

LOVE, HATE, AND THADDEUS STEVENS

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ONE day in February 1866, when Thaddeus Stevens was just starting the radical reconstruction program in Congress, he got a letter from a man in Virginia who impertinently asked: "Now, Thad . . . Which feeling is strongest & uppermost in your Abraham's bosom, *love* of the *negro*, or *hatred* of the *white man* of the South?"¹ Old Thad's reply to the inquiring Virginian, if he gave any, is not on record. But since Stevens' death the question in one form or another has interested biographers and historians, and they have tried to find answers to it.

Nearly all of them have stated or implied that love or hate or both moved Stevens in his political career. They have disagreed, however, about which feeling was strongest and uppermost in his bosom. Most Stevens biographers have believed the strongest feeling was love for the Negroes and indeed for all the oppressed of the world, white as well as black. One of the earliest biographers labeled him a great "commoner." The late Professor J. A. Woodburn averred that he was a born democrat, that he had antislavery convictions arising from the "innate bent" of his character. A more recent biographer dubbed him a "great leveler" and a Marxist author called him a "militant democrat and fighter for Negro rights." In a new and partly fictional life the Pennsylvania novelist Elsie Singmaster depicted imaginary as well as actual scenes to show that he was a sincere friend of the Negro and of all mankind—altogether a loving and a lovable person.²

¹ Thompson Powell to Stevens, February 22, 1866, in the Thaddeus Stevens Papers, Library of Congress.

² E. B. Callender, *Thaddeus Stevens, Commoner* (Boston, 1882); James A. Woodburn, *The Life of Thaddeus Stevens . . .* (Indianapolis, 1913), 57-59; Thomas F. Woodley, *Great Leveler: The Life of Thaddeus Stevens* (New York, 1937); Elizabeth Lawson, *Thaddeus Stevens* (International Publishers, New York, 1942); Elsie Singmaster, *I Speak for Thaddeus Stevens* (Boston, 1947).

Historians of the Civil War and reconstruction have not been so nearly unanimous as the biographers of Stevens. James Ford Rhodes thought Stevens had a "profound sympathy" for the Negro "coming straight from the heart," but was also "bitter and vindictive" and showed "virulence toward the South." William A. Dunning taught his followers that Stevens was merely "truculent, vindictive, and cynical." In the same spirit the popular historian Claude G. Bowers said of Stevens: "Because of his obsession on Negro rights . . . and his inveterate hatred of Southern whites, his relation for many years to Lydia Smith, a mulatto, and until his death his housekeeper, cannot be ignored." Lloyd P. Stryker, one of the revisionist biographers of Andrew Johnson, carried this idea still farther. Taking as a fact what Rhodes had treated as an opinion, Stryker wrote: "Thaddeus Stevens . . . could not forget . . . that during the Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania in 1863 his iron works near Chambersburg were burned. It was therefore with peculiar zest and flaming personal malevolence toward Southerners that he demanded the confiscation of their estates. . . . His hatred and jealousy of the slave owners were only matched by his professed affection for the negro race,—some said a very personal affection for some members of it." In more moderate terms Professor J. G. Randall, a careful scholar and leading authority, referred to the "partisan character of the Vindictive program" under Stevens and also to "the domineering force of this hater of the South."³

While not necessarily denying that Stevens was capable of hatred and vengeance, other students of reconstruction have put more emphasis on what they consider Old Thad's idealism, his social and economic radicalism. The Negro historian W. E. Burghardt DuBois characterized Stevens as "a leader of the common people" who though a politician was "never a mere politician" but "a stern believer in democracy, both in politics and in industry." The Marxist historian James S. Allen considered Stevens the "revolu-

³ James F. Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* . . . (8 vols., New York, 1893-1920), V: 544; William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (vol. 22, *The American Nation: A History*, edited by Albert B. Hart, New York, 1907), 86; Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Boston, 1929), 69; Lloyd P. Stryker, *Andrew Johnson: A Study in Courage* (New York, 1929), 245-46; J. G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1937), 722-23. See also George F. Milton, *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals* (New York, 1930), 262-64.

