

The Hazards of the Flush Times:
Gambling, Mob Violence, and the Anxieties of America's Market Revolution

Joshua D. Rothman
University of Alabama

(Please do not cite, copy, or circulate without permission of the author)

William Mills knew the residents of Vicksburg, Mississippi would be criticized for what happened in their city in the summer of 1835. An argument begun at a Fourth of July barbecue escalated quickly into a paroxysm of extralegal violence that only ended nearly two days later, achieving a frenzied climax as a mob led by the local militia seized and hanged five men accused of being professional gamblers. The victims' bodies were left dangling from a public gallows for twenty-four hours before they were cut down and buried in a ditch. Reflecting on such an undeniably gruesome display of popular fury, Mills, an attorney and the editor of the Vicksburg Register, understood that the actions of his neighbors would meet with "censure from those who had not an opportunity of knowing and feeling the dire necessity out of which it originated." But he made no apologies. On the contrary, Mills used his newspaper to provide a lengthy justification of the mob's behavior, arguing that gamblers so compromised virtue, honor, and the rule of law that only violence carried out by Vicksburg's "most respectable citizens" could bring public decency, moral integrity, and legal order to the city.¹

Mills was right that not every American would see the imperative behind hanging five men without trial, no matter what their supposed crimes. Other accounts of the riot soon appeared for public consumption, and the tone and details of many called into question whether the perpetrators of the violence in Vicksburg could claim to be acting on behalf of decency and order at all. Despite Mills' best efforts at vindication, the

Vicksburg rioters found few staunch supporters. Instead, across the nation “Vicksburg” became a byword for unjustifiable violence and the dangerous excesses of mob rule that threatened to undermine the authority of the law if not republican government itself. In just a few days, the city had acquired a reputation for brutality that would take decades to live down.

Critics of events in Vicksburg had reasonable grounds for skepticism about how William Mills framed matters, as his defense of the gambling riot masked as much as it revealed about the social realities of the place and time that produced the rampage. Although the rioters proclaimed themselves defenders of sound economic and cultural values, Vicksburg was actually a boom town created by the easy credit of the Jacksonian “flush times” and by the scramble for wealth coincidental to Indian removal and the opening of the Mississippi interior to cotton planting. The merchants, doctors, lawyers, and planters who constituted the emerging elite of Vicksburg may have seen professional gamblers as a threat to their moral integrity, but most of the people in Vicksburg were essentially speculators who had risked migration to the southwest for the allure of fast profits almost unimaginable anywhere else in the country. In a very real sense, nearly everybody in Vicksburg was a gambler.

Moreover, as a city that did not even exist less than twenty years before the riot, Vicksburg was almost utterly bereft of the kinds of well-established institutions and communal networks that might have been said to compose “society” as the term was conventionally defined. The gambling riot of 1835 was less the affirmation of widely shared standards and mores claimed by Mills than it was a violent imagining of community and order where such things scarcely existed. At a time when foreign and

domestic observers alike suggested that settlers in the nation's turbulent southwestern hinterland most plainly revealed Americans as aggressively individualistic and rapaciously greedy, William Mills' defense of his riotous fellow townspeople was no simple description of events. It was his particular contribution to the enterprise of constructing Vicksburg as a wholesome and substantive place rather than a wild frontier. Contrary to all appearances, he and those whose behavior he justified insisted that Vicksburg was not populated by unscrupulous speculators and grasping adventurers but by worthy Americans, trying to live upstanding and prosperous lives while making valuable contributions to the national project of extending civilization to the wilderness.²

Still, even if Mills' rationalizations were somewhat unconvincing, Vicksburg was hardly the only place in the United States where people struggled to find measures of meaning and stability at a time when those things seemed scarce commodities. Historians have long been attuned to how Americans responded to feeling unmoored by the radical social and economic changes of the antebellum era, when territorial expansion and technological advances simultaneously provided new economic opportunities and facilitated migration to places that offered them. Particularly for Americans of the burgeoning northeastern urban middle class, turning to evangelical Christianity, founding an array of reform organizations, and articulating a powerful new set of "respectable" bourgeois values enabled an embrace of the "market revolution" even as those things were designed to ease the sense of being cast adrift that was among the revolution's wide-ranging consequences. Believing that they lived in an age of great progress but also that progress threatened to dissolve the social glue provided by traditional understandings

of family and community, Americans reconstituted many of those understandings in an effort to grapple with and contain the upheavals of modernity.³

Nor was Vicksburg the only place in Jacksonian America where the strains and tumult of the era produced extralegal violence. Hundreds of instances of mob violence plagued every part of the United States in the decades leading up to the Civil War, and like the Vicksburg riot they were not infrequently perpetrated by the very persons who considered themselves the moral guardians of their communities.⁴ What made the purge of professional gamblers from Vicksburg notable among most of those instances was how the rioters' choice of victims so vividly exposed the ambivalence that sat at the heart of American attitudes toward the economic energies unleashed by the flush times.

