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THE MONTGOMERYS AND DAVIS BEND: A Provisional Interpretation

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Introduction

This is an historically grounded paper, though not precisely an historical paper. It reflects the work of an historically minded political scientist, but not a historian. As economists are basically students of wealth, and its inverse poverty, so political scientists are students of power, and its inverse weakness. This paper is grounded in an inquiry into power, and depends on a careful, but notably incomplete, search of limited original and secondary material. It is first steps in an interpretation and a basis for new exploration, within the theme of "Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, and the Civil War in Mississippi."

THE PROBLEM OF INCLUSION-AND-EXCLUSION

Lincoln and Davis embodied in themselves, and through the groups they led, the fundamental problem of inclusion and exclusion that any political order has to meet. (Holden, 2006) In any group there is necessarily some decision as to people "who are accepted as members, who are acceptable aliens and are merely there as convenient people." (Holden, 166). The term "alien" means, according the Black's Law Dictionary, "person who resides within the borders of a country, but is not a citizen or a subject of that country." (BLD, 7th ed, 72.) (Metics in ancient Athens were acceptable aliens and so Green Card holders in the United States.) Some people will have lower status than that, and may have no rights at all. Slavery is, of course, a quintessential system of power. Racial hierarchy is even more so a system of power.

This fundamental problem is reduced to a simple human scale in thinking about a family named Montgomery, its most famous member Isaiah T. Montgomery, and their relationship to the Davises through Davis Bend in Warren County, Mississippi

ISAIAH T. MONTGOMERY (1847-1924)

Isaiah T. Montgomery, a slave son of a slave father, one of the most capacious minds of Mississippi history, born on the David Bend plantation named Hurricane, lived into emancipation, showed hopes of group political achievement in a peaceful relation to whites, and ended life as a sadly disappointed man. was a man who received a rare distinction that most people will never meet.

Montgomery was a Mississippian whose funeral was reported in The New York Times. On Sunday, the 13th April, 1924, a story was captioned "Served Jeff Davis, Founded Negro Town."

The story said that Isaiah T. Montgomery had been "private secretary to the President of the Confederacy," that in that capacity he had followed "Davis through all the troubled days of the war between the States," and that he was one of the last surviving black members of the Mississippi state legislature."

But each of the New York Times specifications is wrong. Though Isaiah Montgomery had sometimes performed work for Jefferson Davis, the brother of Joseph E. Davis, under whose rule his life existed. Jefferson became a senator in the four years before the Civil War began. Isaiah, according to his own testimony, did sometimes work for Senator Davis. This would have been in a period of about four years, beginning when Isaiah was about 10. It came to an end when Jefferson went to the steamboat, on his way to the Confederate Presidency. Isaiah, about three months shy of his 14th birthday took him to the landing. In 1861-63 Isaiah Montgomery was at the Joseph Davis plantation.

He was then inducted into the Union Navy when Navy came upriver in 1863. He, with his parents and sisters, spent most of 1864-65 in Cincinnati. So he could not have gone anywhere with the Confederate President. Isaiah also was no legislator. He testified himself that "as a result of the election held July 29, 1890, I held my first commission to any elective office, viz., as

delegate from Bolivar County to the Constitutional Convention.” (ITM in Sillers (comp.) 590). There is, moreover, a register in the Mississippi

Department of Archives and History that shows the times and positions for which commissions were issued, and the he legislative offices are not among them.

On Lincoln and Davis

Lerone Bennett has written about Abraham Lincoln in terms that are intensely researched, closely reasoned, and passionately angry. (Bennett, 2000.) But the passionate anger in it leads to terms that most people-revering Lincoln- probably find infuriating. Lincoln had practical, and arguably intellectual, reasons to struggle with the question of the inclusion of black people as members of the American polity. It is plausible to believe that he never fully reconciled it. But the question of diversity is one of the great questions of human struggle, even reflected in a controversy between Paul and Peter over whom the church really included.