tionist" who best represented both "the industrial bourgeoisie and the Abolitionist democracy." Though not at first impressed by Stevens as the leader of a popular revolution, Howard K. Beale was later inclined to concur with DuBois and Allen. Beale wrote: "Thad Stevens and Charles Sumner agreed with the businessmen who backed the party in wanting a high tariff, which the South's return might endanger. But Stevens and Sumner were idealists in their concern for the Negro and human rights. Stevens at least was genuinely a radical. He wanted to confiscate planter property and divide it among Negroes." Even more than Beale, Louis M. Hacker has emphasized the role of Stevens and the Radical Republicans in using their party to effect the triumph of American capitalism. But Hacker also said: "Stevens envisaged a new South based upon egalitarian property rights. He was a vengeful man and fearful of the recapture of political power by the old ruling class of the South. But he was, as well, the honest friend of the Negro." Hacker added that the "New Radicals" sympathized with the Negro "for expediency only," but the "Old Radicals" (and Stevens was one of these) did so for "emotional reasons." These Radicals, Hacker insisted on another occasion, "labored in the great democratic tradition of the West that goes back to the Levelers of Puritan England."⁴

As has been seen, none of the more sophisticated writers has sought the meaning and motivation of Stevens' career solely in terms of love and hate. All the newer historians have recognized that he had important partisan and economic interests. It should be noted, however, that they have not presented a political and eco-

⁴ W. E. Burghardt DuBois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York, 1935), 182, 265-66; James S. Allen, *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy (1865-1876)* (New York, 1937), 22; Howard K. Beale, "On Rewriting Reconstruction History," in the *American Historical Review* (1940), XLV, 818-19; Louis M. Hacker, *The Triumph of American Capitalism* (New York, 1940), 340-41, 353, 373; and "Professor Hacker v. Some Sons of Dixie," in *Fortune* (1947), XXXVI, 6, 9. See also Beale, *The Critical Year: A Study of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (New York, 1930), *passim*, and "What Historians Have Said about the Causes of the Civil War," in *Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography* (Social Science Research Council Bulletin No. 54, New York, 1946), 75. In the first of these two writings Beale does not emphasize Stevens' radicalism; in the second he says that some extremist Republicans were really economic conservatives but "Stevens and [George W.] Julian were thoroughgoing social and economic radicals."

nostic interpretation to refute or provide a substitute for the love-hate thesis but merely to supplement and enlarge upon it.

About five years ago a Stevens biography was published which took a basically different point of view toward his motivation. This book, bearing the subtitle *A Story of Ambition*, admitted that Stevens "did his part in bringing about the age of Big Business" but maintained that, of all the historians and biographers treating him, "None has taken adequately into account the simple fact that he was, above everything else, a man of politics seeking always to get and exercise the powers of public office."⁵ Apparently, however, this book did not state its case very clearly or argue it very cogently. One of the book's ablest reviewers, Robert H. Woody, commented: "... the reinterpretation is one of degree rather than kind. It reminds one of Claude G. Bowers' graphic portrait, though it is much more fully developed. . . ."⁶ But the book had intended, in part, to refute or at least to question the Bowers view that Stevens was motivated by vindictiveness toward the South, as well as the opposite view that he was motivated by regard for the Negroes in particular and the oppressed of all races in general.

The present paper will attempt in a brief space to make this refutation somewhat more explicit and perhaps more convincing. It is a dangerous and difficult thing, of course, for an historian to pry into the motives of any historical figure. To find out what really made the man go, the historian would need the combined aid of two experts from outside the profession—a psychoanalyst and a spiritualist. Until the historian can get the co-operation of reliable mediums and analysts, he is going to find much to baffle him in his efforts to understand the personalities of men no longer living. This does not mean that he has to give up in despair. He can learn something about a man's dominating interests, even if he cannot learn everything, from a study of what the man actually said and did when alive.

About Stevens it should be remembered, again, that his greatest activity and interest lay in the field of politics. That is to say, he was a politician. The business of politicians is to get votes. One way they get votes is to hold up to the voter ideals against idols—

⁵ Richard N. Current, *Old Thad Stevens: A Story of Ambition* (Madison, Wis., 1942), iii-iv.

⁶ *Journal of Southern History* (1943), IX, 274-75.

ideals to be cherished, idols to be smashed.⁷ They point with pride and they view with alarm. To take a recent example, Hamilton Fish held up a species of "Americanism" as the ideal and "Communism" as the dangerous idol.⁸ Today all our politicians seem to have become "Ham Fishes." In the day of Thaddeus Stevens the behavior of politicians was the same but their materials were different. With Stevens the true god for electioneering purposes came to be the idea of "democracy" and "freedom." The false god came to be the idea of "aristocracy" and "slavery."

