strengthened during the Free Banking Era, when, “in

²⁸ Christopher Memminger, quoted in Arlie Slabaugh, *Confederate States Paper Money*, 13.

²⁹ Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 231.

³⁰ Doty, *America’s Money, America’s Story*, 126.

³¹ See Douglas B. Ball, *Financial Failure and Confederate Defeat* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991) and *Banking in the American South: From the Age of Jackson to Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

³² Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 22.

³³ Tschachler, *The Greenback*, 35. The term “Greenback” refers to Northern scrip.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35

³⁵ For a more abbreviated account, see Michael O’Malley, “Specie and Species: Race and the Money Question in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 99:2 (1994): 369-95.

³⁶ Michael O’Malley, *Face Value: The Entwined Histories of Money & Race in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

the absence of a central bank, slaves served in place of gold,” sometimes being used as “black flesh coins.”³⁸ O’Malley reasons that this was perhaps the greatest motivating factor for putting African Americans on notes, as it symbolized the economic importance of “negro bodies.”³⁹ He, like Doty, posits “paper notes [...] shared a visual vocabulary” that would undoubtedly influence merchants to continue chattel sales just by looking into their pocketbooks.⁴⁰

According to this line of argument, bills also provided the perfect avenue to propagate slavery in the North. O’Malley agrees with Doty that “by the eve of the Civil War, Southern paper money tended to feature benign and positive images of healthy slaves toiling in subservience: a positive message [...] that the circulating money carried with it as it traveled North.”⁴¹ O’Malley is of the opinion that if “slaves, not gold, formed the capital base of credit” in the South, than it should be obvious that they be promoted through the exchange system.⁴² After all, “bankers put images [...] on their notes not simply from sentiment,” but rather because they were important components to the proliferation of the Southern way of life.⁴³ But while this statement is true, on the eve of secession banks were more concerned about going broke than they were about what types of vignettes appeared on their bills.

Almost immediately after declaring themselves an independent nation, the C.S.A. ordered Southern banks to loan their specie to the government in exchange for Confederate Treasury notes. Their decree had two adverse results. First, the act of seceding stirred a panic, which caused citizens to remove their money from the banks. Second, the numbers of notes needed to match these demands were unfortunately not tendered until mid-1861. Tellers, therefore, found themselves lacking scrip when the public demanded it. If, according to Larry Schweikart, “bankers were preoccupied with the slave question, few evidenced such concern in their personal letters until after secession was at hand [...] and] even then, they were principally concerned with the practical effects of secession on business.”⁴⁴ Schweikart’s claim can be verified by simply perusing Raphael Thian’s 3000-page compendium of Treasury correspondences, in which no Southern banker *ever* expressed pro or anti-slavery sentiments. Their need for currency was so great that the majority of them just desired *some* form of respectable money to fill their vaults, be it notes that depicted slaves or not.⁴⁵

An equally important query is if blacks were so linked to the economy during the Free Banking Era, why were their likenesses noticeably absent from bills issued before 1850? Richard Doty raises a very valid point with regards to this issue. During his 30-year career as a curator at the Smithsonian Institute, Dr. Doty investigated countless currency specimens, and he admits

³⁸ O’Malley, *Face Value*, 44.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁴ Larry Schweikart, *Banking in the American South: From the Age of Jackson to Reconstruction*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 286.

⁴⁵ The more persistent problem was counterfeiting and thus the majority of bankers wanted notes with higher security features rather than slave vignettes. See Raphael P. Thian, *Correspondences with the Treasury Department of the Confederate States of America*, 1880.

“among the thousands of notes that I have examined at the Smithsonian [...] and elsewhere, I discovered precisely *one* image of African Americans prior to 1850.”⁴⁶ Doty credits this underrepresentation to the mood of the country during this period: “the economy, recovering from hard times of the late 1830s, was set to reach new heights; and Americans had more important [...] things to think about than a potential conflict over slavery.”⁴⁷ Instead, “the South was yearning for the good old days of unfettered local control over local affairs, and while its view on the past was not accurate in all respects, there was enough truth in it to give pause to reflective Northerners” throughout the war.⁴⁸

While Michael O’Malley’s arguments are closely related to those of Richard Doty, a different rationale is professed by Jules d’Hemecourt. Dr. d’Hemecourt, while not an historian, claims the use of allegorical images in conjunction with slave vignettes points to a “divine” historical justification of chattel servitude. He believes that “the imposition of such classical figures suggest[s] that the slave system was not only economically crucial but also in perfect compliance with revered tradition.”⁴⁹

Typical of many Confederate bills, the \$100 note honors a white hero of the South, in this case the late senator [...] John C. Calhoun. But the largest vignette [...] is devoted to a field scene in which slaves serenely hoe cotton. The symbolic national figure of Columbia (a classically illustrated female originally used to portray the United States), gazing upward from the right foreground, seems to offer tacit blessing to the concept of forced labor, suggesting that it is integral to a national purpose... Such conjoined motifs reappear throughout Confederate currency [...] providing a sense of traditional, almost heavenly, acceptance of the Southern System.⁵⁰

In the same article, d’Hemecourt continuously points to the various notes issued by the Confederacy, Southern states, and private banks during this four year window as evidence that “slavery was actively and aggressively promoted as the principal bulwark of Confederate prosperity” and carried moralistic undertones in its presentation.⁵¹

Dr. d’Hemecourt seems to be suggesting that by mixing images of slavery with emblematic representations, the South had found the perfect form of propaganda. The earliest \$50 Confederate bill (which d’Hemecourt incorrectly labels as a \$5 note), depicts slaves picking cotton under the supervision of their white master, alongside scenes of Agriculture and Industry. D’Hemecourt discusses how “the clever juxtaposition of classical icons and idyllic scenes of modern involuntary servitude serves notice that the government bases its economy on slavery, and that history and heritage validate the system.”⁵² The use of mythological goddesses

⁴⁶ Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, 122. Emphasis added by the author.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28

⁴⁸ Doty, *America’s Money, America’s Story*, 133.