In Christian teaching, the universality of Jesus's words is taken for granted. Yet the very earliest apostles did not always agree. Thus, the Apostle Paul wrote that he had been preaching to Gentiles. There was some difference of opinion as to the status of Gentiles, so he went to Jerusalem, met with the leaders there, received “the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” (Galatians 2:9, New Revised Standard Version) In due course, the problem of inclusion and exclusion did re-present itself. Thus reported Paul as to his next action:

But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. (Galatians 2:11-13)

The question of whom the body politic included was a problem for Lincoln, as it is a problem for the world in 21st century politics.

On the other hand, there is no sign that this question

of a possible challenge to racial hierarchy ever entered the mind of Jefferson Davis. For a brief moment during the Civil War, President Davis contemplated the possible use of blacks as Confederate fighting soldiers (Ballard,). But such a policy never came to fruition. Thereafter, he lived with the fact there were no more slaves. But granitic resistance was part of his meeting his own personal emancipation, which came in the change of status of the Montgomerys, his brother's former slaves.

JOSEPH EMORY DAVIS (1784-1870) AND JEFFERSON FINIS DAVIS (1808-1895)

To link all the we begin with the little emphasized fact of these two closely-lined brothers, Joseph Emory Davis and Jefferson Finis Davis. Joseph Emory Davis was born three years before the 1787 Constitution was drafted at Philadelphia and died five years after the Appomattox surrender and the collapse of Confederacy had decisively remade that Constitution.

Joseph Emory Davis came to the Old Natchez District when it was both the political and financial center of Mississippi and still the outpost of American authority in Mississippi. He practiced law, evidently made a good deal of money, and entered into the life of Natchez's elite. Then established a plantation upriver from Natchez and down river from Vicksburg, on a peninsular loop that got the name of Davis Bend. (Today, it is Davis Island.) Joseph Davis died in 1870, when Reconstruction was still a political and military reality in Mississippi.

Jefferson Finis Davis, the youngest and most famous on a world historical scale, was born in the last full year of Thomas Jefferson's presidency. (Abraham Lincoln was born within the same period before the Jefferson term came to an end.) Jefferson Davis died when the effort to re-construct government itself, on the basis of African American citizenship in reality, was withering so much as to look as if it also were dead. Joseph Davis had, since the death of their father, acted himself almost as a father figure to Jefferson, securing his appointment to West Point, introducing himself to his second bride, the now famous Varina Howell Davis.

From around 1835, Joseph Davis had let Jefferson clear and cultivate slightly more than half of the land. In 1860, the Census of Agriculture (Schedule 4, Page 241) showed a total of

1800 acres for Jefferson Davis. This was the plantation named "Brierfield." The same Census showed 1700 acres for J. E. Davis.

BEAUVOIR AND DAVIS BEND

Beauvoir, well known to Davis admirers, Jefferson Davis's last redoubt from the world. It was created as the symbol of Confederate resistance to the facts of the Civil War, and a symbol of Jefferson Davis as the representative of unyielding white supremacy in Mississippi.

Davis Bend was much more complex. It was the location of the home that launched Jefferson Davis upon the world. Through it we might see the vehicle also the travail that Jefferson Davis encountered, as well as the travail that his legacy left in the world yet to come. The experience of this other Jefferson Davis ***** It links to the question of the struggles of human beings to find resolutions, if not solutions, to the enduring and recurring problems that put Peter and Paul to the test.

BENJAMIN THORNTON MONTGOMERY

The crucial link that also must be known, if we are to understand, is one of Joseph Davis's slaves was called "Ben." Eventually he would be called by "triple barreled name" (Kazin) of Benjamin Thornton Montgomery. Where even the name "Montgomery" comes from is a mystery.

Whatever is to be said of how Ben Montgomery go into the picture, he was a remarkable character. But we have also to reinforce the remarkable character of Joseph Emory Davis. Joseph Davis was, as an individual, unusual. So far as the little evidence shows, he had some capacity to act as if his African American dependent - - though the term "African American" is anomalous when read back in the 19th century - - could exercise judgment and discretion. If one cannot accord the "other" - - whatever that other may be - - room for judgment and discretion, then one can never establish terms of reciprocity on the same ground.

***** ical study of Davis Island (as it now is) and the variety of legal, economic, political, demographic, ecological and engineering changes that continued to come into it or pass through it.