It can be demonstrated that Stevens fairly consistently used the symbols of "democracy" and "aristocracy" to gain political power. (It cannot be demonstrated that he consistently used his political power to gain the ends of democracy as against those of aristocracy.) The way to make this demonstration is to compare the *public* Stevens and the *private* Stevens, the explicit and the implicit meanings of his words and actions. It will be revealing to compare the public and the private aspects of his career at several points, giving attention first to the years 1835-38, when he was as yet prominent only in Pennsylvania, and then to the years 1865-68, when he had become conspicuous throughout the whole country.

By 1837 Stevens had gained a reputation as a defender of free public schools and as a scourge of the secret, exclusive, "undemocratic" society of Masons. He was just becoming famous as a friend of the slave and a foe of the slaveholder. After having been elected three times to the Pennsylvania legislature, he had recently been defeated for re-election. As a kind of consolation prize, however, he had won election as a delegate to the state constitutional convention of 1837-38. If his immediate personal concerns during the 1830's are examined in the light of his reputation, some interesting contrasts appear.

When, for instance, Stevens delivered his famous speech (in 1835) that saved the new educational system of Pennsylvania, he was interested not only in schools but also in politics. He was determined that his party of Whigs and Antimasons should elect their candidate for governor in the approaching elections. The Democratic party was splitting on the school question. The Demo-

⁷ For a fascinating discussion of "idols and ideals" as used by politicians, see F. S. Oliver, *The Endless Adventure* (2 vols., London, 1931), I, 44-55.

⁸ See Richard N. Current, "Hamilton Fish," in J. T. Salter, ed., *Public Men in and out of Office* (Chapel Hill, 1946), 210-24.

cratic governor, George Wolf, himself a candidate for re-election, was an advocate of public enlightenment at state expense. Another Democratic candidate, Muhlenberg, who had strong Lutheran support, opposed the levying of taxes for public education. By forcing the school issue Stevens could hope to widen the rift in the Democratic party and so enable the Whigs and Antimasons, who combined were still a minority, to elect their man as governor. This they succeeded in doing.⁹

While Stevens was noisily condemning the Masons, for all to hear, he was more quietly interesting himself in quite other things than the destruction of the Freemasonic lodge. His closest friend in Gettysburg, the banker John B. McPherson, was a leader of the local Masons, and Stevens' tirades against Masonry did not ruffle this friendship in the least. In the legislature, while Stevens cried out in vain for laws to suppress the damnable society, he was busily getting laws passed to benefit McPherson and other bankers, among them the biggest of all, Nicholas Biddle. The grateful and realistic Biddle wrote to Stevens: "You are a magician greater than Van Buren, & with all your professions against Masonry, you are an absolute right worshipful Grand Master."¹⁰ But Antimasonry had lost its magic for Stevens when he was defeated for office in 1836. Then and only then did he begin to turn seriously to anti-slavery.¹¹ One may reasonably doubt whether he was motivated by love for the Negro or hatred for the slaveowner when he turned to antislavery, any more than he was motivated by love for the common man or hatred for the aristocratic Mason when he earlier took up Antimasonry.

One can be certain at least that Stevens was no "leveler" in those days. It is true that on the hustings and in the legislative hall he

⁹ In the state campaign of 1835, Stevens attacked both the Democratic candidates as enemies of the common man—Muhlenberg as an advocate of "ignorance" and Wolf as a member of the Masonic order. *Philadelphia American Advertiser*, May 8, July 27, 1835; *Harrisburg Pennsylvania Reporter*, October 2, 1835.

¹⁰ Biddle to Stevens, July 3, 1838, in R. C. McGrane, ed., *Correspondence of Nicholas Biddle Dealing with National Affairs, 1768-1844* (Boston, 1919), 315.