⁴⁹ Jules d’Hemecourt, “Beyond Face Value: Slavery Iconography in Confederate Currency,” *Beyond Face Value Website*, accessed July 1, 2012. http://exhibitions.blogs.lib.lsu.edu?page_id=707.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

accompanied by portraits of government officials only drives this point home as it justifies the “peculiar institution” as “not only moral but legal” as well.⁵³

This is a profound revelation, but the evidence from the notes challenges d’Hemecourt’s argument. Such scenes were *not* “typical” on notes issued by the Confederate government – far from it. Just because a printer happened to pair two vignettes together may be nothing more than a coincidence, especially since such combinations often occurred out of convenience and necessity. As will be addressed later in this essay, ill prepared printing houses often selected their imagery based on what they had at their disposal. In fact, many firms’ work at this time touted “artful but irrelevant images of Greek goddesses, civic virtues, and the odd railway train” all on the same note.⁵⁴ So although one picture might have been used in conjunction with several others, that placement does not indicate an ulterior motive on the part of Confederate officials.

This is not the only shortcoming of d’Hemecourt’s case. Like Doty, d’Hemecourt is somewhat careless in his observations. Throughout his article (and most of the web archive), currency is grouped together so haphazardly that the untrained scholar assumes public and private-issue bills to be one and the same. If d’Hemecourt’s lead is followed then there is no problem accepting the statement that “issuers of paper money in the Confederacy openly sought validation for slavery;” however, this is not the case.⁵⁵ While the Confederate government was certainly guilty of enacting numerous ploys to see the slave system continued, they did not do so with their currency. A statistical assessment of the notes yields scant evidence to support the claim that “Confederate currency was designed [...] to validate [a] system that held black laborers in perpetual slavery.”⁵⁶

Instead, statistics indicate that “Slave/Black” scenes represent one of the smallest groups of vignettes on Confederate currency (See Table 2). With regard to the “total images studied” sample, Slaves and Blacks make up 4.6% of the 153 aggregate vignettes examined, placing them sixth among the other six sections.⁵⁷ Turning to the “total central images” sample, Slaves and Blacks come in last place at a mere 8.4% of 71 central vignettes appraised.⁵⁸ Finally, in the “total peripheral images” sample, Slaves and Blacks rank fifth at 1.2% of 82 peripheral vignettes, only outnumbering “Buildings/Capitols,” which have 0% in that category. These figures are taken from seven different varieties of notes, with six showing centralized scenes and one showing a peripheral tableau.⁵⁹ Also important is the fact that all but one of these notes was printed during 1861, a period when the variety of imagery was at its height and when note makers were scrambling to find suitable designs.

⁵³ d’Hemecourt, “Beyond Face Value: Slavery Iconography in Confederate Currency.”

⁵⁴ Doty, *America’s Money, America’s Story*, 139.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics of Confederate Treasury Notes.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Criswell notes: 1-70. Only one bill printed during 1862 depicts any type of black/slave scene. This appears on a \$100 note and was produced early on in the 1862 series.

	# Of Central Images:	# Of Peripheral Images:	# Of Total Images:	% Of Central Images:	% Of Peripheral Images:	% All Images Studied:
“Slaves/Blacks” 1861-1862:	6	1	7	8.4%	1.2%	4.6%
“Industrial/Commercial” 1861-1862:	12	13	25	16.9%	15.8%	16.3%
“Allegorical/Mythical” 1861-1862:	16	23	39	22.5%	28.0%	25.5%
“(White) Heroes/Officials” 1861-1865:	17	41	58	23.9%	50.0%	37.9%
“Buildings/Capitols” 1862-1865:	8	0	8	11.3%	0%	5.2%
“Worth/Whimsy/Other” 1861-1865:	12	4	16	16.9%	4.9%	10.4%
Totals:	71	82	153	Approx. 100%	Approx. 100%	Approx. 100%

Table 2: The Numbers and Percentages of Categorized Vignettes⁶⁰

Given this information, it is difficult to believe that currency of the Confederate States of America functioned as a form of proslavery propaganda. Simple statistics show that bills depicting Blacks and Slaves were designed and circulated in such small numbers (3,554,363) that they were unlikely to have affected the mindset of the average Southern citizen. When added up, these notes equal just 11 per cent of the 32,285,409 bills issued between 1861 and 1862, leaving 89 per cent that could potentially promote causes *other than* slavery.⁶¹ Since all of these notes were printed when the assortment of images was at its most diverse, it is quite improbable that an 11 per cent figure reflects a genuine attempt to pictorially advocate chattel labor. Further, that percentage only becomes smaller as the years progress. By 1865, approximately 85,095,974 notes had been circulated among the public, which would significantly reduce the potential indoctrinating effects of slave scenes.⁶² At the wars’ close these images amounted to only four per cent of the aggregate, and thus would have been quite rarely seen in daily transactions.⁶³

⁶⁰ Christian M. Lengyel. “Number and Percentage of Categorized Vignettes.”