Ben learned to be what is now called a paralegal, copying letters and briefs. He kept a store and did business even with members of his master's family. He learned surveying and planning for levees, and invented a boat propeller for which the patent application was rejected because he was black. (Hermann, op cit.; and, for further detail, Sluby 2004, 32-34.)

Janet Hermann says that he even assigned readings and conducted after hours discussion with Ben from his library of political theory and philosophy, though she offers no support for this extraordinary claim.

As to the working relationship, we may suppose that Benjamin Montgomery ultimately stood in relation to his master reminiscent of, though not identical to, the Biblical Joseph did to the Pharaoh, as recited in Genesis 41:40. "Thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou."

Yet there was at least one thing Ben Montgomery was, he could not do. He could not exercise the simple paternal decision to control his own son's education. When Isaiah was ten, which would have been 1857. This was the year of Dred Scott. Mrs. Davis wanted Isaiah to come and live in the main house. He would be a servant to her husband. She was, in effect, making her husband a present of this boy. No enslaved man with any prudence would force the choice between his own will and that of domina upon the dominus.

Isaiah wrote many years later: "I was inducted into the domestic life of that remarkable man, Joseph Emory Davis. He soon established with me relations of the uttermost confidence. I do not remember how it was accomplished but the fact remains. His wish became law, and I was totally free from responsibility to any one else."

Isaiah went through, as his father had, the 19th century version of the paralegal internship: filing, getting the newspapers; copying Joseph Davis's correspondence. As noted above, he served not only Joseph but sometimes Jefferson, when Jefferson Davis was at home. There is profound matter here for thought about the process of political socialization. How does a child learn what is authority and power? How did Isaiah learn

when he was 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 whom to respect and whom not, how to maneuver, when to assert and when to defer?

This was, after all, a little boy with, subject to Master Joseph's will, absolute freedom in a slave polity of more than three hundred persons. If we had further time for study, we would also learn more of Benjamin Thornton Montgomery. In later years, Isaiah always spoke respectfully of "Father." Father somehow generated in his sons the ambition of making money, but who evinced (according to Isaiah) little interest in "the suffrage question."

THE CIVIL WAR DISRUPTS HURRICANE

Isaiah's service to Joseph had to have ended in 1862. Isaiah was then 15. Joseph Davis moved off Davis Bend in 1862. He wanted to get out of the war-affected area. He went to live at Bolton, east of Vicksburg and just a few miles west of Jackson.

Ben Montgomery was left in charge of the Hurricane properties. The war further disrupted the relationship.

In turn, Ben and his family came to the attention of Admiral D. D. Porter when the Union Navy came upriver. Thornton was taken into the military as was Isaiah, the latter as a cabin boy for the Admiral. Ben Montgomery was advised by the Admiral that he should let Isaiah go with him and that the family should go North, "to escape the hardships of war."

In the end, the whole family was at Cincinnati for about two years. It cannot have been a happy time for them. Cincinnati was cold and these were Mississippians. They probably were poor, for in the disruptions of the war where would they get cash? Ben had a job in a boatyard, and Isaiah also worked there. This seems to imply hard physical work at somebody else's command. As soon as possible, they returned to the South.

TRANSACTIONS AT DAVIS BEND: THE MONTGOMERYS AS A DAVIS FAMILY LIFE OF DEFENSE

The Benjamin T. Montgomery-Joseph E. Davis relationship survived the Union conquest. The Montgomerys were, with however much mutual consciousness one cannot tell, functionally a part of the Davis family line of defense against what might have been

Federal encroachment.

In the eight remaining yeas of his life, he never re-established residence on the island, though he did arrange with Ben Montgomery to build a tomb for him on the island.

[For a brief period, there was a Union sponsored allocation of land, with an attempt to establish smallholder farming. The Montgomerys' role in this deserves some closer attention. Bugged the main relationship continued to be with Joseph Emory Davis.

Ben Montgomery's management of the farm, contention with Union Army officers, and calls for political help from Joseph Davis all require some discussion that the present author bypasses for simple lack of mastery of complicated facts.

But there is a basic fact. When the Montgomerys returned from Cincinnati, Joseph Davis sent a message to Jefferson asking for his consent to sell it to the Montgomerys. (Jefferson Davis had been caught and held in military prison, and released in 1867. He was never actually brought to trial in civil courts.) Joseph actually made the deal before he got a final word from Jefferson.