¹¹ Early in 1836, Stevens said there was "no other question than Masonry and Anti-Masonry." Stevens to the Literary Society of Lafayette College, March 19, 1836, in the Edward McPherson Papers, Library of Congress. Later in the same year, after his reverse at the polls, he seemed convinced there was no other question than slavery and antislavery. *Harrisburg Pennsylvania Reporter*, December 30, 1836.

sometimes sounded like a rabid democrat, especially when he denounced that pretended friend of the common people, Andrew Jackson. But in the relative privacy of the constitutional convention of 1837-38, he sounded quite different. There he was afraid the Loco Focos might put through an amendment limiting the freedom of bankers or extending the power of voters. Demanding protection for "vested rights," he inveighed against "the wild visions of idle dreamers," "the wild, revolutionary, and agrarian folly of modern reformers." He deplored the "inflammatory harangues from raw Irishmen and imported democrats" who might induce "mobs to lay violent hands on the institutions of the country." He condemned the revolutionists of the past and present, who with their "levelling doctrine" had always begun their attack on "order" and "virtue" by "arraying the poor against the rich and the laborer against the capitalist." Certain pages of the thirteen-volume report of this convention ought to be required reading for all those Marxists who make a pet of Thaddeus Stevens.¹²

Even though they concede a point about the Stevens of 1837, however, the Marxists and other proponents of the love-hate thesis may object that the Stevens of 1867 was a different man. But there is little, in actual fact, to indicate that Stevens had changed his dominant interests in the interim. During the years before the Civil War, he continued to busy himself with a politician's chores—bribing editors, combining party ballots in deceptive ways, herding voters to the polls, and doing whatever else was needful to win elections.¹³ And in 1867, elections were still the things he was most concerned about. Early in that year he suffered the biggest disappointment of his life when Simon Cameron bought from the Pennsylvania legislature the United States senatorship that he himself desperately wanted. Later in the year he was chagrined to see the Democrats coming back strong to win state and local elections in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and elsewhere: These affairs of

¹² John Agg and others, reporters, *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced and Held at Harrisburg on the Second Day of May, 1837* (13 vols., Harrisburg, 1837-39), I, 208, 386-87, 390; II, 108-10, 340-44; III, 685-86, 693-96; IV, 24, 245-47; V, 302-3; VI, 154-67.

¹³ See the *Pennsylvania House Journal*, 1838-39, vol. II, part 2, pp. 4-5, 7, 10, 78-79; Stevens to Samuel Evans, October 5, 8, 1854, manuscripts in the Pennsylvania State Library, Harrisburg; Stevens to Henry C. Carey, September 24, 30, 1856, in the Edward Carey Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

politics, as will be seen, had a very real bearing upon the things Stevens was meanwhile saying and doing about Negro suffrage, the impeachment of President Johnson, and reconstruction, "confiscation," and the punishment of the South.

Congress by its legislation of 1867 gave the vote to Negroes in the Southern states, which were in what Stevens called a "territorial condition." But Congress could not do the same for Negroes in the sovereign states of the North, a number of which, including Stevens' own Pennsylvania, still kept black men away from polling places. (Much has been said of Stevens' refusal to sign the revised state constitution of 1838, which introduced the word *white* as a voting qualification. The truth is that, though Stevens did not sign, he also did not protest, as did the president of the convention, John Sergeant. The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society published a thinly disguised rebuke to Stevens for his "neutral course."¹⁴) In 1866, Stevens had broken with Charles Sumner when the latter demanded immediate and universal Negro suffrage.¹⁵ To Old Thad that was bad politics. Few Pennsylvania Republicans, to say nothing of Democrats, would be willing to let Pennsylvania Negroes vote.

In 1867, however, Stevens began to feel that a fifteenth amendment giving the vote to Negroes everywhere, North as well as South, had become a political necessity. Foreseeing in August the Democratic victories in the fall, he wrote to his confidant Edward McPherson: "We must establish the doctrine of National jurisdiction over all the States in State matters of the Franchise, or we shall be finally ruined. We must thus bridle Penna. Ohio Ind et cetera, or the South, *being in*, we shall drift into democracy." Before the end of 1867 he was preparing public statements in which, forgetting his recent quarrel with Sumner, he said "universal suf-

¹⁴ Philadelphia *National Enquirer*, March 1, 1838.

¹⁵ The issue between Stevens and Sumner was well stated in a letter which Stevens received from one of his correspondents and forwarded with his endorsement to Sumner. Chas. W. Wardwell to Stevens, March 3, 1866, in the Charles Sumner MSS, Harvard College Library.