Northeastern reformers condemned gambling as a dangerous vice, and in antebellum prescriptive literature, religious sermons, and popular fiction the figure of the gambler was a stock villain, a deceiver who ensnared and ruined the young, the ignorant, and the unwary. Yet millions of Americans gambled, drawn to how games of chance distilled to their essentials the calculations of risk and reward, luck and skill, and profit and loss sitting at the center of nearly all economic pursuits in a speculative age.⁵ Residents of the southwest were especially notorious for their love of gambling, yet they determined they would not countenance the presence of men who gambled for a living. In reality, professional gamblers arguably sought their fortunes as many others did in the southwest—wagering on the future, searching for the optimal chance, and occasionally cheating or stealing. But the rioters and men like William Mills preferred not to think of themselves in such a fashion. Betraying no awareness that gambling for a living might be

considered the very foundation of their survival in the flush times, they argued instead that gambling for a living undid prospects for honest prosperity.

And with that notion, at least, many other Americans did seem to agree. Few Americans publicly defended the actions of the Vicksburg rioters, but perhaps even fewer had anything to say in defense of gambling or gamblers. On the contrary, in the immediate aftermath of the Vicksburg riot, dozens of cities and towns across the United States took measures of their own to let professional gamblers know they were unwelcome and that they ought to take up residence elsewhere. If those measures generally took less drastic and dramatic forms than resorted to in western Mississippi, they revealed nonetheless that the perceived need to delineate and enforce boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate forms of speculation and economic striving was widespread among a people uncertain of where those boundaries lay.⁶

The Vicksburg gambling riot, then, was just one incident in one city. But the horror expressed by most Americans about the outburst concealed the extent to which they shared widely in the apprehensions that produced it. Filled with newcomers who pursued speculative profits in a freewheeling market economy while desperately insisting they had not lost their moral bearings, Vicksburg in 1835 exposed the economic culture of Jacksonian America in its most concentrated and intense form. Situated on a southwestern frontier and inextricably bound up with the expansion of slavery, many eastern Americans seem to have considered Vicksburg literally and figuratively distant from their lives and experiences. But historians have perhaps been too willing to concede the point. In turn, they have too readily placed expansion to the southwest at the periphery of the story of America's market revolution without sufficient consideration of

how it might in fact be understood as sitting at the center. Fear and anger displayed in Vicksburg marked a population whose anxieties simply overwhelmed their sense of restraint. But the anxieties themselves were shared across the United States and were products of the flush times.

In purging professional gamblers, Vicksburg's rioters denied that which they feared they had already become. Yet in doing so through brutal violence, they also inadvertently confirmed that it was too late. The southwest exemplified how neatly the seductiveness of wealth dovetailed with the progressive rhetoric of infinite opportunity and social improvement characteristic of America's flush times. But the vaunted possibilities for the common man in the Jacksonian America belied a grim reality where the boundaries of opportunity were monitored and restricted through the ferocious competition and conflict those very possibilities called forth. All the gestures Vicksburg's rioters made toward reform and respectability could not make the five common men on the gallows disappear.⁷

William Mills readily conceded that the purging of professional gamblers from Vicksburg was a "startling" event. But he asserted that appreciating its "necessity" required reading it against the backdrop of the city's recent history, which he portrayed as a constant battle between upstanding "citizens" and gamblers who constituted a vicious "band of desperadoes."⁸ Professional gamblers, Mills wrote, had "for years past" been gathering in Vicksburg, making the city a sort of headquarters for engaging in "their vile and lawless machinations." Selfish and motivated entirely by greed, gamblers were a formidable enemy to what Mills referred to as "society." Like the word "citizen," Mills

used “society” repeatedly as a conceptual foil for the noxious environment that gamblers supposedly created wherever they traveled. In just a few lines, for example, Mills claimed that professional gamblers “poisoned the springs of morality and interrupted the relations of society,” that they were “unconnected with society by any of its ordinary ties,” and that they hatched nefarious schemes “in the very bosom of our society.” To Mills, the “citizens” of Vicksburg “society” were quiet, industrious, orderly, and law-abiding. They felt a sense of responsibility for nurturing the character of future generations and contributed to a convivial public sphere where everyone might feel secure. Professional gamblers, by contrast, were loud, drunken, unprincipled, and criminal. They defrauded and corrupted the young and made the streets unsafe and unsavory places. “Citizens” of Vicksburg saw fellow residents of their town as friends and neighbors. Gamblers saw them as prey.

Making matters worse, according to Mills, was that more and more gamblers flocked to Vicksburg all the time and there seemed to be little anyone could do to stop them. True, there were laws against gambling and other sorts of disorderly behavior, but Mills argued that gamblers always evaded legal punishment, especially by having “secret confederates” falsely testify on their behalf on those rare occasions when they found themselves facing prosecution. Overall, professional gamblers as Mills described them were a collection of villains so powerful in their collaboration and so evil in their intent that they were ultimately “the secret or open authors of all the disturbances and crimes that distract the community.”⁹

Situated in such a context, the outrage with which the citizens of Vicksburg responded to a gambler’s interference with their Fourth of July celebration was not only

understandable but long overdue and all the more heroic. As Mills described what happened, the good people of Vicksburg, Mississippi intended to honor American independence in 1835 with a celebration typical of the kind held elsewhere in the antebellum United States. In conjunction with a muster of the local Vicksburg Volunteers militia unit, participants in the organized public festivities gathered just outside the city for an afternoon barbecue that was to be followed by speeches, a reading of the Declaration of Independence, and a series of patriotic toasts extolling the virtues of the nation and recalling the glories and heroes of the Revolution. The Volunteers were then scheduled to conclude the day's events back in Vicksburg's public square with a parade and a display of military maneuvers.¹⁰