⁶¹ Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics,” using Criswell notes: 1-55.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Using Criswell notes: 1-72.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Using *Ibid.*, 56-72.

Production numbers are also misleading. Notes displaying slaves and blacks were only issued in the denominations of \$100, \$50, \$10, and \$5. With the two counterfeits excluded, a total of seven different \$100 bills, or 2,457,028 individual notes, circulated between 1861 and 1862. Of that figure, 1,285,827 (52 per cent) were “ethnic,” and shown in two issues.⁶⁴ But by early 1862 “notes of \$100 cannot rightly be regarded as being a real portion on the paper currency of the country, [since] not one dealer in fifty wish[ed] them” due to a rash of forgeries.⁶⁵ This resulted in Christopher Memminger instituting a mass recall in the fall of 1862, which potentially included over 600,000 \$100 bills that bore a prominent slave vignette and greatly reduced the gross amount of “black notes” in circulation.⁶⁶ Further, it is highly unlikely that the average Southern citizen would have regularly possessed a note of such high value. Albert A. Nofi computes “that on the eve of war a common laborer received about a dollar for a ten-to-twelve hour day, and usually worked a 55 to 65 hour week, for a monthly income of \$30.00.”⁶⁷ Although heavy-duty inflation eventually caused this wage to rise, by the end of 1862 the ratio of Confederate dollars to gold was only 3.25:1.⁶⁸ In turn, this kept earnings relatively constant, but also lessened an ordinary person’s chances of seeing one of these \$100 bills.

More widely seen denominations are equally problematic. The seven varieties of \$50 bills amount to 1,460,106 notes. Only 1,606 (0.001 per cent) portrayed a slave, and were shown in just one issue.⁶⁹ A similar situation is witnessed with the \$5 series, where of the 7,982,701 bills printed, 7,160 (0.009 per cent) depicted chattel workers.⁷⁰ The majority of these vignettes instead appeared on the 8,055,892 \$10 notes issued between 1861 and 1862, which was the common form of pay for Confederate soldiers.⁷¹ Of the eleven \$10 varieties, three depict black field workers; yet this sample can be deceptive. While African Americans appear more here than on any other denomination, the production figure of 2,246,770 bills is equivalent to just 27.9% of the total \$10 issues.⁷² Perhaps these notes were meant to be circulated among Confederate troops in an attempt to stir anti-emancipatory sentiments; however, it is doubtful that this percentage would have made much of an impact. Thus, it seems fair to assert that slavery carried with it a relatively low priority on the Treasury notes of the Confederate States of America.

While this essay has argued that the Confederate government did not deliberately use their currency to promote slavery, they more than likely had a reason for not doing so. Based

⁶⁴ Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics.”

⁶⁵ Thian, *Correspondences with the Treasury Department*, 1881: 482.

⁶⁶ \$22 million were redeemed, but \$130 million remained in circulation.

⁶⁷ Albert A. Nofi, *A Civil War Treasury: Being a Miscellany of Arms and Artillery, Facts and Figures, Legends and Lore, Muses and Minstrels, Personalities and People* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, Inc., 1992), 383.

⁶⁸ Marc D. Weidenmier, “Turning Points in the U.S. Civil War: Views from the Grayback Market,” *Southern Economic Journal* 68 (2002): 886-9.

⁶⁹ Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See Albert Nofi, *A Civil War Treasury*, 381. Nofi provides a helpful chart that lays out the pay figures for Confederate (and Union) soldiers. Monthly earnings ranged from \$11.00 to \$301.00, but the majority of serving men (privates, corporals, and sergeants) received approximately \$13 to \$17 a month, and was usually paid in 10-dollar notes.

⁷² Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics,” using Criswell notes: 4, 23, 29, 30, 35, and 41.

solely on the sheer amount of support that this “peculiar institution” received in the South, one could make a case that note makers had to see the advantages of such a convenient form of indoctrination. In turn, it is rather incongruous for slavery *not* to have appeared more frequently on an item that would so easily disseminate itself within the public sphere. Further, the fact that slave vignettes were used, albeit minimally, at the start of the war and then quickly vanished, does little to explicate this issue. This is a difficult question to answer; however, by investigating the background surrounding these specimens insights might be gleaned that help clarify why slave scenes were not more prevalent on Confederate scrip.

