

**Southern Slavery As It Wasn't:
Coming to Grips with Neo-Confederate Historical Misinformation**

Sean M. Quinlan and William L. Ramsey

“[W]ith the use of the word *nigger*, it is important for us to remember the mutable nature of human language. What today constitutes a gross insult did not have the same connotations a century ago.”¹ So conclude Douglas Wilson and Steve Wilkins in *Southern Slavery, As It Was*, a short “monograph” that defends racial slavery and claims its abolition is the primary cause of “abortion, feminism, and sodomy” in today’s society. According to Wilson and Wilkins, “the remedy which has been applied” – that is, emancipation – “has been far worse than the disease ever was.”²

Wilson and Wilkins present a simple argument. In their eyes, slavery is morally justifiable because they can identify biblical references that sanction Christian servitude. As they see it, the problem with racial slavery in the South was that it “did not follow the biblical pattern at every point,” and those few “sad realities” leave the whole institution “open to criticism.” For

¹Steve Wilkins and Douglas Wilson, *Southern Slavery, As It Was* (Moscow, Id., Canon Press, 1996), 38 [emphasis in original]. Note that Canon Press is not an academically recognized or refereed press. It is the personal publishing arm for Wilson’s sectarian enterprises in Moscow, Idaho, which include Christ Church, the Logos School, the non-accredited New St. Andrews College, Greyfriar’s Hall, and affiliated businesses. Wilson’s faction forms part of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals.

the most part, they claim, slavery was a harmonious institution, one characterized by racial affection and patriarchal benevolence.³ Because these so-called “facts” are not known beyond neo-Confederate circles, Wilson and Wilkins lament that criticisms of southern slavery can still be “put into adept use by those in rebellion against God.” “Sodomites,” “feminists,” and “‘civil rights’ propaganda” can use “the plain teaching of the Bible” to undermine fundamentalist moral authority and thereby use scripture “as a battering ram against the godly principles that are *currently* under attack.”⁴

Why should the academic and legal community waste a moment thinking about this argument? It is not that Wilson and Wilkins are original or eloquent writers. At best, their work simply repeats many of the racist arguments advanced by proslavery activists in the 1840s and 1850s.⁵ Yet they have retooled those arguments and deployed them in the service of modern neo-Confederate and Christian Reconstructionist causes. Wilkins is co-founder of the League of the South, identified as a white supremacist hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The group possesses over 15,000 members in sixteen states and has been a decisive factor in at least three gubernatorial elections in the deep South. Wilson, meanwhile, pioneered the “Classical School” movement and currently services 165 elementary schools and thousands of homeschool families nationwide with his self-published curricular materials.⁶

²Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 39, 11, 8.

³Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 8.

⁴Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 10–11 [emphasis in original]. The terms “sodomites,” “feminists,” and “‘civil rights’ propaganda” are used by Wilkins and Wilson themselves (15, 24).

⁵For an overview of this literature, see Ralph E. Morrow, “The Proslavery Argument Revisited,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48 (1961), 79–94.

⁶For the Southern Poverty Law Center’s take on Wilson and Wilkins, see Mark Potok, “Taliban on the Palouse? A Religious Empire Based in Idaho is Part of the Far-right Theological Movement Fueling Neo-Confederate Groups,” *Intelligence Report* 113 (Spring 2004); and Mark Potok, “Wilkins’ World: Homeschoolers Nationwide are Learning an Unusual Version of the American Story from Neo-Confederate Steve Wilkins,” *Intelligence Report* 113 (Spring 2004); both articles are available online at www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/intrep.jsp (accessed May 20, 2004).