The program proceeded smoothly enough until a militia officer called for quiet so that the toasts might be heard by the crowd. That request presented a problem for a man named Francis Cabler. According to Mills, Cabler was known to the residents of Vicksburg as a professional gambler. He was thus of dubious substance, but his presence at the celebration had been tolerated so long as he behaved himself. When he took umbrage at being silenced and struck a man who tried to quell the disturbance, however, Cabler wore out his welcome. He was forced to leave, and only the interference of the commander of the Volunteers kept him from being pummeled on the spot. Cabler left the scene, but to say he was disgruntled would be understating matters significantly. As the militia paraded by the courthouse later that afternoon, he returned with several weapons, intending to use them on a man who had been especially energetic in expelling him from the barbecue. Cabler never found that man, but he did find the limits of the crowd's indulgence. Cabler was disarmed and taken to some nearby woods, where what Mills

described as “a crowd of respectable citizens” watched as he was tied to a tree, whipped, tarred and feathered, and ordered to leave town within forty-eight hours.

According to Mills, later that night “a large number” of Vicksburg’s “citizens” met at the courthouse. Sure that professional gamblers watched out for one another and that their treatment of Francis Cabler had provoked the entire lot, the meeting’s attendees decided to take the offensive and rid their city of men like Cabler once and for all. The next morning, warning notices were posted giving professional gamblers twenty-four hours to get out of Vicksburg, and William Mills claimed that over the course of the next day, most of them fled in terror. But once the deadline expired on the morning of July 6, the militia, followed by a throng that Mills claimed numbered several hundred people, came together to finish the job. They marched through the streets, sending into homes representatives who tossed out faro tables and any other gambling apparatus they discovered on the premises.

But the real target of the soldiers against fortune was less the sharper’s tools than it was a gambling house owned by a man named North, where “it was understood that a garrison of armed men” had barricaded themselves, defying the warning to evacuate the city. The crowd surrounded the house, and when the occupants refused to surrender, someone kicked down the door. The men inside promptly opened fire, killing a “citizen universally beloved and respected,” a physician named Hugh Bodley. Members of the mob returned fire before rushing the house and hauling out four men. North, the owner the house, was not one of the four. But he was apprehended nearby while attempting to make his escape from Vicksburg and brought back into the city. All five men were conducted “in silence” to a nearby gallows and hanged, which Mills claimed proceeded

without objection, as any “sympathy for the wretches was completely merged in detestation and horror of their crime.” The faro tables and other gambling equipment confiscated by the mob were piled and burned shortly after the executions.

Concluding his description of the gambling riot, William Mills explained that the citizens of Vicksburg really had no choice but to behave as they did. Charitable impulses had no claim on people as brutalized as those in Vicksburg had been, and although he knew critics might suggest there were options other than mob violence to rid the city of gamblers, Mills was certain that there was only one way. “Society,” he wrote, “may be compared to the elements, which, although ‘order is their first law,’ can sometimes be purified only by a storm.”

And Mills claimed that everyone decent in Vicksburg agreed. “The revolution,” as he called it, was a collective project, “conducted here by the most respectable citizens, heads of families, members of all classes, professions, and pursuits. None has been heard to utter a syllable of censure against either the act or the manner in which it was performed.” In case anyone doubted that the effort to “exterminate” the “deep-rooted vice” of gambling was a truly democratic project sanctioned by “society,” Mills concluded his reportage by noting that an anti-gambling society had been founded in Vicksburg, the members of which, in a manner and language appropriate for declaring their collective independence and liberation from the bane of their city, “pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honours for the suppression of gambling, and the punishment and expulsion of gamblers.”

The criticism William Mills had anticipated came quickly and emphatically. Where he and the fellows he termed citizens saw the coincidence of their violence with the anniversary of the nation's independence as entirely fitting, others found it perverse. All across the United States, newspaper editors offered blistering condemnations of Vicksburg and its residents. Headlines described the hangings as a "tragedy" and an "outrage," as "murders" and as "butchery."¹¹ Indeed, in an age of highly partisan journalism when there was almost no important issue or event on which one might find complete agreement among the nation's editors, it was remarkable that the New York Evening Post could observe without exaggeration that "the Vicksburgh outrage is commented upon in terms of suitable indignation and reprobation in almost every mail paper which we open."¹²

To a certain extent, most of the nation's editors found events in Vicksburg so troubling because they argued that the United States was a nation governed by laws. They insisted that gamblers—no matter how much William Mills tried to depict them otherwise—were citizens entitled to the protection of those laws, that the occupants of North's house had acted in self-defense against a violent crowd when they killed Hugh Bodley, and that even if they were guilty of murdering Bodley, executing Americans without even the pretense of a trial was itself a serious and dangerous crime. Ultimately, most wrote that the Vicksburg hangings were a step down the road to anarchy, and that the perpetrators had humiliated the United States and its experiment in democratic government all over the world. The New Orleans True American insisted, for instance, that when it came to gamblers, the "unpopularity (and where it is the case) the illegality of their profession, furnishes no warrant to Tom, Dick and Harry to deprive them of

liberty or life at their pleasure—they are as much as any other citizens, entitled to the privileges secured by the Constitution, to the protection of the laws of the land and the right when illegally assailed, to a practical resort to the first principle of nature—self defence.”¹³ The editor of the Hartford Times was still more vehement. Even if one conceded that gambling was an unseemly vice, he asked whether “persons [were] to be butchered like wild beasts, because they are guilty of vicious propensities and immoral practices? If so, wretched indeed is our country. The laws must be supreme, or we are a ruined people. It is wicked to attempt glossing over the Mississippi murders. They are a reproach to our country, a disgrace on the American name.”¹⁴