When the Radical Republican convention met in Philadelphia in September 1866 Stevens disapproved the conspicuous attention which Theodore Tilton there gave the Negro abolitionist Frederick Douglass. "It does not become radicals like us to particularly object," Stevens wrote privately. "But it was certainly unfortunate at this time [with the crucial congressional elections in the offing]. The old prejudice, now revived, will lose us some votes." Stevens to William D. Kelley, September 6, 1866, in the Stevens Papers. Publicly, Old Thad did not object.

frage" was an "inalienable right." He added: ". . . without it I believe the government will pass into the hands of the loco focos"—or, as he cunningly corrected the words before publication, "into the hands of the rebels and their friends."¹⁶ In this rather sudden conversion of Stevens to the cause of general Negro suffrage, there is plenty of evidence that he was thinking about his own political fortunes and those of the Republican party, but there is little or no evidence that he was thinking about the welfare of the nation's Negroes or about the injury of Southern whites.

Granting all that, the unconvinced may still ask: But did not Stevens have good reason for hating Southerners? What about his affection for Lydia Smith, his mulatto housekeeper? What about the burning of his ironworks by Confederate troops? Do not his public actions reveal a strong hostility toward the white South, even if they do not show any real humanitarian regard for the Negro? What about his attacks on President Johnson, whom he condemned as the agent of unreconstructed rebels? What about his repeated demands that Southerners must suffer "just retribution for their hellish rebellion," including the loss of their political rights and the confiscation of their estates?

As for Lydia Smith, it would obviously be hard to find documents that would show precisely her relationship to Stevens or her effect upon his attitudes. (There does exist one document that proves he got from her no deep and abiding affection for all members of her race or even of her family. That is a note he left in 1867 for one of Lydia's sons, ordering him to get out of the house and stay out.)¹⁷ As for the destruction of Stevens' ironworks, it had no noticeable effect upon his policies, for his speeches were as "vindictive" before as after. And if his public remarks were vengeful, his private letters at the time were quite otherwise. In his personal correspondence he observed that "the chivalry" were disappointed in not getting him too when they burned his establishment and took his horses and mules; he expressed concern for

¹⁶ Stevens to McPherson, August 16, 27, 1867, and Stevens to M. G. D. Pfeiffer, October 14, 18, 24, 1867, in the Stevens Papers; *New York Herald*, November 8, 9, 1867; *New York Times*, January 8, 10, 1868.

¹⁷ "Sir: Take notice that before Tuesday night next you have all your things away from my house and that you do not yourself enter my House during my absence to sleep or for any other purpose, under the penalty of being considered a Housebreaker." Stevens to Isaac Smith, November 9, 1867, in the Edward McPherson Papers.

the immediate welfare of his workmen; and, viewing his loss calmly and philosophically, he said it was the sort of thing one must expect in war. All talk of vengeance he saved for the place where it would get some votes—the public platform.¹⁸

There is a similar revealing contrast between Stevens' public actions and his private actions in regard to President Johnson. In confidential notes to Sumner in 1865, Stevens worried about the fate of the nation under its new president, but he also worried about Johnson's political power and its possible meaning for his own political future. "John[son] has the reigns," he complained. "With illegal courts, and usurping 'reconstruction,' I know not where you and I shall be." "The danger is that so much success will reconcile the people to almost any thing." One of the first things Stevens openly attacked Johnson for was the president's liberal policy in granting pardons to former Confederate leaders. But previously Stevens himself had signed a petition to President Lincoln for the pardon of a leading secessionist, and he used to inquire in a friendly way about the health of Roger A. Pryor, a captured Confederate officer who had been released to the custody of John W. Forney.¹⁹ These facts imply that Old Thad's "vindictiveness" was not so much personal as political.

This point is better established by the frank avowal Old Thad made in June 1867 to a New York *Herald* reporter. For some time the judiciary committee of the House of Representatives had been investigating Johnson's private life in an effort to find grounds for impeachment. "What chance would an impeachment resolution have?" the *Herald* man asked. Stevens replied that it could not possibly be carried, for if Johnson were removed his successor would be the president of the Senate, Ben Wade, and Wade's election to that position had aroused the jealousy of all the friends of his chief competitor, W. P. Fessenden. Yet, despite its futility, Stevens favored keeping up an agitation for impeachment, and he explained why. "I fear that we shall lose Pennsylvania this next election," he said. The people were "disheartened" and the party was disunited and demoralized because of Cameron's recent notorious corruption of the state legislature. "This corruption will

¹⁸ Stevens to Simon Stevens, July 10, 11, 1863, in the Stevens Papers; Lancaster *Intelligencer*, September 17, 1863.