As such, their peculiar version of American history is rapidly gaining influence not only among far right extremist groups but even among some mainstream conservatives and members of Congress. Their views on southern slavery in particular have helped to launch a new and increasingly sophisticated wave of white supremacy that civil rights activists and attorneys will be dealing with for years to come. The determination of the League of the South and its allies, for instance, to restrict the franchise, dismantle affirmative action, destroy multiculturalism, impose biblical law, and re-impose racial segregation has already precipitated numerous local clashes that have played themselves out in the state and federal court systems.⁷

In opposing these threats to our modern freedoms, civil rights advocates have generally failed to perceive that all of them are grounded in and inspired by a grassroots insurgency against the consensus academic view of historical truth. Wilson and Wilkins are representative of such efforts. In *Southern Slavery, As It Was*, they dismiss the last fifty years of academic scholarship on slavery as “abolitionist propaganda” and “civil rights propaganda.” Professional historians have been reluctant to engage this amateur revisionism, in part, because it is often too transparent and outrageous to seem worthy of attention, and partly because there are few professional rewards for public engagement. This homespun history, however, is becoming a significant social force among conservative, white, evangelical Christians in the South and Mid-West. As a consequence, frontline advocates of civil rights and civil liberties need to come to grips with the his-

⁷Some of these cases would be funny if they did not conceal such frightening agendas. Consider, for instance, the recent attempt to have “Confederate Southern Americans” recognized as a National Origin group under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. *See Don Curtis Terrill v. Elaine L. Chao, Secretary of Labor*, Case No. 01-1814, 2002 WL 376681 (4th Cir.. 2002). This case was, unsurprisingly, dismissed in May 2002 by the 4th Circuit and subsequently appealed to the United States Supreme Court, which denied cert. *See also Chaplin v. Du Pont Advance Fiber Systems*, 293 F. Supp.2d 622 (E.D. Va. 2003) (finding that “Confederate Southern Americans” are not a protected class under Title VII). Lawsuits such as *Terrill* and *Chaplin* may look like amusing uses of the legal system to harass employers, but the League of the South and similar groups are engaged in a serious attempt to change politics in the United States.

torical fallacies that motivate their opponents in the years to come. The weight of historical evidence as established in those local disputes will undoubtedly influence the growing debate over reparations for slavery.⁸ If professional historians do not assist civil rights advocates in rebutting the myths of neo-Confederate writers, moreover, we will likely see those ideas forming the basis of actions by state and national legislatures. In the spirit of interdisciplinary cooperation, this review essay seeks to provide a road map to the key historical fallacies prevalent among neo-Confederate revisionists and to explore the ideologies that encourage these twisted versions of American history.

I.

As is typical of most neo-Confederate historians, Wilson and Wilkins claim to be setting the record straight after years of “abolitionist” slander, but have they really used any new methods or historical sources in their effort to unearth at long last the “true nature” of southern slavery? In reality, they present almost no historical evidence and the few documents they do use are highly selective. For the most part, they base their judgment that the majority of slaves were in fact happy to be enslaved on the testimony of former slaves who were interviewed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930s. Their distorted reading of these interviews leads the authors to conclude that “slave life was to them a life of plenty, of simple pleasures.” The many negative depictions of slavery interspersed among the interviews, they suggest, merely lend “authenticity” to the overall impression of profound contentment. According to Wilson and

⁸For an excellent overview of recent developments in the reparations debate, see Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., “Repairing the Past: New Efforts in the Reparations Debate in America,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* vol. 38 (2003): 279-320.

Wilkins, those negative depictions demonstrate that former slaves “weren’t afraid of what ‘whitey’ might think” and thus lend additional credence to the happy memories.⁹

Wilson and Wilkins are clearly unaware, however, that in many cases the WPA interviews that depict slavery negatively and those that speak positively about slavery are the products of separate interview sessions with the same individual. When speaking to a white interviewer, Susan Hamlin of Charleston, South Carolina, remembered her former master as a good, Christian man who always treated her kindly. “He sure was a good man,” she emphasized. Yet when speaking to a black interviewer, Susan described the horrors of fatal whippings that “all de other slaves was made to watch.” The same woman who told a white interviewer that her former owner “just git his slaves so he could be good to dem,” nevertheless told a black interviewer that her fellow slaves “hated and detest both of them [master and his wife] and all de fambly.” “People was always dyin,” she explained, “from a broken heart.” The existence of such contradictory testimony is common knowledge to most introductory history majors. In fact, Susan Hamlin’s interviews are frequently published in freshman historical methods textbooks.¹⁰

The reasons behind this discrepancy are complicated, stemming from a lifetime of white intimidation, the ever-present reality of Jim Crow segregation in the South in the 1930s when the interviews were conducted, and the fact that many of the interview subjects were elderly and still living on the lands of the planters who once owned them. The WPA records cannot be taken at face value, and every reputable historian who has made use of them has been careful to take these many distortions into consideration. For Wilson and Wilkins to suggest that the narratives

⁹Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 25–26. Wilson and Wilkins claim that professional historians have ignored the WPA narratives. They are obviously unaware that virtually every major scholar of southern slavery has made extensive and prolonged use of the records. In fact, they are regarded as one of the foundations of modern slave scholarship.

are a prima facie case for widespread slave happiness is more than mere incompetence. It is a fresh act of violence against the memory of these wronged individuals.