The most straightforward cause for this dearth may stem from a simple lack of availability. As Dr. d’Hemecourt so appropriately mentions, “chronic shortages in both artistic manpower [...] and essential supplies eventually strangled Southern publishing,” and the Confederate Treasury Department was no exception.⁷³ According to Neely *et al.*, “so desperate was the fledgling country for engravers that it had serious difficulty even printing a respectable-looking national currency.”⁷⁴ Originally printed using the *intaglio* (engraved plates) process on cotton paper, the quality of notes began to decrease as “ink and rag paper became increasingly scarce.”⁷⁵ This was compounded by the army’s need for soldiers, which effectively drained the talent pool of artisans for the duration of the war. Although the Confederacy still attempted to maintain a “proper” monetary system, these added pressures made the realization of such a goal progressively difficult.⁷⁶

Ink, paper, and manpower are all essential for producing bills; however, the plates also play a key role in the process. Since “most of the engravers of bank note plates were in the North, as were the plates,” the South lost access to these resources when they seceded from the Union.⁷⁷ For a brief time the National Banknote Company, which had a branch office in New Orleans, continued to supply the newly formed Confederacy with currency.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, this partnership came to an abrupt end on April 19, 1861 when President Abraham Lincoln declared an official blockade between the Northern and the Southern regions. A few weeks later, authorities raided NBNC’s New York office, and ordered them to cease their Southern dealings.⁷⁹ But this was not the end of the National Bank Note Company, thanks to the efforts of an ambitious (Southern) employee named Samuel Schmidt.

Just because the Northern operation was out of the picture that did not mean the Southern contingent could not continue business as usual. Samuel Schmidt, who headed NBNC’s three-man firm in New Orleans, decided to continue producing Confederate Treasury notes under the

⁷³ d’Hemecourt, “Beyond Face Value: Slavery Iconography in Confederate Currency.”

⁷⁴ Mark Neely, Harold Holzer, and Gabor Boritt, *The Confederate Image: Prints of the Lost Cause*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 6.

⁷⁵ d’Hemecourt, “Beyond Face Value: Slavery Iconography in Confederate Currency.”

⁷⁶ Tschachler, *The Greenback*, 34.

⁷⁷ Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*, 39.

⁷⁸ See William H. Griffiths, *The Story of the American Bank Note Company* (New York: The American Bank Note Company Press, 1959).

⁷⁹ This included the first four Confederate notes (known as the Montgomery Issue), which was authorized by the Act of March 9, 1861. This series happened to include one slave scene. See *Ibid.*

alias of the Southern Bank Note Company.⁸⁰ However, this too was short-lived. The Union's capture of New Orleans on April 24, 1862 officially brought an end to SBNC's wartime involvement.⁸¹ The South soon faced the fact that it needed to find not one, but several new printing houses to meet their constituency's growing demand for currency. Eventually, they settled upon the lithography firms of Hoyer & Ludwig, Archer & Daly, and Keating & Ball, as well as independent agents like Blanton Duncan and James T. Patterson; yet, there were to be severe costs for their compromise.⁸²

One element that suffered was the variety of images that they could select for their bills. Lithography is a vastly different medium than intaglio, using stones rather than steel plates. More importantly, lithographers were not used to printing paper money, meaning their selections of imagery did not match the parameters of the banknotes. Hoyer & Ludwig fell into this category, as before the war the company had mainly produced stock certificates, sheet music, and maps.⁸³ Therefore, the firm "had a limited number of suitable lithographic views or 'cuts' from which to choose (for it had never intended doing business as currency printer)."⁸⁴ While companies like Keating & Ball executed their tasks with slightly more finesse, occasionally even printing with the intaglio method, all note making companies were faced with the same predicament: how to produce an official and quick currency with few resources and limited expertise.⁸⁵

To compensate for their handicaps, printers were forced to select one of two alternatives: using the images they already had in stock, or making new stone lithographs with existing works of art. A prime example of the latter process is "General Francis Morton's Sweet Potato Dinner," which was actually painted during the Revolutionary War and hung in the Charleston state capitol.⁸⁶ When the Civil War began, paintings like this one provided convenient sources of imagery for Southern printmakers, such as Blanton Duncan, who wished to illustrate a sense of peace and harmony through the lens of a more bucolic past.⁸⁷ Of course other "Southern printers simply lifted by offset [...] scenes that had been used on bank notes they had access to."⁸⁸ Indeed, "many notes did not even picture Southern scenes, but were vignettes used before in the North."⁸⁹ By the end of 1862 these "recycled" pictures accounted for over half the vignettes in circulation.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ This was known as the Richmond Issue of 1861 (The capital was moved from Montgomery to Richmond in May of that year). SBNC continued to be one of many note producers for the Confederacy well into 1861. In all, this company issued no slave vignettes for the Confederate States of America. See *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Just prior to the Union entering New Orleans, Christopher Memminger ordered that Schmidt's printing equipment be seized due to his inability to meet deadlines. Unfortunately, they were seized by the Union before Memminger could do so. See Raphael P. Thian, *Correspondences*.

⁸² See *Ibid.*

⁸³ Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, 113.

⁸⁴ Doty, *America's Money, America's Story*, 129. Parenthesis in original.

⁸⁵ Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, 123.

⁸⁶ See Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*.

⁸⁷ Tschachler, *The Greenback*, 89.

⁸⁸ Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*, 39.