¹⁹ Stephens to Sumner, August 17, 1865, in the Sumner MSS; John W. Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men* (2 vols., New York, 1873-81), I, 38.

certainly beat us here next election, unless we draw out the Republican strength by getting up a furor and excitement on impeachment."²⁰ Thus to Old Thad, in 1867 at least, violent condemnation of Johnson as a representative of the unrepentant South was primarily a means of strengthening the Republican party and winning the next election in Pennsylvania!

The following year, as Republicans were preparing for the campaign of 1868, Stevens displayed a similar spirit toward another supposed pro-Southerner, James Buchanan. After Buchanan's death, the House of Representatives was composing a resolution honoring the former president. Cynically Old Thad moved to delete from the statement, already cautious and perfunctory enough, the words "ability and patriotic motives." But all that was for public consumption. In private, Stevens was much more charitable. He had recently told a Democratic acquaintance that those who had "fawned on Mr. Buchanan in the day of his power" and had since deserted him were base and contemptible men. During the war Stevens once sent Buchanan a letter of apology for implying that Buchanan as president had been extravagant in furnishing the White House. Earlier, at a time when the two men used to exchange scurrilities on the stump but refused to exchange civilities on the streets of Lancaster, their mutual home, Buchanan once requested a favor of Stevens and the latter politely responded by recommending Buchanan's nephew to the Whig President Taylor for an appointment to West Point.²¹ Between these politicians there secretly existed a professional camaraderie which suggests that much of their denunciation of each other was only for political effect.

It seems likely that Stevens again had political effect in mind when he harped upon his favorite reconstruction theme—"confiscation." At the end of the war he was only one of several Radicals, prominent among whom were also Sumner, Wade, Henry Winter Davis, and Ben Butler. To make himself stand out as the Radical of Radicals, Stevens had to go to unusual extremes. But did he really intend to impoverish the Southern planters and give

²⁰ The report of this interview covered most of a page in the *New York Herald*, July 8, 1867.

²¹ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 2 session (1867-68), 2810-11; obituary of Stevens in the *New York Tribune*, August 18, 1868; Buchanan to Stevens, July 31, August 10, 1850, and W. B. Reed to Edward McPherson, January 13, 1869, in the Stevens Papers.

forty acres to every freedman? Some features of his confiscation plan cause one to doubt whether he himself took the whole of it seriously. He told his fellow Lancastrians that after the land had been taken from its former owners and forty million acres given to the freed slaves, 354 million acres would be left and could be sold to raise three and a half billion dollars toward paying the national debt. He was estimating that the government could get on the average ten dollars an acre for this land. But could the government sell worn-out lands at that price in the ruined South at a time when it was giving away under the homestead law good lands in the virgin West? Horace Greeley thought the plan was impracticable, the whole idea absurd. Though the proposal might appeal to Pennsylvania voters who had suffered property damage in the war, could Stevens have believed in it as a program to be put into actual practice? Anyhow, while he always kept the confiscation idea hanging in the air, he never pressed it very hard as a concrete piece of legislation. In 1867, an editorial writer in the New York *Herald* scoffed at the notion that Stevens was motivated by his "apparent vindictiveness" toward the South or by an "avaricious longing" to make good the loss he had incurred in the destruction of his ironworks. "His ambition," the writer pointed out, "induces him to run to extremes in his confiscation programme; but we believe it to be prompted more by his desire to retain the position of the leader of the extremists than by any settled determination to push it to the bitter end."²²

From Stevens' point of view the whole reconstruction program seems to have been a matter of political expediency rather than one of settled principle. It was not a case of punishing whites and rewarding blacks; instead, it was a case of keeping Democrats down and Republicans up. Ever since Andrew Jackson's first election Stevens had been fighting Democrats. To him the words *Democrat*, *Loco Foco*, *slaveowner*, *rebel*, and *Copperhead* were all synonymous. The prewar crisis and the war itself gave him and others like him their first real chance to crush the opposition. After the war, and especially after the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment, he feared that the Southern and Northern Democrats, reunited, would soon get back into power. Unless something was done, he said,

²² New York *Tribune*, September 12, 1865; New York *Herald*, July 10, 11, 16, 1867.