The gross mishandling and manipulation of the WPA narratives that is so evident throughout the pamphlet extends to other sources and even to the choice of sources used by Wilson and Wilkins. No historian worthy of the name, for example, would dare take the word of a white southern planter as definitive evidence that slavery was a good thing. Yet the authors of *Southern Slavery, As It Was* repeatedly cite such sources without flinching. As evidence that southern slavery rested on the paternal kindness of white planters and the “real affection” between slaves and masters, for instance, they refer to a “report” made by Confederate veteran George Christian to the “Reunion of Confederate Veterans” in Virginia in 1907. Most professional historians would suspect, when reading such a report, that a Confederate veteran speaking about the legacy of slavery to other Confederate veterans might be tempted to express a version of Confederate history biased in favor of the Confederacy. Not Doug Wilson and Steve Wilkins.¹¹

They fail, however, to provide even the wounded testimony of Confederate veterans to support their proposition that “the black family has never been stronger than it was under slavery.” Wilson and Wilkins rely on the simple business logic that “happy, contented workers are good workers” and upon a twenty-five year old study of slavery entitled *Time On the Cross* that was largely discredited within two years of its publication.¹² For respectable evidence that slave

¹⁰For the Susan Hamlin interviews and a freshman level introduction to the historical complexities of the WPA narratives, see James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 183–191.

¹¹Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 22–23.

¹²Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 33. It is significant that Wilson and Wilkins rely consistently on the 1974 edition of *Time on the Cross*. The 1989 edition includes a troublesome afterword in which the authors acknowledge that much of the book is now considered unreliable; see Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989). Robert William Fogel’s analysis of the failures and successes of his

families were not disrupted by the sale of family members, Wilson and Wilkins might again have turned to their favorite document series: the WPA narratives. When speaking to a white interviewer, Susan Hamlin of Charleston recalled that her master, Edward Fuller, “didn’t sell none of us, we stay wid our ma’s till we grown.” When speaking to a black interviewer, she confirmed again that Fuller “aint nebber want to sell his slaves.” One of his slaves, however, a mixed race woman named Clory, who had long “beautiful hair she could sit on,” apparently wanted very much for Fuller to sell her away. In fact, Clory “begged to be sold.” Fuller refused and angrily proceeded to “whip ‘er until dere wasn’t a white spot left on her body.” Seventy years later, Susan stilled remembered Clory’s ordeal as “de worst I ebber see a human bein’ got such a be-atin’.” Fuller never sold her.¹³

Perhaps Susan’s recollections of life outside the happy, stable Fuller household could lend additional support for the Wilson/Wilkins thesis. When speaking to a white interviewer, she recalled that

sometimes chillen was sold away from dey parents. De Mausa would come and say “where Jennie,” tell um to put clothes on dat baby, I want um. He sell de baby and de ma scream and holler, you know how dey carry on. Generally, dey sold it when de ma wasn’t dere.¹⁴

No, that doesn’t really seem to help them out much. Maybe Susan’s conversation with a black interviewer could be of use. She recalled that when slaves got married “no minister nebber say

early work may also be found in *The Slavery Debates: A Retrospective, 1952-1990* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003). For other criticism of *Time on the Cross*, see Thomas L. Haskell, “The True & Tragic History of ‘Time on the Cross,’” *New York Review of Books*, October 2, 1975, 33–39; Herbert G. Gutman, “The World Two Cliometricians Made,” *Journal of Negro History* 60 (January 1975), 53–227; Herbert G. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of ‘Time on the Cross’* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Richard Sutch, “The Treatment Received by American Slaves: A Critical Review of the Evidence Presented in *Time on the Cross*,” in *Explorations in Economic History* 12 (October 1975), 335–457; Paul A. David, et al. *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹³Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 187, 190.