⁸⁹ Slabaugh, *Confederate States Paper Money*, 23.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

The rest just made do with what they had available in their files. In order to come up with general approximations of previous bills, firms like Hoyer & Ludwig often utilized disjointed vignettes, “not because [they] were identical to what had been on the earlier note[s] but because [they were] about the same size.”⁹¹ The outcomes were images that had a “cut and paste” appearance, resembling stock certificates rather than currency.⁹² So what types of iconography were featured on Confederate *bonds*? Typically they matched the product of the company for whom the certificate was issued.⁹³ Thus, Railroads depicted rail scenes, canal companies depicted canal boats, and cotton manufactures depicted cotton fields. But tableaux of cotton crops came with an added component. These scenes also incorporated the people who were entwined with cotton production: slaves. Whether it was the lithographer’s intention to promote slavery by selecting such imagery is uncertain. Still, it stands to reason that the cotton – not the slaves – was probably the primary focus of these vignettes, due to its significant role in the Southern economy.⁹⁴

The war’s progression indeed had a harsh impact on the South’s financial situation. Simply put, the more new bills that were issued, the less old bills were worth. While the true pains of this inflation spike were not fully felt until July of 1863, the continuous printing of Treasury notes had a devastating effect on Confederate currency’s overall value.⁹⁵ It also put a tremendous strain on the lithography stones as they were heavily used to match a growing public demand and reverse the monetary deficit. But, whereas the hardened steel plates used in the intaglio process could usually withstand this high frequency of use, the soft limestone used in lithography could not.⁹⁶ Unfortunately, when the Southern Bank Note Company dissolved at the beginning of 1862, the intaglio system all but vanished from note making. In its wake limestone was left as the primary medium for printing, and with it came a series of drawbacks.⁹⁷ Lithography was not as sophisticated as intaglio. Lines were often ill defined and the amount of security that could be incorporated into the designs was significantly reduced. Additionally, “the slender stock of artwork available [...] was available to virtually any other lithographer, honest or not, as the portraits and scenes had been around for decades.”⁹⁸ This left the door wide open for any able-bodied counterfeiter to reproduce the Treasury’s notes with relative ease, which they usually did without hesitation.⁹⁹ Further, the printing houses’ crude presentations did little to instill the sense of nationhood that the Confederacy desired. Instead, notes resembled unbalanced pieces of paper that were often as primitive as those produced by unauthorized agencies.

⁹¹ Doty, *America’s Money, America’s Story*, 129.

⁹² Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, 123.

⁹³ Neely Jr., Holzer, and Boritt. *The Confederate Image; Prints of the Lost Cause*, 33.

⁹⁴ Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, 54-72.

⁹⁵ Marc D. Weidenmier, “Turning Points in the U.S. Civil War: Views from the Grayback Market,” *Southern Economic Journal* 68:4 (2002). July 1-3, 1863 was the date of the infamous Gettysburg campaign.

⁹⁶ See Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*, 53.

⁹⁷ See Larry Schweikart, *Banking in the American South*, 296.

⁹⁸ Doty, *Pictures from a Distant Country*, 123.

⁹⁹ See Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

More alarming was the amount of attention that the lithography stones required. Although the number of imprints that could be made from a single stone varied considerably, “the maximum appears to have ranged generally from 3000 to 5000” before the quality deteriorated to such a degree that a new stone needed to be created.¹⁰⁰ Doing so wasted valuable energy and artistic manpower that neither the engravers nor the Treasury had at their disposals. Slave vignettes (and other tableaus in place on earlier notes) were quite detailed and required a great deal of skill to create.¹⁰¹ Since the Treasury tried to produce approximately 200,000 notes a day by November of 1862, new stones would have to be prepared at least 25 times per session.¹⁰² Therefore, it would seem sensible that as the more complicated designs started to wear out, the Confederate Treasury simply replaced them with images that could be hastily constructed. Due to time deficits, engravers perhaps chose not to concern themselves with more complex images, which may easily explain why slave tableaus are not only relatively scarce, but also disappear after 1862.

This date holds much significance as it also represents several turning points in the Civil War. Besides signaling the beginning of a Northern-dominated warfront, 1862 was also the year in which Abraham Lincoln emancipated the slaves. On September 22, “Lincoln declared that as of January 1, 1863, ‘all persons held as slaves, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion,’ would be ‘forever free.’”¹⁰³ Coincidentally, slave vignettes cease to exist in October 1862, less than a month after the President made this decree. But why? Certainly it could be argued that Mr. Lincoln’s actions did not directly affect the Confederate States of America because they had already become an independent nation. However, according to Richard Current, “the Confederacy was seriously weakened [...] by the long-term effects of Lincoln’s emancipation policy.”¹⁰⁴ Current goes on to explain that “early on, [Jefferson] Davis feared that it would handicap Confederate efforts to gain recognition and intervention” from potential allies in France and Great Britain.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it is logical that scenes blatantly illustrating slavery were removed after this time, and replaced with pictures more closely associated with states’ rights.

In reality that is what the South had been professing the war was about since its secession. Robert Francis Engs as well as numerous other historians noted that, “the new republic claimed its justification to be the protection of state rights,” or at least that is what they intended to sell to people abroad.¹⁰⁶ Davis and his cabinet were well aware of “the universal hostility of Europe to slavery,” and therefore attempted to downplay that element as much as

¹⁰⁰ Philip H. Chase, *Confederate Treasury Notes: The Paper Money of the Confederate States of America 1861-1865* (Philadelphia, PA, 1947), 133. Lithography stones are made by transferring an image from a steel plate onto a porous type of limestone that, when rubbed with fat, resists ink – thus creating a relief copy of the original image.

¹⁰¹ Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*.

¹⁰² Thian, *Correspondences*, 676.