Strictly speaking, he did not need Jefferson's consent. Though Jefferson Davis had been at Brierfield for almost forty years, he had never owned a foot of the land. No title had been conveyed to Jefferson in the twenty six years from his clearing the land (1835) to his departure for the Confederate Presidency (1861). Once secession occurred, it would it would have invited trouble to change titles and identify the property with the President of the Confederate States. It might have made it vulnerable to physical attack or to legal attack. After the surrender, it might have been subject to demand for expropriation. Title was never vested in anyone except Joseph Davis.

This was fraternal comity. In the interest of peace in the family, it made sense to seek Jefferson's agreement. But the correspondence also shows mutual regard. Joseph and Jefferson's wife sometimes fought. But Joseph and Jefferson did not fight, and Jefferson did not oppose Joseph.

Jefferson did so agree, though he seems not to have liked the idea much. He agreed partly on the argument that this might protect against Congressional attempts to punish him by taking some action against the estate. But he did not think it would work. "Unless the Negroes exceed my expectations, they will

never complete the payments." (Everett, 90.) The implication here is that "the Negroes" would not complete the payments, but someone else could.

Joseph Davis does not show himself precisely naive on the subject. It not been easy. The deal was being consummated in the period of the Black Codes. "This was delayed," he wrote in March 1867, "by an act of the State Legislature forbidding the purchase or sale of real estate by Negroes." He also said "Few expect the contract will be complied with." He was writing in March 1867 of the contract that he describes in the following letter.

My Brother

I have closed the contract with Ben. . . . I have before stated the conditions of the contract. Nine years credit with six per cent per annum interest payable the 1st of Jany of each year. The debt bound by Mortgage of the property sold. (Strode (ed). 265-266.)

There is need for a good evaluation of the contract under the market conditions that then prevailed. The two farms (Hurricane and Brierfield) together had been valued in 1860 at \$175,000.00. (Census, 1860, 241) The sale price from Joseph to Ben Montgomery was \$300,000.00.

There is an interesting issue here. In general, reporting on the post-Civil War South seems to emphasize how much impoverishment took place. Yet the sale price in this case was seventy percent above the reported value of the land six years before. If we use contemporary calculators, the 1860 value might have risen to a little over \$311,000. (Williamson, 2008) So we may infer that Joseph Davis was not setting an unreasonable price, and we also may infer that real estate values must have been fairly good.

Joseph goes on to inform Jefferson of the opinions of others, and of his stronger hopes. His own hope was this. "I trust it will if Ben lives." Why? Simple economic reasoning. "He is ambitious to be a rich man, and will control the labor." (Strode, Private Letters, 266.)

Joseph Davis continues, pointing out other unfavorable but realistic conditions. "The prospect of a general overflow the present year will add to the distress of the Country and this is I fear inevitable. A few places may escape. I hope the Bend may escape, upon it depends the payment of the interest for the present year." (Strode, 266.)

Due to floods, pests, and business conditions the Montgomerys were never able to keep the payments current. This had been a burden to Joseph, no longer as rich as he once been, though he seemed in letters to Jefferson always to show optimism and to accept the Montgomerys' explanations as valid. Even in his will, Joseph Davis urged the executors to show forbearance to the Montgomerys.

TRANSACTIONS: LIFE STYLE AND POLITICS

On the first of May, 1872, Jefferson Davis came to Brierfield, where Benjamin Montgomery's household was living. As Mary Virginia Montgomery noted in her diary.

A messenger stated that Mr. Jefferson Davis was at Ursino and would come up after Breakfast. We sent the buggy for him. In the meanwhile, I brushed around the house, and donned my white dress. Smoothed my hair and pinned on a rose or two. Mr. D. arrived accompanied by Dr. Bowmar. Both gentlemen were polished in their manners and on the whole I have been pleased with their visit. (Mary Virginia Montgomery, Diary entries in Sterling, 466.)