¹⁴Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 187.

in reading de matrimony ‘let no man put assunder’ cause a couple would be married tonight an’ tomorrow one would be taken away an’ be sold.” No, that doesn’t seem to help much either. Maybe Wilson and Wilkins could have done something with the tearful mother of the bride who stood inconsolably in the middle of Charleston’s main street screaming over and over “dat damn white, pale-faced bastard sell my daughter who jus’ married las night.”¹⁵ Then again, maybe not.

II.

The number of factual and interpretative errors achieved by their methods is truly impressive. The authors of *Southern Slavery, As It Was* manage to conclude, falsely, that New World slavery was far more humane than slavery as practiced in the Greco-Roman period. They claim that Southerners opposed the slave trade “fervently and zealously” and “repeatedly *and consistently* tried to stop slave traders” after the federal abolition of slave trading in 1808 – totally ignoring the persistence of the internal slave trade in the U. S. South.¹⁶ They disingenuously note that African slavery originated first in Africa, totally overlooking how slavery in West African and Islamic communities was a malleable and temporary condition. They claim, contrary to all empirical evidence, that abolitionism wasn’t a major social force in the U. S., and they astonishingly overlook how abolitionism was primarily a puritan, evangelical movement.¹⁷ They even have the temerity to suggest that African-Americans sympathized with the Confederate war effort, overemphasizing black participation in the southern cause and entirely dismissing the enormous groundswell of African-American support for the North.

According to Wilson and Wilkins, southern slaves were economically better off than freed blacks. Yet they fail to acknowledge the many ways in which white culture deliberately

¹⁵Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, 191.

¹⁶Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 19–20.

marginalized free blacks (why on earth would whites want to advertise the benefits of freedom to the slave population?). They deny the raw fact of sexual exploitation in planter society and even congratulate white owners for inculcating “high standards of morality among their slaves.”¹⁸ Their preposterous insinuation that the word “nigger” was originally a term of endearment does not bear serious comment.¹⁹

The southern slave’s “life of plenty” and “simple pleasures,” according to Wilson and Wilkins, included ample supplies of “food, clothes, and good medical care.”²⁰ But let us keep in mind the grim statistics. Infant and child mortality were extraordinarily high for African American slaves in the South, as much as three times the mortality rate for white southerners, and life expectancy for slaves was much lower than for the average white.²¹ Wilson and Wilkins flip-pantly assure themselves, however, that “[n]early every slave in the South enjoyed a higher standard of living than the poor *whites* of the South – and had a much easier existence.” This type of “reverse discrimination” fantasy, it should be noted, is recurrent rhetoric in current-day hate literature.

Throughout their booklet, Wilson and Wilkins play repeatedly upon the pervasive racist image of the so-called happy darkie, that obedient Sambo type who happily bore his subjugation precisely because he was racially predisposed to it. Accordingly, slavery was far better for African-Americans than emancipation. Wilson and Wilkins go on to speculate that “if slavery had

¹⁷For a good overview of the literature on the subject, see James L. Huston, “The Experiential Basis of the Northern Antislavery Impulse,” *Journal of Southern History* 56 (1990), 609–40.

¹⁸Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 33. On rape and sexual abuse in planter society, see especially Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs* 14 (1989), 912–20. Melton A. McLaurin’s *Celia, A Slave* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), is particularly graphic on this point.

¹⁹Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 38.

²⁰Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 25.

not been so pleasant an experience for the majority,” then the obedient Sambo “mentality would not likely have such a strong hold upon the minds of some of their descendants today.”²²

To reinforce the racist Sambo stereotype, Wilson and Wilkins offer the stunning proposition that “there were very few slave uprisings in the South.”²³ Even if their knowledge of southern history (and motives) could be trusted, their assumption that the lack of successful resistance was a sign of voluntary, happy compliance defies both common sense and human pity. They might as well argue that the absence of recorded rebellions in Stalinist Russia shows that the majority of the population enjoyed rule by Communist terror, or that the paucity of recorded concentration camp revolts shows that Jews preferred being gassed to enjoying life and liberty.