¹⁰³ Robert Francis Engs, “Emancipation Proclamation,” *Encyclopedia of the Confederacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 2:530.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 532

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Richard N. Current, “Slavery during the Civil War,” *Encyclopedia*, 4:1441.

possible.¹⁰⁷ But when President Lincoln launched the Emancipation Proclamation, it thrust this “peculiar institution” into the spotlight. The C.S.A. thus found it hard to pass off the “states’ rights issue, especially when their currency featured slaves.

Still, it is important not to sell paper money short. It is, after all, one of the greatest sources of publicity and could potentially be an excellent means of propaganda. As Heinz Tschachler reminds us, “a national currency may foster a sense of nationhood only [...] in accordance with the wishes of the nation.”¹⁰⁸ If this is correct, perhaps the Confederate government wished to foster a sense of nationhood through its notes, but placed the emphasis on a subject *other than* slavery. Indeed, slavery was a major component of the Civil War; however, historians often lose sight of the Southerner’s mindset and assume that every element of their lives revolved around this institution. Maybe so, but it does seem rather unrealistic that something *that* important would not appear on more than a small percentage of the government’s bills. So what did appear?

Of the all the categories studied, two stand out as being unusually high in representation on Confederate notes (See Table 3): “Allegorical/Mythical” and “(White) Heroes/Officials.” More intriguing are the facts that between 1862 and 1863 allegorical scenes practically die out, while heroic tableaux *increase* in number. Interestingly, there seems to be a noticeable shift during the autumn of 1862 towards more “realistic” types of vignettes, with “(White) Heroes/Officials” becoming the dominant category for the remainder of the Civil War. A similar pattern is apparent in the “Industrial/Commercial” and “Building/Capitol” arenas. Beginning precisely in the fall months of 1862, Buildings and Capitols seem to become more favored and completely replace Industrial/ Commercial tableaux.¹⁰⁹ So why did these shifts take place? This essay suggests that the Confederacy initially utilized their paper money to depict their cause as just, blessed by God, Nature, and Industry for the first two years of the war, but changed to a more “concrete” set of characters as the Union started to dominate the warfront after Sharpsburg (Antietam).¹¹⁰

Representational figures account for one of the largest samples of image-types utilized by the Confederacy during the early Civil War. These scenes, which this essay labels as Allegorical/Mythical, account for 25.5 per cent of the 153 aggregate vignettes issued between 1861 and 1864, with 22.5 per cent placed centrally and 28.0 per cent placed peripherally. Of all the allegorical and mythical images, the dominant depictions are of Ceres, the goddess of agriculture and grain, Proserpine/a, her daughter as well as the goddess of corn, Columbia, the goddess of justice, and Minerva, the patron goddess of war, liberty, hope, and also the Confederacy.¹¹¹ In total, such scenes account for 55.3 per cent of the Confederate vignettes issued between 1861 and 1862, with none being produced after those years. Even more pronounced are the portraits of white heroes and officials, which make up 37.9 per cent of the

¹⁰⁷ Richard N. Current, “Emancipation Proclamation,” *Encyclopedia*, 2:532.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*.

¹¹⁰ This event took place in September of 1862, only a month before the vignettes changed.

¹¹¹ James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Second Ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008).

vignettes issued from 1861 through 1864 and 69 per cent of the vignettes issued from 1861 through 1862.¹¹² They mainly include those persons who were influential to the South and Confederate government, such as John Calhoun, Clement Clay, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, Jefferson Davis, George Washington, Alexander Stephens, Lucy Pickens, and Christopher Memminger.¹¹³