Editorial condemnation of the hangings in Vicksburg, however, was not just a matter of principle. Part of the problem with Mills’ version of events was that it was just his version, and it did not seem a particularly believable one. Hezekiah Niles, whose Niles’ Weekly Register had a national readership and one of the largest circulations in the United States, was openly incredulous of Mills’ story, noting that it might “be considered an ‘official’ account of the hanging of five gamblers at Vicksburg,” but frankly describing that account as being of a “specious character.”¹⁵ It is not hard to see why some observers had these kinds of doubts. William Mills’ story of the violence in Vicksburg was reprinted in dozens, if not hundreds, of newspapers all over the country during the summer of 1835. But the story was not solely his to tell. The same roads, rivers, canals, and rail lines that moved the Vicksburg Register from place to place across the United States moved competing narratives of the hangings as well. And as accounts of other witnesses appeared for public consumption, it was clear many of them had seen something quite other than a display of bravery and valor.

The most extensive counter-narrative to that of William Mills appeared in the New Orleans Louisiana Advertiser. Claiming to have received information from “two gentlemen” who had been in Vicksburg during the riot, the Advertiser reported that it was hardly a throng of hundreds who marched through the streets of Vicksburg looking for gamblers and their equipment, but rather a mob of just thirty or forty men under the command of a militia captain. Moreover, that mob hardly acted with the serious deliberativeness Mills suggested. Instead, the Advertiser noted the gratuitous and practically sadistic brutality that characterized the purge of the gamblers. It detailed, for instance, how Francis Cabler was struck right “across the eyes” with tar in response to begging that it at least be kept out of his eyes. The Advertiser described how North and his compatriots were dragged to the gallows by ropes placed around their necks, and how the mob ordered a band to play music in order to drown out desperate pleas the prisoners made on the scaffold for a jury trial. It told how one man, badly injured in the raid on North’s house, was hanged before he even regained consciousness, and of the wife of one of the condemned being denied permission even to inter her dead husband’s body. Finally, the Advertiser wrote of people in Vicksburg who were horrified by what was happening and who made efforts to stop the mob, only to be warned that they would be tarred and feathered or killed if they tried to interfere. Ultimately, the executioners threatened that individuals attempting to cut down the dangling bodies before a twenty-four hour period had expired would themselves be hanged.¹⁶

The events described by William Mills and those described in the Louisiana Advertiser were the same, and yet they were entirely different. One described hundreds of the most upstanding men in Vicksburg acting with moral righteousness and official

sanction of a militia to evict and eliminate dangerous criminals lacking a sense of civic responsibility or basic human decency. The other described a significantly smaller gang of thugs hijacking what should have been an impartial protective force to enact personal retribution on men with friends and families of their own. One described a community united for the common purpose of locating and removing sources of disorder in their midst, and unwavering in its determination to take the harshest steps necessary in pursuit of that goal. The other described a city population divided about the wisdom of a lynch mob, and dissenters bullied into submission and silent witness. One described justice. The other described vengeance.

Between the collective verdict of America's editorial class and news reports like those appearing in the Advertiser, William Mills was greatly displeased. He was prepared for criticism, but he had not expected the sort of backlash that quickly became evident, and he tried to counter it. In the Register, he republished editorials from the small number of papers whose editors supported what had happened in Vicksburg, and he insisted that other papers print his version of what had happened rather than any others, as they were lies while his was "a correct and impartial statement."¹⁷ Mills found the accounts from the Advertiser especially pernicious. That paper's stories, he wrote, were "so distorted and detestable,—so different from the truth—that we can account for them only by supposing that a blackleg, who was liar enough to be scouted by his own associates, was at the elbow of the Editor prompting him when he wrote his accounts, or the editor was very gullible, and gave ear to a great many idle tales."¹⁸

It is probably impossible to determine precisely what happened in Vicksburg during the summer of 1835.¹⁹ But it is clear that the narrative William Mills fashioned

was a decidedly partial and tendentious one. Private letters and other sources confirm matters like the playing of music at the gallows, the tumultuous and chaotic scene that followed the death of Hugh Bodley, the uncertainty among Vicksburgers as to whether the accused gamblers ought to be summarily hanged, and the ways in which members of the mob stifled all criticism of their behavior. Whether or not the Advertiser told the entire truth, William Mills was hiding something.²⁰

That his description made his neighbors look like valiant saviors of their city rather than like barbaric murderers is hardly surprising. An editor who did otherwise would be unlikely to keep his job. Given the prevailing intolerance for opposition among rioters and their supporters, in fact, an editor who did otherwise would be lucky to escape Vicksburg without a beating and a coat of tar and feathers. Still, Mills was so persistent. He not only provided a lengthy defense of the rioters, but he complained for weeks afterwards about the failure of his and their version of the story to be accepted by other Americans. More than self-interest and self-preservation motivated Mills. Indeed, a closer look at what the city of Vicksburg was and what it was not in 1835 indicates that Mills was not just telling a story, and that rioters were not just hanging gamblers. They were all inventing a respectable place for themselves amidst the instabilities of Jacksonian America.