Flawed logic, however, pales in comparison to the depth of their historical ignorance on this point. Antebellum white southerners spent much of their lives in hysterical fear of slave rebellions, and many such rebellions reinforced their fear: the Stono Rebellion, Gabriel’s Revolt, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and a hundred smaller instances of attempted insurrection that never outran the overseers’ bullets.²⁴ During the American Revolution, more than twenty thousand African-Americans in South Carolina alone escaped from slavery to fight for their freedom alongside British forces.²⁵ After the War of 1812, several hundred escaped slaves in northern Florida occupied an abandoned British fort on the Apalachicola River and defied U. S. military

²¹For a good overview, see T. L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); and Kenneth Kiple and Virginia H. King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: Diet, Disease, and Racism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²²Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 36.

²³Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 28.

²⁴For one famous occasion when individual defiance was not permanently silenced, see Frederick Douglass, *The Life of Frederick Douglass As Written by Himself* (New York: Penguin, 2002).

²⁵Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108–142, esp. 142.

authority for years, killing and scalping a detachment of fifty soldiers at one point.²⁶ White refugees and sensational newspaper headlines, moreover, terrified southern planters in the wake of the Haitian Revolution in 1792. Equally important, black resistance in the South took many other forms that Wilson and Wilkins spurn as insignificant, such as poisoning, escape (a lot of escaping), sabotage, arson, maronage, and work slow-downs to name only a few. In response to this multifaceted resistance, southerners used every legal and military advantage they could muster to insure obedience through intimidation. That they succeeded in most cases in snuffing out the flames of hope and freedom should not be read as consent and approval on the part of those who suffered under their hand.

Should this catalogue of incompetence strain the reader's credulity, then let's have Wilson and Wilkins speak for themselves:

why were there not thousands of rabid abolitionists demanding an end to the evil? Or, even more to the point, why were there not hundreds of slave rebellions? These questions have not been asked often or loudly enough. The answer would shock and dismay the vast majority of our nation who have been carefully schooled in abolitionist propaganda.²⁷

Slavery as it existed in the South was not an adversarial relationship with pervasive racial animosity. Because of its dominantly patriarchal character, it was a relationship based upon mutual affection and confidence. There has never been a multi-racial society which has existed with such mutual intimacy and harmony in the history of the world. The credit for this must go to the predominance of Christianity. The gospel enabled men who were distinct in nearly every way, to live and work together, to be friends and often intimates. This happened to such an extent that moderns indoctrinated on "civil rights" propaganda would be thunderstruck to know the half of it.²⁸

Slavery produced in the South a genuine affection between the races that we believe we can say has never existed in any nation before the War or since. Whatever its failures,

²⁶Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733–1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 273–290.

²⁷Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 22.

²⁸Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 24.

slavery produced in the South a degree of mutual affection between the races which will never be achieved through any federally-mandated efforts.²⁹

For the sake of fairness, objective readers should be aware that other groups do support Wilson's and Wilkins' arguments. Those interested in these alternative perspectives may want to consult, for instance, the history of southern slavery offered by the Ku Klux Klan. Virtually any Klan website will offer confirmation of Wilson's thesis that slavery was not all that bad. "Blacks in America lived better during the slavery years," the Mystic Knights of the Ku Klux Klan report, "than they did in Africa."³⁰ The only significant difference we have been able to find between typical Klan histories of slavery and *Southern Slavery, As It Was* involves the issue of the transatlantic slave trade. Wilson and Wilkins argue that the South should not be held morally responsible for the transatlantic slave trade because it was conducted by "New Englanders and Northeasterners."³¹ KKK historians disagree. "The facts are," they assert, "that the Jews were the ones who brought slaves to America."³²

III.

Let us not mince words. Wilson and Wilkins want us to believe that racial slavery was okay, and they even want us to believe that slaves themselves supported that evil system. They are wrong. They are horribly wrong. The evidence does not support their contentions. As scholars, we have little else to offer. But as a way of conclusion, we'd like to ask: Why have these two men made such an incorrect, abhorrent argument? Why do they deny historical reality? What is their theological and political agenda?

²⁹Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 38.

³⁰"Guilt," Mystic Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, www.mysticknights.org/whiteguilt.html (accessed October 15, 2003).