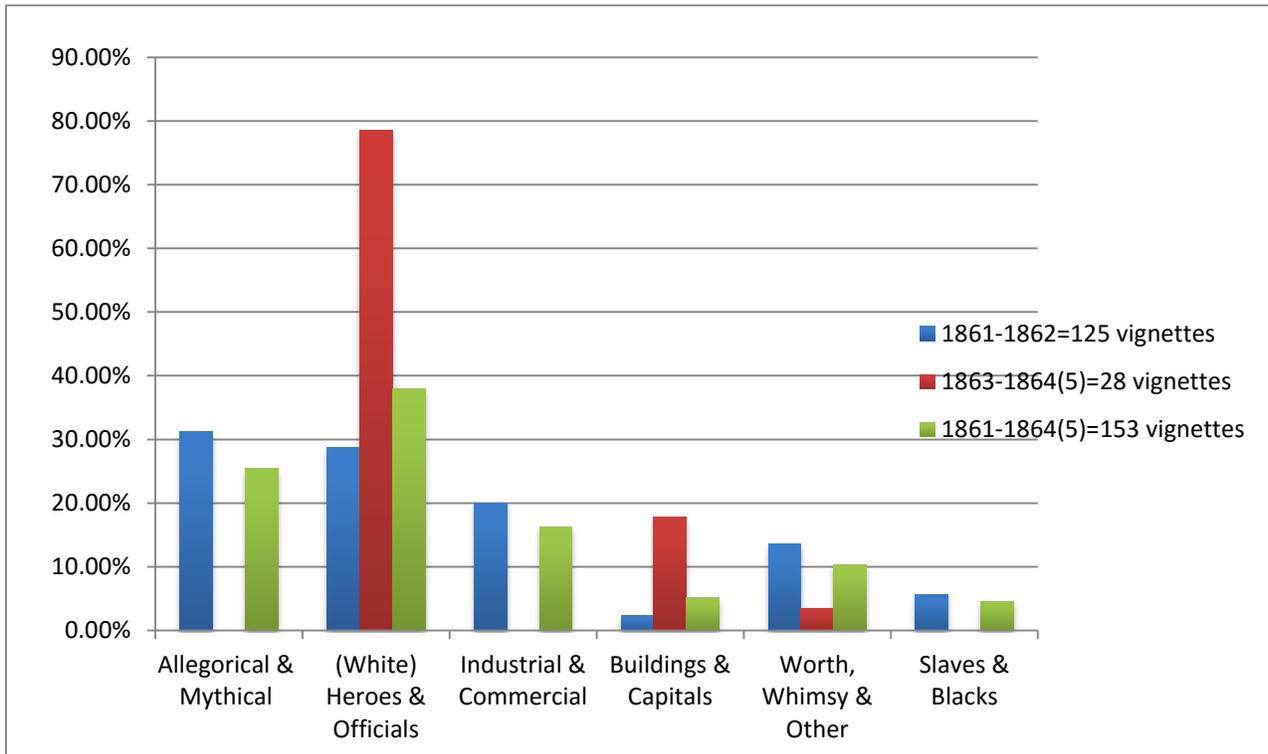


Table 3: Bar Chart of “Totals” of Categorized Vignettes (1861-2 & 1863-4)¹¹⁴

Considering those percentages, definite “godly” accentuations on agriculture, prosperity, and victory are apparent during the first two years of the war; however, these images ceased to exist by 1863. This disappearance might be explained by several reasons: either, as stated above, the ornate plates bearing allegorical scenes wore out after 1862 and were unable to be replaced; or, as the South began experiencing significant losses, the concept of a “divine right of nationhood” started to fade. Beginning in late-1862, Southern troops were dealt major blows to their campaign. With Confederate defeats at Sharpsburg (Antietam) in October of that year and Gettysburg nine months later, the CSA found itself on a downward spiritual (and monetary) spiral.¹¹⁵ However, though the notion of triumph may have dissipated, reverence towards the

¹¹² Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics.” See Grover Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*, Types 1-55.

¹¹³ Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*, 41-3.

¹¹⁴ Christian M. Lengyel. “Bar Chart of “Totals” of Categorized Vignettes (1861-2 & 1863-4).”

¹¹⁵ See Marc D. Weidenmier, “Turning Points in the U.S. Civil War,” 880-2.

Confederacy never diminished. Esteemed figures logically found their way onto Confederate currency, especially following these disasters, since it was in their leadership that the people were invested. Therefore, throughout the war, these individuals had their likenesses widely promoted among the public, allowing all to see who *actually* determined their futures.

Given the large numbers in both of these categories, the Confederate States of America may have initially utilized their paper money to market themselves as a “blessed” nation, under the watchful eye of several protective beings. Goddesses of agriculture, justice, and hope all point to a venerable “Southern cause” sanctified as “righteous” and “good.” Further, “by choosing a figure representing Plenty or Agriculture they could successfully advertise the prosperity of local trade” as well as that of their nation.¹¹⁶ These early tableaus indicate the items that *really* were of highest concern to the government: successful crops, victory, and, most importantly, the preservation of the Confederacy. But as the North started to take the upper hand, destroying the South’s plantations and aspirations for dominion, the idea of metaphoric symbols may have lost their appeal. Southerners conceivably wanted more concrete evidence that their cause was justified and turned their attention to realistic heroes instead of emblematic ones. This could account for why, during the last two years of the war, Confederate currency became noticeably inundated with vignettes of government officials, former (Southern) generals, and other distinguished individuals, all who provided the public with *tangible* sources of inspiration.

Industrial/Commercial scenes follow a pattern similar to tableaus of allegory and mythology. While not nearly as popular as their emblematic brethren, Industrial/ Commercial vignettes came into being at the beginning of the War and disappeared promptly after the Act of October 13th 1862. Exactly at this point, a new type of imagery made its way onto “Blueback” dollars: portraits that prominently displayed Confederate buildings and capitols. Yet, for the first two years of the war, idyllic recreations of industry and commerce held their own and comingled with the other types of iconography. In sum, 16.3 per cent of the entire vignette catalogue was comprised of Industrial/Commercial subjects, including 12 (16.9 per cent) central and 13 (15.8 per cent) peripheral pictures.¹¹⁷ In all, 61.9 per cent of the currency printed between 1861 and 1862 incorporate at least one Industrial/Commercial vignette; however, the most frequently repeated examples tend to depict trains, sailors, and seafaring vessels.¹¹⁸ Moreover, of the 22 total Industrial/Commercial notes, 18 display rail or maritime items, and over half (11) showcase these scenes in a centralized location.¹¹⁹ A similar statistical trend is noticeable: 12,482,422 out of a total 20,000,354 (62.4 per cent) Industrial/ Commercial bills feature a ship, a sailor, or a train. It is obvious from this placement and percentage that transportation, as well as the people, places, and things associated with it, were key considerations for the Confederate government.

¹¹⁶ Tschachler, *The Greenback*, 79.

¹¹⁷ Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics.” See Table 1.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 20,000,354 notes (out of 32,285,409) have at least one I/C scene featured somewhere. See also Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*. See types 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 27, 28, 29, 36, 37, 39, 40, 44, and 45 for examples of trains, ships, and sailors.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Types 2, 3, 5, 9, 15, 18, 37, 39, 40, 44, and 45.