Long before a town ever existed there, observers commented that the land that eventually became Vicksburg seemed like a good place for one. Situated atop a bluff amidst a ridge known as the Walnut Hills, Vicksburg overlooks the Mississippi River from a spot near its confluence with the Yazoo. It was extraordinarily scenic, and many

even thought it romantic. It was also well protected from flooding, and an ideal location for a commercial river port. Heading north past Vicksburg, travelers would not see high ground on the east bank of the Mississippi again for hundreds of miles.²¹

First established in 1819 on land that had been part of the plantation of Newitt Vick, the timing of Vicksburg's founding was fortuitous. The Choctaw were forced just a year later to cede to the United States most of the Mississippi Delta region, and in short order, much of the cotton grown on plantations springing up in the Mississippi interior found its way to Vicksburg, from which it shipped to New Orleans on an ever-growing number of steamboats. Additional Indian land cessions finagled in 1830 and 1832 brought the rest of the northern half of Mississippi under American sovereignty. More cotton followed. By the middle of the 1830s, Vicksburg was the retail center for products desired by farmers and planters in the countryside, and over 40,000 bales of cotton came to its docks annually, enabling it to rival Natchez as the premier commercial hub in the state. The population had grown from practically nothing to more than 2,000 people. A Planter's Bank opened in the city in 1832, and the Warren County seat was moved to Vicksburg a few years later. So small in 1822 that a traveler passing the Walnut Hills could not even see it from the river, by 1835 Vicksburg was bustling with mercantile firms, cotton warehouses, law offices, and other businesses. Author Joseph Holt Ingraham may not have been far off when he wrote on visiting the southwest in 1835 that there was "no town in the south-west more flourishing than Vicksburg."²²

But even as it grew commercially successful and became integrated into the national and Atlantic economies, Vicksburg remained a rootless and unformed place. Plenty of people were drawn to Vicksburg, but few were inclined to stay for very long. In

the 1830s, nobody was actually “from” Vicksburg. Rather, visitors and more permanent residents alike noted that it was a city filled with “strangers,” itinerants from a wide variety of places who lacked strong ties to each other or to any given community. A new arrival in 1836, for example, noted that there was “hardly one native of the place,” and that the city instead attracted “men from every corner of the world.” Until the Civil War, in fact, the population of Vicksburg was a relatively impermanent one, with a minority of the population in any given year still present ten years later. From boatmen and businessmen to doctors and lawyers to gamblers and drifters, Vicksburg was a place people tended to pass through rather than stay.²³

The physical and institutional development of the city reflected the transience of its population. Harriet Martineau, who made a brief stop in Vicksburg during a steamboat voyage in 1835, described it as a “raw-looking, straggling place.” None of Vicksburg’s streets were paved and many were “full of dirt and rubbish.” Because the city was built on a series of steep hills, deep gullies and ravines formed during hard rains and were filled in only “very badly.” Vicksburg had a much-admired brick courthouse, but practically all of its hastily constructed commercial buildings were wooden and unpainted, and accommodations for travelers were filthy. Residents had formed a Temperance Association and a Colonization Society in the early 1830s, but the city had no regular school and just two churches, though the building housing the Presbyterian Church was in disrepair and neither it nor its Methodist counterpart had a permanent minister. Instead, men who practiced law or medicine during the week often served as lay preachers on Sundays.²⁴

If any one thing bound together people living in Vicksburg in 1835, it was the insatiable desire to become wealthy. Commerce, it seems, never stopped in Vicksburg. Sundays, one man wrote, were “more like a holliday than a day of prayer. The stores are open, and business is carried on the same as if there was no Sabbath.” There was a certain inevitability to such sacrilege, as steamboats traveled on Sundays and arrived at the wharves ready to be loaded and unloaded whether or not that seemed the Christian thing to do. Not that many Vicksburgers appear to have been overly concerned about the impact of their business practices on the state of their souls. Nearly all observers agreed that it was hardly worth trying to talk to most people in Vicksburg about salvation or anything else unless it was “connected with making DOLLARS and CENTS.” William Gray, a lawyer and land agent from Virginia, summed up the state of affairs neatly. “This is a busy place,” he wrote in his diary. “All appear to be intent on making money.”²⁵

Money was why people came to Vicksburg in the 1830s, and with good reason, since it appeared there was so much to be made. Whether you were buying and selling land, growing or brokering cotton, dealing in slaves, tending the sick, working at a mercantile firm, or facilitating the endless number of legal transactions and lawsuits, Vicksburg and much of the southwest boomed in the flush times. Different people had different ideas about how they planned to make their money, but the path may have been less important than the destination. The whole region was packed with people lawyer James Davidson described as “gentlemen adventurers who have dreamed golden dreams.”²⁶