One can only wonder in amazement at Benjamin Montgomery's daughter, with the air of a young lady, receiving Jefferson Davis in what he steadfastly maintained was his house. Jefferson Davis was one of the co-executors of his brother's estate. But was going on was a fight about the ownership of Brierfield. Joseph Davis's grandchildren (a brother and a sister) claimed that the whole estate was theirs, and that their grandfather had never signed the Brierfield part over to Jefferson Davis.

Jefferson Davis suffered severe financial embarrassment. It

is believable that he, his wife, and others in the family became increasingly disenchanted. The Montgomerys' defaults were less tolerable to Jefferson and to Mrs. Davis, who were often desperately short of money. (Strode, ed. shows this.)

In 1872, the year that Jefferson Davis visited Brierfield, Ben Montgomery was reported to have assets of \$350,000. (Foner, 152) If he were alive today, the same dollar value would come out at about \$6, 129,000. As we do not know what his debts were, so we cannot state net worth. We do know the debts included nearly \$300, 000 on the purchase of lands. That would today amount to something around \$4,900,000. Obviously, there were other debts from the normal operating expenses of farms totaling about 3500 acres. Obviously, there was also some income for at least some of the years.

Yet it is pretty certain that the Montgomerys were sometimes strapped for cash, if only because they did fail to keep the payments current. Strapped for cash or not, the Montgomerys were well off, not only far beyond most slaves, but far beyond most white people. Indeed, Kenneth M. Hamilton describes them as "extravagant," (Hamilton, 1991,47.) though the evidence of that is not convincing to this author.

They were able in 1872, **the year that Jefferson Davis visited Brierfield,** to send Isaiah's two sisters, Rebecca and Mary, to study at Oberlin for two years. (Diary of Mary Virginia Montgomery, 19.) Mary Virginia's diary shows her mother, Mary Lewis Montgomery, vigorously directing all hands into the field. Rebecca, her sister, apparently was amenable to field work. She was competitive about how much cotton she would pick. She bragged about how much cotton she could pick. This is not the lifestyle of a family of social extravagance and no hard routines. Scarlett O'Hara did not spoil her delicate hands on the prickly ends of sunhardened cotton bolls. It is very hard to drag a sack with a strap across one's back all day in a cotton field.

Mary Virginia ran the Hurricane post office and kept account books. She was a thoughtful person, whose diary records her stress over working over the accounts all day and not being able to find the trial balance. She was subject to verbal discipline, which seems to have received painfully. (Sterling, .)

Two years after this visit, Jefferson Davis launched, claiming legal ownership of Brierfield. The law suit appears to have been against the other executors of the estate—he himself was one—and the persons whom he sought to displace were actually his great-niece and great-nephew, the grandchildren of Joseph Davis. (Everett, 102-105.) The Montgomerys were not the prime targets, but they were indirect targets. If they were making any payments, who would receive the payments? If they were foreclosed, who would benefit from the foreclosure?

If the Montgomerys were not prime legal targets, the fact is that Jefferson Davis had come to speak badly of Ben Montgomery. He now said that Ben Montgomery was greedy and oppressive, quoting an aged black woman who said she hated Ben Montgomery. Jefferson Davis said, in justifying his own position, that the who purpose had been to let him have the plantations in order to provide for the freed Africans. Nothing in the available record shows any such motive articulated. The written record of their correspondence showed them talking realistic business, management, and political self-protection reasons.

What the social psychologist Leon Festinger (19??) called dissonance reduction would be predictable. Once you are upset about something, your mind creates pscychological fiction-facts that allow you to justify whatever you think. Jefferson Davis and his wife were continually exchanging messages about their financial exposure, he was bothered with continual health problems, and continually troubled by unfair political complaints and criticisms from Northerners.

It is no surprise that he would find reasons to dislike Ben Montgomery. Ben had continued as his brother's confidant until the end, it was to Ben that his brother left instructions about the construction of a burial tomb, it was Ben in whose interest Joseph had urged executors to be forbearing, it was Ben who sdent his daughters to the Abolitionist citadel of Oberlin, it was Ben whose ebony black daughter received him in the parlor of his own Brierfield, dressed in the manner of a young lady!

Whether such motives were present—for the facts are correct, but the interpretation is speculative—Jefferson did sue. Economic conditions were generally unfavorable for a panic — we now say depression or recession—had occurred in 1873. Weather interfered with crops. By 1875, so Isaiah wrote, their entire

capital had been engulfed.