That being said, in October of 1862 the Treasury Department released a new series of paper dollars, some of which featured various powerhouses located throughout the Confederacy. Although they only accounted for 5.2 per cent of the total wartime image-inventory, Buildings/Capitols were placed on 8 of the 23 (34.8 per cent) bills that made up the fifth, sixth and seventh acts.¹²⁰ Unlike any other kind of pictorial vignette, these tableaux occupied exclusively central places on “Blueback” currency and were printed on only low-denomination bills. While just 11.3 per cent of the total central pictures were capitol buildings, over 34 per cent of the notes produced between the Act of October 13, 1862 and the Act of February 17, 1864 used such portraits.¹²¹ This points to the same trend as outlined above: like scenes of allegory and mythology, representations of industry and commerce die out by 1862, and are replaced by realistic subjects. Thus, it is highly likely that issuers shifted their intention from promoting generic symbols of strength among the elite, to showcasing concrete samples of national power to members of the working class.

When imaging the concept of freedom, one might be inclined to envision pictures of the American flag, the bald eagle, or the Statue of Liberty. These subjects are what Heinz Tschachler calls “new symbols of Freedom” and are often used on modern Federal Reserve notes to showcase “icons of Americana.”¹²² But such scenes are not exclusive to today’s monetary market. During the Civil War many “new symbols of Freedom” surfaced on paper money that caused consumers to take notice of, and in turn, relate “not just to the national currency but to the government as well.”¹²³ From 1861 through 1862, one particular set of Confederate vignettes seemed to center around transportation and trade. Images of trains and boats attest to the idea that the country had “come under the spell of ‘civilization’ [which...] involved the building of canals, toll roads, [...] bridges, and railroads.”¹²⁴ In addition, they illustrate the importance of a solid, albeit “mixed,” business network, and the freedom of being able to take materials practically anywhere with utmost speed and efficiency. These tableaux thus spoke to well-to-do groups of people with emblems of pride and glory, but also of stability and endurance. Essentially, they presented financiers, businessmen, and even potential foreign allies with metaphoric examples of strength and power that were all hallmarks of a modern, functioning government.

Yet, like Allegorical/Mythical iconography, portraiture of industry and commerce served little purpose to a nation that was on the losing end of the fight. By the last two years of the War, Southerners had effectively been cut off from nearly every major waterway and railroad in America, leaving them confined to their self-created borders and absent of any substantive

¹²⁰ Christian M. Lengyel, “Statistics.” The Act of October 13, 1862 signaled the beginning of a “uniform” national currency. As a result, only one type of each denomination was issued during the fifth, sixth, and seventh acts – causing the variety of notes to greatly diminish and resulting in only 23 different specimens of bills.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* This percentage is taken from *all* notes issued between 1861 and 1864.

¹²² Tschachler, *The Greenback*, 69.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

industrial or commercial base.¹²⁵ In response to this predicament, note makers appear to have changed their focus (and their audience) with the Act of October 13th 1862's new series of bills. Similar to the Allegorical – (White) Heroes shift, the CSA Treasury Department placed Buildings/Capitols on “Bluebacks” in an attempt to display *tangible* subjects that had *literal* foundations. By doing so on *low-denomination* scrip, the Confederacy was better able to personify itself to the working class majority as an independent entity of permanence and its currency as a trustworthy instrument of value.

Whether or not these trends mean that the Confederacy manipulated its money as a form of indoctrination is unclear. It is impossible to know for sure since there exist few written records other than a body of battered bills. Be that as it may, one question can be addressed: was Confederate paper money used as pro-slavery propaganda? From the nearest this essay can determine, it appears the answer is no. By allowing the notes to speak for themselves through a series of statistical analyses, their statements agree with the hypothesis that while bills may have been used to promote several “Southern causes,” slavery was not on the forefront of these endeavors. If anything, these notes functioned as more of a “morale booster” for people who wanted to preserve their nation and their national identity. Although such concepts most likely included maintaining the slave system, that specific tenet is not a noticeable trait on more than 5.6 per cent of the 162 vignettes printed.¹²⁶

With that information it can be concluded with relative certainty that the notes produced by the Confederate government did not promote slavery; however, that issue was not addressed with regards to other Southern currencies. The sample investigated was limited only to those bills bearing the motto: “The Confederate States of America,” detailed in Grover Criswell's catalogue. But, as Criswell himself mentions, there were also an estimated “\$215 million dollars [...] issued by the individual states, counties, railroads, private banks, and merchants” well into 1865.¹²⁷ Ironically, these bills seem to present a much higher percentage of slave vignettes than those produced under the actual Confederacy! What remains to be seen is a project that examines these “unaccounted currencies” and determines why slave scenes were more regularly depicted on state and private-issue notes. In doing so one stands to gain a more detailed understanding of the differences between the Southern states and their governing body, and hopefully shed additional light on this compelling, but ultimately under-researched, topic.

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¹²⁵ On April 19, 1861, President Lincoln ordered the blockade of Southern ports. By the summer of 1863, the North had seized control of the Mississippi River.

¹²⁶ Lengyel, “Statistics.”

¹²⁷ Criswell, *Comprehensive Catalog of Confederate Paper Money*, 38.