Among those “gentlemen adventurers,” of course, were professional gamblers. Drawn to the southwest by the same sorts of profiteering impulses as other migrants, they

too tended to be itinerant, moving from town to town along the rivers and in the interior, running faro banks, playing card games like brag and poker, and spinning roulette wheels. A few cities, like New Orleans, housed permanent and elaborately outfitted gambling establishments, but professional gamblers plied their trade just about anywhere they could find people with money. They played on steamboats and at hotels, in taverns and at vacation resorts, and alongside racetracks, public land sales, and revival meetings. In every river town, the interested could find alcohol and gambling tables at businesses clustered along the waterfront, and even in the smallest villages everyone knew they could find games of chance at innocuously named “coffee houses” or “groceries.”²⁷

No matter where they worked, professional gamblers never seem to have starved for customers. Southern men generally were fond of gambling, and notably willing to place a bet on almost anything, a phenomenon many historians have attributed to how the risk-taking, boasting, winning, and losing inherent to wagering against others confirmed both camaraderie and hierarchy in ways that resonated with the masculinist code of southern honor.²⁸ Even by southern standards, though, southwestern men were renowned for their love of gambling, their appetites legendary across the class spectrum and among all professions and occupations. Joseph Baldwin, the famous chronicler of the southwestern flush times, was likely being facetious when he claimed to have seen a little boy give an adult ten dollars just to lift him high enough to place a bet at a faro table. But he was likely serious when he claimed to know a judge who canceled court on multiple occasions so that he could preside over a horse race, and he was almost certainly both serious and right that every tiny hamlet in the southwest had at least half a dozen “groceries” that were “all busy all the time.”²⁹

Such a reality hardly ought to be surprising, for reasons that transcend the fact that most migrants to the southwest came from older parts of seaboard southern states.³⁰ The entire southwestern economy was itself a sort of gamble, grounded in speculative ventures, easy credit, and cheap paper money churned out by local and state banks as Andrew Jackson began removing federal deposits from the National Bank soon after his victory in the 1832 election.³¹ Some migrants came to the southwest with cash in hand, of course. But for many men, the allure of the southwestern boom was, as one man wrote, that “credit is plenty, and he who has no money can do as much business as he who has.”³² Participating in such an economic environment was something many found irresistible, as it offered the prospect of making a fast fortune out of nothing. But it required a gambler’s sensibility, a willingness to borrow money, take the risk that you could make large profits on paper, and cash out into something tangible and valuable before the bubble burst or the loans got called in.

The southwest was both literally and figuratively filled with gamblers, and Vicksburg exemplified the tendency. Its residents were not merely profit-oriented. In the words of one diarist, they were “run mad with speculation” and did “business in a kind of phrenzy.”³³ And by all accounts, Vicksburgers absolutely loved to gamble. Jonathan H. Green, for example, the “reformed gambler” who became famous in the 1840s and 1850s as an anti-gambling crusader, wrote in one of his many books that in the early 1830s, “as many as three-fourths of all the citizens of Vicksburg, were more or less addicted to gambling.”³⁴ Similarly, H.S. Fulkerson, who migrated from Kentucky to Mississippi in the 1830s, claimed in a memoir that the “better class” of people in Vicksburg “loathed and condemned” gambling. But he conceded that gambling dens could nonetheless be

found “on every business thoroughfare of the city, conducted openly by day and night, and all day of Sunday,” and that gambling was “encouraged by some of the most prominent people” in Vicksburg.³⁵

It might seem ironic that Vicksburgers lived in a city prospering because of a collective gamble and whose residents flocked to the card tables yet also in a place where many loathed professional gamblers enough to kill them. But whatever Vicksburg was in fact, it was not what at least some of its residents liked to believe it was and insisted that it would be in the future. The anti-gambling riot of 1835 can be understood as an almost willful act of denial, an imaginative performance by which rioters and their supporters tried wrenching into being a sense of place where there was none and an economically virtuous community where individual self-interest was ascendant if not triumphant. Rioters and their supporters wanted to see Vicksburg as a city of stability, industry, and sobriety. It was good both for business and for their sense of their own moral standing at least to present the appearance of being dedicated to honest economic progress and strong communal ties. Vicksburg’s formal institutions of law and order might be weak, but rioters insisted through the very act of rioting that they were hard-working people trying to make decent livings for themselves and their families, not a bunch of transient adventurers out for a quick buck. Where so many saw only speculative fantasies, rioters in Vicksburg insisted there was something real.

As the editor of the city’s only newspaper, William Mills’ role in manufacturing Vicksburg’s respectability was to tell the rioters’ story to the nation. His version of events surrounding the Fourth of July celebration made the violence seem rational, inevitable,

just, and something around which all estimable people rallied. But Mills was not the only one with a role in this performance. Dr. Hugh Bodley himself was a central symbol for the Vicksburg rioters. In dying, he assumed a martyr's significance. He became representative of who the rioters imagined themselves to be, and the antithesis of the professional gamblers they targeted for removal.