³¹Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 21.

³²"Guilt," Mystic Knights of the KKK.

As we see it, Wilson and Wilkins hope to whitewash the legacy of southern history. They do this, it seems, because they fantasize about a new southern cause – an evangelical redemption, the creation of a New Jerusalem. They believe that the South is historically the locus of Christian regeneration. The South is God’s promised land for the chosen white race, a race that will redeem all others through blood and fire. But in order to memorialize the South – past, present, and future – they must expunge the historical realities of racial slavery, violence, oppression, and civil war. These are huge memories to overcome. As a result, Wilson and Wilkins need to create a new myth – a myth of an evangelical, righteous, and moral South. They want to believe that southerners were exemplary Christians even when they were slaveholders. And so, the South was just in its war for slavery because slavery was condoned by the Bible. In some ways, the war to defend slavery was in itself a war to defend biblical authority.³³ Wilson and Wilkins even argue that the South underwent an evangelical revival at the beginning of the Civil War, making the unbelievable claim that “the Confederate army was the largest body of evangelicals under arms in the history of the world.” Here, drawing upon the racist ideologue R. L. Dabney – that “godly man who fought for the South” – Wilson and Wilkins argue that the South ultimately lost the war because God used a truly iniquitous people (northern abolitionists) to punish a nation of simple sinners.³⁴

We should pause here for a moment. It is this emphasis on the South as a place of moral regeneration that allows us to place Wilson and Wilkins in *their* historical context. Their little booklet, in our view, chillingly distills much of the ideological and political agenda of the radical evangelical right. This extremist movement calls itself variably “Christian Reconstructionism,”

³³In their discussion of Wilkins and Wilson, Edward H. Sebesta and Euan Hague make this same point; see Sebesta and Hague, “The US Civil War as a Theological War: Confederate Christian Nationalism and the League of the South,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 32 (2002): 253–84

“Dominion Theology,” or “Theonomy,” and over the past decade many of these activists have dovetailed with the neo-Confederate movement, a group dedicated to southern secession, the imposition of Biblical Law, and racial separatism.³⁵ The typical Reconstructionist agenda is to overthrow the U. S. constitutional system and institute a Christian theocracy, enforcing draconian religious and racial segregation and denying all their religious and political opponents citizenship in their new city of god.³⁶ Its followers draw their core beliefs from the writings of Francis Shaeffer, Gary DeMar, Gary North, George Grant, David Chilton, and especially Rousas John Rushdoony, among others. Some of these individuals are openly anti-Semitic in their writings (Chilton),³⁷ or insinuate that the gay community should be put to death (Grant),³⁸ or are Holocaust deniers and suggest black racial inferiority (Rushdoony).³⁹

³⁴Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, 13.

³⁵On Christian Reconstructionism and the neo-Confederate movement, see Sebesta and Hague, “The US Civil War as a Theological War.” Wilkins is a co-founder of the League of the South, and Wilson has been active in the movement since at least 1995, giving speeches at the Southern Heritage Society on topics such as “Why the War Never Ended” and “The Blue and Grey in Black and White.” See <http://pointsouth.com/southernheritage/5th.htm> (accessed November 16, 2003).

³⁶“The long-term goal of Christians in politics should be to gain exclusive control over the franchise. Those who refuse to submit publicly to the eternal sanctions of God . . . must be denied citizenship. . . . The way to achieve this political goal is through successful mass evangelism followed by constitutional revision”; Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 87.

³⁷“The god of Judaism is the devil. The Jew will not be recognized by God as one of His chosen people until he abandons his demonic religion and returns to the faith of his fathers – the faith which embraces Jesus Christ and His Gospel”; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1984), 127.

³⁸George Grant and Mark Horne, *Legislating Immorality: The Homosexual Movement Comes Out of the Closet* (Chicago: Moody, 1993). Grant and Horne regret that “many have tried to avoid the obvious significance. . . . God’s condemnation of same-sex perversions is absolute and categorical.” In their eyes, “[t]here is no such option for homosexual offenses” except capital punishment (186–87).