"They will at the very first election take possession of the White House and the halls of Congress." He schemed to prevent this by the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment that reduced the basis of Southern representation in Congress and disfranchised and disqualified the leading Southerners. In 1867, he deliberately planned to make the process of reconstruction so complicated and confusing as to postpone the restoration of the seceded states indefinitely. When he changed his mind soon afterward and decided to hurry the "reconstructed" states back into the Union, he did so because of considerations of politics—first, the hope for more Republican senators to vote Johnson guilty in the impeachment trial; later, the need for additional Republican electors in the election of 1868.²³

So, at different points in his long career there is a contrast between the public Stevens and the private Stevens. The one—the public man—preached hatred and retribution for Freemasons, slaveowners, doughfaces, and rebels successively, while he preached love and vindication for common men both white and black. The other—the private individual—was thinking in terms of party advantage and personal advancement.

The conclusion to be drawn from the evidence and argument here presented is not, in the first place, that Stevens disliked Negroes and liked Southern white people. On the contrary, a politician like Stevens may come, if only through autosuggestion, to believe his own speeches. The only purpose here is to question whether these feelings of love or hate, if any, are relevant as motivations of Stevens' political career. In the second place, the conclusion is not that his aid to Northern industrialists was inconsiderable or unimportant. But it can be shown that his economic measures were often as much a means as an end of politics. In Congress, he demanded a high tariff in 1861, for instance, as a means of saving the Republican party in Pennsylvania. During the war years, he did not insist on higher duties for ironmakers in disregard of the needs of railroad builders; he acted as an honest broker harmonizing the conflicting interests and holding the loyalty

²³ Undated manuscript in Stevens' handwriting in the Stevens Papers, vol. 16; *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session (1865-66), 72-75, 2459-60, 2544, 3148; 39 Congress, 2 session (1866-67), 1075-76, 1167, 1213-15; 40 Congress, 2 session (1867-68), 2399-464; *New York Times*, June 9, 14, 1866, May 27, June 23, 1868; *New York Tribune*, June 23, 29, 1868.

of both. And he supported a Northern Pacific railroad land grant with the understanding that the company was going to bring laborers from northern Europe and colonize them along the right of way—"men who [would] always be on the side of freedom;" men who would constitute a population in the Northwest that "with the people of the great North, [might] be a counterpoise to the rebellious South;" men who, in other words, would vote as faithful Republicans.²⁴ In the third place, the conclusion is not that Stevens was unique among politicians of his time in attacking the idols of another section and defending the ideals of his own. Far from it. Indeed, it may be argued that the activities of politicians both North and South in turning domestic discontent away from home—and deflecting it to the opposite side of Mason and Dixon's line—were important causes of the sectional controversy, the Civil War, and the reconstruction bitterness.

Regardless of the merit of this speculation, there is one conclusion that the student can scarcely avoid after a careful study of the life of Thaddeus Stevens. One could give in a single word an honest answer to the Virginian who asked Old Thad, "Which feeling is strongest & uppermost in your Abraham's bosom, *love* of the *negro*, or *hatred* of the *white man* of the South?" That one word would be "Neither!"

²⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 36 Congress, 2 session (1860-61), 1188-89; 39 Congress, 1 session (1865-66), 2239-46; letters to Stevens from D. A. Baldwin, May 2, 1864; A. W. Moore, June 20, 1866; Josiah Perham, July 19, 1866; and John D. Perry, June 24, 1868, all in the Stevens Papers.

While Stevens succeeded pretty well in harmonizing the conflicting interests of ironmakers and railroad builders, he found it impossible to do the same for the interests of ironmakers and national bankers. When he demanded more greenbacks after the war, Jay Cooke lumped him with Ben Wade and Ben Butler as a dangerous economic radical. Jay to Henry Cooke, October 9, 1867, in Ellis P. Oberholtzer, *Jay Cooke: Financier of the Civil War* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1907), II, 27-28. But Stevens was no radical, no "agrarian." He was merely responding to the urgent need of local ironmakers, bankers, and other businessmen in his part of the country who were suffering from a scarcity of money and were unable to get sufficient banknotes under the new National Banking System. R. A. Ahl to Stevens, May 5, 1866, in the Stevens Papers. This letter indicates that in the beginning the National Banking System discriminated not only against the West and the South (as is shown in Randall, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, 457-58), but also against certain rural areas of the East.