Bodley's body was barely cold before the rioters began appropriating him to craft a public memory of the riot. On the night of July 6, a body of "citizens" met at a hotel, the five dead men still hanging on the gallows nearby. They passed a resolution expressing their sympathies for Bodley's family, and proposed building a monument "in commemoration of the virtues of the deceased, and particularly of the enthusiastic public spirit in the execution of which he met his mournful and untimely fate." They then resolved that people in Vicksburg should wear a badge of mourning for thirty days, that all businesses in the city be closed the following day, and that everyone ought to attend Bodley's funeral instead of working.³⁶

The Bodley memorial would eventually take the form of a marble obelisk resting on a square base. One side of the base bears the image of a woman grieving next to an oak tree with a fractured branch, another an inscription reading that the monument was "erected by a grateful community to the memory of Dr. Hugh Bodley, murdered by the gamblers, July 5, 1835, while defending the morals of Vicksburg."³⁷ By the time the monument was built, however, Vicksburgers had long since created the story were telling themselves about who Hugh Bodley was and why he had died.³⁸ The crux of it appeared in his obituary, where Bodley was described as a "beloved citizen," a man of "sterling virtues and amiable deportment" who was "universally" admired and who participated in

expelling gamblers from Vicksburg because of an “enthusiastic public spirit which marked all his conduct.” Bodley, the piece continued, had a “susceptible and generous heart” in which “the claims of duty, friendship and benevolence ever found a ready advocate.” His death was all the more noble if all the more tragic in coming at the hands of “miscreants” such as professional gamblers, but the writer of Bodley’s obituary concluded that his “death will ever remain a damning testimony against that infamous class of individuals to whose desperate vengeance he fell a sacrifice.” His name would be “a watchword to rally the friends of virtue against any one of them who may hereafter dare to obtrude his person within the limits of our city or county.”³⁹

Hugh Bodley was in many ways the perfect counterpart to the men at whose hands he met his demise. Where professional gamblers supposedly made their living through fraud and by preying on the weaknesses of others to the detriment of the larger social order, as a physician Bodley was a man who had dedicated his life to healing weakness and earning a living by helping communities stay whole. Originally from Lexington, Kentucky, the twenty-eight-year-old Bodley was from an upper-class family, and his father, Thomas Bodley, had been a general during the War of 1812, a member of the Kentucky legislature, and a presidential elector from the state in the 1810s and 1820s. Hugh Bodley belonged to an American elite caste that, to those who fashioned themselves “respectable” in Vicksburg, were the kinds of people who were supposed to benefit from American progress. Gamblers, by contrast, were the dregs of American society, ruthless killers who had cut down a young man on the cusp of a brilliant future.⁴⁰

We need not doubt that many people in Vicksburg genuinely held Hugh Bodley in high esteem to see how the construction of his memory almost instantaneously after he

died served the purposes of making the riot and the hangings seem noble deeds and of making Vicksburg seem a place where communal roots ran deep among an upstanding populace. Those who commemorated Hugh Bodley's life and death wrote and spoke of him as if he was a long-standing and venerable friend to all in Vicksburg who knew him. In fact, Hugh Bodley had been in the city for a grand total of slightly more than two years. He was unmarried, owned no land and no slaves, and before moving to Vicksburg had been a bit of a wanderer, moving about the southwest for a time while he decided where to live.⁴¹ His only real attachment to Vicksburg in particular was the fact that his older brother William lived there as well.⁴² Surely Hugh Bodley had the capacity to make many friends in a brief period of time. But the assessment those friends made of his character was grounded in a relative shallow base of experience. The Hugh Bodley they chose to remember may well have been to some extent the person he really was, but he was also surely the person they wanted him to be. If he represented a certain segment of Vicksburg's population at its finest, then by extension his virtues were their virtues, his righteous deeds their righteous deeds, his imagined depth of feeling for the good people of Vicksburg the depth of feeling all good people in Vicksburg had for each other and their city. If a man like Hugh Bodley led a column of rioters in breaking down the door of a gambling house, then it was in that mob that any virtuous person had to stand.

The effort to prove that respectability could be made through violence in Vicksburg may have culminated almost six months after the gambling riot. On New Years Day 1836, in front of the Planters' Bank, a group of women known only as "the ladies of Vicksburg" publicly presented a stand of colors to the Vicksburg Volunteers militia company. Speaking before what the newspaper described as a "very large

concourse of ladies and gentlemen,” a young woman named Mary Ann Fretwell gave a speech in which she praised the Volunteers for their “gallantry and courage,” singling out their actions the previous July. With the Volunteers still touchy about criticism they had received in the national press, Fretwell noted that the “uncandid and censorious” could have their say, but that the ladies of Vicksburg knew the Volunteers’ actions were grounded in “noble and virtuous motives” and had inspired “improvement in the moral and social condition of the community.”⁴³

Lieutenant George Brungard, a Pennsylvania native, grocery merchant, and one of the few men we can conclusively identify as an active participant in the gambling riot, received the flag on behalf of the Volunteers he commanded.⁴⁴ He expressed his gratitude and assured the donors that their gift would motivate members of the unit to fulfill their duties as “citizens and soldiers.” Then Brungard, like Fretwell, used his remarks to reflect on Independence Day 1835. He insisted that the Volunteers acted as they believed was necessary, that the passage of time had only further convinced them of the justice of those actions, and that they would be repeated should the “moral pestilence” of gamblers reappear in Vicksburg. Brungard acknowledged that condemnations of the riot had come not only from outside Vicksburg but even from “a few of our own citizens.” Though a rare concession that even those opposed to mob violence could be considered “citizens” or even that there were opponents in Vicksburg, Brungard maintained that such people could not really be part of what was considered the community. Instead of rallying around the rioters, local critics were liars who only undid the project of respectability by “adding fuel to the flame, and by misrepresentations exciting citizen against citizen and friend against friend.” For Brungard, the Fourth of July in 1835 had been an opportunity

for Vicksburg residents to make a choice and decide on which side of a moral line they stood. Rioters and those who supported them had chosen virtue and could consequently claim a place among the decent in the city. Critics might still live in Vicksburg, but their choice entitled them only to “the contempt of the friends of morality, and the good wishes of those excrescences of all communities, the professional gamblers.”⁴⁵