³⁹R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (n.p.: Craig Press, 1973), 586–588. Instead of 6 million dead from Nazi genocide (the accepted demographic statistic), he calculates Jewish deaths after deportation between 896,292 and 1.2 million. “Very many of these people died of epidemics,” he writes (586). Rushdoony then suggests that Holocaust survivors and researchers are bearing “false witness” against Germans, an infraction he earlier suggested (in the same chapter) should be punished by death (548, 571–72). Note that his discussion of the Shoah and German casualties relies upon the work of anti-Semitic writer Léon de Poncis and notorious Holocaust denier David Irving, and his interpretation of the ninth commandment draws upon R. L. Dabney, the southern proslavery apologist and opponent of African-American education. Crucially, Rushdoony’s Holocaust denial has recently attracted mainstream notice; see Joseph Lelyveld, “In Clinton’s Court,” *New York Review of Books* 50, no. 9 (May 29, 2003) and his subsequent letter, “‘The Clinton Wars’: A Correction,” *New York Review of Books* 50, no. 10 (June 12, 2003). Lelyveld refers to Rushdoony as a “religious zealot and Holocaust denier”(June 12, 2003).

For Reconstructionists and neo-Confederates, the primary enemy is something they confusingly call “modernity.” They never quite define this word, but we can infer that it means in part the global process of state-building, world trade, industrialization, urbanization, migration, bureaucratization, mass politics, secularization, and scientific and technological change that has unfolded over the past millennium. In this regard, based upon our reading of these sources, Wilson and Wilkins belong to a long line of anti-modernist thinkers, a very diverse club of communarians that includes groups ranging from the KKK to WTO protesters. What distinguishes fringe right radicals like Wilson and Wilkins, however, is that they view the cultural manifestations of modernity – perceived changes in religious belief, sexual hierarchy, and racial relations – with utter fear and loathing. In their eyes, these transformations have originated from underlying intellectual causes, and they blame philosophical skepticism and modern science for social and cultural change.

One controversial cultural critic has argued that the difference between neo-conservatism and fascism “consists merely in the fact that the latter says openly what the former thinks without daring to say.”⁴⁰ In this sense, Wilson and Wilkins are walking a fine line indeed. We are fascinated to observe how they formally deny any racist sympathies but then seem totally oblivious to the actual content of their work. This, we conclude, is sheer calculation. In the case of *Southern Slavery, As It Was*, it seems to us that Wilson and Wilkins insert passages to please the Klansman or neo-Confederate thinking of joining their cause, while at the same time including passages to deflect the charge of racism just in case their educational accreditation or faith-based

In light of these observations, cf. Peter J. Leithart’s ominously favorable obituary of Rushdoony, in which he shockingly overlooks his racism, right-radical sympathies, and Holocaust denial; see “Old Geneva and the New World: The Reverend Rousas J. Rushdoony,” *The Weekly Standard*, March 26, 2001, 36. Leithart teaches at Wilson’s non-accredited facility, the New St. Andrews College in Moscow, Idaho.

⁴⁰Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 180 n. 4.

funding is jeopardized.⁴¹ To our ears, they speak with a tongue that is both forked and false, and they do violence to historical fact in order to serve their own hateful agenda. In their public declarations, Wilson and Wilkins may deny their racism and disavow violent intentions. But elsewhere they claim that racial slavery, misogyny, and violence against gays are condoned by the Bible.⁴² They then go on to claim that we need to reconstruct society along their lines of scriptural interpretation. What, we ask, do they logically expect their followers to conclude as a prescribed course of moral action?

⁴¹This is most likely the point of Douglas Jones's *The Biblical Offense of Racism* (Moscow, Id.: Canon Press, 1996). Jones teaches at the New St. Andrews facility and is an Elder at Wilson's congregation in Moscow, Idaho, called Christ Church.

⁴²Wilkins and Wilson, *Southern Slavery*, passim. For one example of this rhetoric, consider the following: "Sodomites parade in the streets, claiming that if we do not appropriate more money to study why people with foul sexual habits get sick, we are somehow violating their constitutional rights. Feminists, in rebellion against God, invert the order of the home established by God. They do so in a way that seeks to rob women of their beauty in submission and their security in being loved" (15). For Wilson's opinion that the Bible mandates death or exile for homosexuality, see his interview in the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*, Oct. 11–12, 2003.