The economic conditions were linked to increasingly unfavorable political conditions. In the same year that Mary Virginia Montgomery recorded Jefferson Davis's visit to Brierfield, she also shows the place as a center of black and Republican political activity. She refers to I. D. Shadd, a bookkeeper for Montgomery & Sons. The political reference is that he came and brought news of legislation. (Sterling, 468.) Well he might. He was the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the man whom Vernon L. Wharton without other evidence referred to slightly as "none too competent." (Wharton, 176.) The diarist refers to her excitement at the "Public Meetings" to choose delegates to the county Republican convention, to a Republican campaign meeting in September, and to another in October addressed by Peter Crosby. (Sterling, 468.) Finally, she recorded the votes in the Presidential election with 442 for Grant and Wilson and 3 for Horace Greeley.

This was the same year that a black group led by the aforementioned Shadd and Crosby took over from white leadership and made Crosby the Sheriff. County officers needed to be bonded, as they still do in the 21st century. In 1874 just two years later, Crosby was unable to get his bond renewed. (Harris, 1979). This was just of the white against black struggle. The Montgomerys appear to have stayed out of it as much as they could.

"Crosby had also been accused of withholding evidenced against three black officials whom a racially mixed grand jury had indicted on charges of fraud (they were later found guilty)." (Harris, 646.) Crosby's eligibility to continue in office was upheld in court. White conservatives controlled the Vicksburgh city government. Republicans with black support controlled the county government.

The overt complainty from the white side was "heavy taxes on burdened property holders for the benefit of blacks or the propertyless class." (Harris, 645.) Five hundred people -doubtless many of them visibly armed- marched on the court house demanding that Crosby resign, which he did. But he also rushed to Jackson, seeking the aid of Governor Adelbert Ames. Ames sent him "home with vague instructions to organize a posse comitatus for the purpose of restoring his authority in Vicksburg."

(Harris, 646-647.)

The end result was a fight in which the lowest number of black people killed was twenty five. Considering the population of Warren County in 1874, that yields a killing rate of about 1:840. Such a killing rate, applied to New York City on 9/11 would more than doubled the number of persons massacred by al-Qaeda. William C. Harris writes that the number was far below what actually occurred. "Having routed the blacks in Vicksburg, armed whites vengefully swept the county, attacking suspected insurgents," said Harris. "When the racial excitement had run its course perhaps as many as three hundred blacks lay dead, whereas only two whites were killed." (Harris, 648)

What the Montgomerys did in the years after the 1874 massacre is not altogether clear. They had a business known as Montgomery & Sons, but the available evidence does not show clearly whom their customers were. Moreover, they had acquired a neighboring Davis Bend plantation known as Ursino, which seems to have mainly under the management of Thornton. This was a patently unfriendly environment, far worse than had been so for a few years before. Yet the Montgomerys held on. William Thornton Montgomery was county treasurer of Warren County as late as late as 1879. (Foner,)

Isaiah was enough of a respected figure for some former Davis Bend person to solicit for help. In the Exoduster years some went to Kansas, but found conditions utterly discouraging. They sought help from Isaiah, who went to Kansas in 1879 and arranged for their return to Mississippi. At that stage, he corresponded with Governor John P. St. John of Kansas, about ideas that he and his brother had for investment in Kansas. (The sense of exposure to white retribution is in his letter to the Governor. He asked that any letter from the Governor show no seal or mark because that would cause it to be opened.)

This leaves a period of about six years in which little documentation is so far available. We know that the Davis lands were foreclosed in 1881, thus extinguishing any residue of a Montgomery interest. Isaiah wrote about what happened after the next four years. "After the close of our cotton business in 1885 I removed Vicksburg and being in bad health, did very little for two years." Those two years bring us up precisely to 1887.

That year Montgomery, with the partnership of his cousin Benjamin T. Green, and with legal cooperation of his wife, Martha R. Montgomery, led the group to the settlement of Mound Bayou. In addition to his wife, who would live and die as his business partner, for their two estates were separate in the 1920s, he had at least one daughter already. That was Mary Cordelia, who grew up to attend Straight University, which in 1934 merged with another institution to become Dillard University. In adult life she was an active Republican politician. From the 1920s to the 1940s she was the Republican National Committeewoman from Mississippi, at the same time that her father's severe critic, S. D. Redmond was State Chairman.)

In 1887, all adults over twenty four would have been born slaves, the remainder having been subject to freedom from whatever time after 1863 that the actualities of the Civil War forces caught up the words of the Emancipation Proclamation. William Thornton Montgomery made a more radical decision than Isaiah. As Isaiah said later, "discouraged at prospects of the South . . . he went to North Dakota."

After Davis Bend

Isaiah T. Montgomery after Davis Bend, and all that is associated with him, obliges us to confront powerful historiographic myths. Both these myths are ways of dealing with the problem of inclusion-and-exclusion to which reference is made at the beginning of this paper.

In the encounter of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, in the Civil War's Mississippi faces and consequences, the question was what to do after the collapse of slavery. One historiographic myth is Jefferson Davis somehow helped "his" former slaves find a place where they could create a life for themselves and that Mound Bayou is its result. Jefferson Davis had, on the available evidence, nothing to do with the Montgomerys' movement to the Delta. Davis felt that Northerners' unjust and unfair hostility -his interpretation of reality- prevented his finding a means to support himself in accord with the dignity and life style that his self image demanded. The best hypothesis to guide new thinking is that Ben Montgomery, and implication of necessity his progeny, came to offer what Jefferson Davis most needed and accordingly an object of hostility.

The historiographic myth may well also have been encouraged, not by Montgomery himself who never mentioned it, but Montgomery heirs in need of legitimation in the severe years of the 1920s and 1930s. Books and articles in the South, and notably in Mississippi, ranged mainly from presumptively sympathetic patronage to contempt to overt hostility.

In such a milieu it is not surprising that Montgomery offspring found value and protective coverage in anything that elicited white toleration and apparent sympathy. When Walter Sillers, Sr. could praise Montgomery as the greatest of the black race, in tandem with Jefferson Davis as the greatest of the white race, that was truly protective rhetoric. This was continued in 1937, when Montgomery's son-in-law and daughter encouraged the idea that the separate black town was an idea that sprang from the mind of Jefferson Davis in conversation with Ben Montgomery. The son-in-law, Eugene P. Booze, reportedly had some connection with Jefferson Hayes-Davis, the grandson of Jefferson Davis. One may hypothesize that, in a state where the political culture was so strongly expressed by Vardaman and Bilbo, a favorable association with the name of Jefferson Davis was too valuable to be jeopardized by accuracy.

The second historiographic myth has to do with Montgomery's purported defense of the idea that the suffrage was not for black people. This is white historiographic myth, but it is even more powerfully the black historiographic myth. Montgomery was, indeed, the lone black member of the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890. Montgomery did not, in fact, have a large or generally visible role in the 1890 Convention. The author can offer no provable evidence. But he has communicated orally or in writing with three Mississippians who are white, have internationally famous names, are highly literate, and politically sophisticated. One said that he had never heard of Isaiah T. Montgomery. One said that he had never known there was a black delegate in the 1890 Convention. One said that he had never known of, or read, Montgomery's speech to the Convention.

But Montgomery's most perceptible, and fundamental, contribution, was a speech on the franchise question. Montgomery took as his fundamental fact-realpolitik-that the white people of the state insisted that they must rule. He did not, contrary to anything said by any one, that this was right or that it was justifiable. But he took it as irresistible, much as

the Japanese in 1945, took American power secured the atomic bomb as irresistible.

Some action had to be taken to restore white confidence that they would not ever be overrun by a 60% black majority, as it then was. He took for granted that if the Constitution were fairly administered, there would be about a 30% or 40% black share of the electorate (approximately what exists in 2008, interestingly), that if property holding amongst blacks increased, and education increased, there would be a natural rise in the black franchise, and that the two populations would exist "mutually assisting" each the other. This approach he described as a "peace offering" and asked "what is your answer?" We also know that, in the last year of his life, he looked back with some disillusionment, but forecast that the situation could not go on indefinitely as it come be by 1923.

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