That Brungard drew such a clear rhetorical line between the moral and the immoral in Vicksburg reflected how the rioters had tried to demarcate the boundaries of respectability by drawing and enforcing a line of their own, one essentially predicated on the idea that there were different types of gambling and different types of gamblers. In an era and a place practically defined by the individual quest for profits, Vicksburgers seem to have been relatively untroubled that the prospects of speculative moneymaking broadly defined had attracted so many of them to the city in the first place. But as William Mills described them in his initial report about the gambling riot, professional gamblers were men whose devotion to making money knew no bounds, who cared only for themselves, and who neither produced nor contributed anything of use to the larger “society” in which they lived. They came, they sized up their prospects, they stayed while they fleeced who they could, and when they stopped making money or went bust, they vanished. Anyone trying to stop them along the way might not live to tell the tale. Professional gamblers were speculators too. But in speculating on the lust of others for easy winnings, they both represented and exploited what many Vicksburgers feared were their worst inclinations toward greed without the constraints of social obligations, acquisitiveness without the reciprocities entailed by communal relations, gain without the

imperatives of productive labor, and riches without any substantive economic or moral foundation.

Ultimately, whether those who purged the men they felt transcended the limits of acceptable economic behavior were different in any fundamental way from those they purged is debatable. The proprietor of the gambling establishment that served as the focus of the mob's wrath, for instance, was probably a man named Truman North. He may well have been a professional gambler, but he was no mere itinerant who came and went from Vicksburg as the financial winds blew. On the contrary, he had lived in Vicksburg for several years longer than Hugh Bodley had, and he owned the building targeted by the rioters, an investment that provided him—despite William Mills' claims that gamblers were “unconnected with society by any of its ordinary ties”—with the most ordinary tie of all to an American place.⁴⁶ Arguably, it gave him a more concrete stake in the city of Vicksburg and its future than even someone like Bodley. To the rioters, however, Hugh Bodley was who they wanted to be at their best, while Truman North was who they feared they were at their worst. And although the distinction between the two men and what they represented may have been somewhat hazy—both had made a conscious choice, after all, to move to a place like Vicksburg—in the minds of the rioters it was unambiguous. Through riot, rhetoric, and public ritual, the members of the Vicksburg mob made it clear that no matter how much property North managed to acquire, the way he made his living meant he would never be a legitimate member of their “society.”

These sorts of distinctions still did not convince everyone. Methodist minister William Winans, for instance, had lived in Mississippi since its territorial period in the 1810s, and by 1835 had become a plantation and slave owner near Centreville in Amite

County, southeast of Natchez. Profoundly disturbed by the gambling riot, Winans wrote in late August of his concerns to the Reverend Benjamin Houghton, a colleague then living in Vicksburg. Winans made no claims on behalf of gamblers, but he failed to see on what basis the rioters could effectively declare that the city somehow belonged exclusively to them. “The gamblers,” Winans insisted, “had just as much right to order the citizens to leave Vicksburgh, and murder them in case [of] refusal, as the citizens had to give them such orders, and murder them in case of refusal.” The riot, as Winans saw it, “was clearly a case of wanton usurpation and tyranny—of lawless power against right.”⁴⁷

Replying in January 1836 to Winans’ sense of disquiet, Houghton tried to clarify the intensity of the hostility toward professional gamblers in Vicksburg, explaining how the rioters distinguished their collective enterprise on the Mississippi frontier from that of their victims. “Many of them,” Houghton conceded, “doubtless do all in the way of gaming, that gamblers themselves do; but at other times, they pursue an honest avocation; and if they are fleeced, it is amongst one another; but they will not again soon suffer those to live and game it here who are dependent wholly on that business for support, and have no other visible means of subsistence.”⁴⁸ The problem with professional gamblers, then, was not that they gambled. Many men in the southwest gambled, including many men in the Vicksburg mob. The problem was not even that professional gamblers cheated. Many men in the southwest cheated, even cheating other men who were purportedly their friends. The problem, at least as Houghton understood it, was that gamblers did not do anything in Vicksburg but gamble and cheat. To those considering themselves “honest,” speculation so naked, so unrestrained, and so single-minded was simply unacceptable. Vicksburg may not have ended up being their home for very long

either. They may have understood the city was likely to be a way station where games of chance helped pass the time and maybe even make some cash while they assessed their economic prospects elsewhere in the southwest. But as they proved at the gallows, at least they pretended to be part of “society” while they stayed.

The Vicksburg rioters were hardly the only Americans to feel in 1835 that professional gamblers embodied a sort of disreputable speculative impulse run amok that needed to be checked lest it lead to rampant social and economic disorder and decay. Professional gamblers appear actually to have been killed only in Vicksburg, but in the immediate aftermath of the riot there, Americans all across the country became terrified that they were about to be inundated with members of the “blackleg gentry.” Through the summer and into the fall, people turned to both legal and extralegal means to evict gamblers from the borders of dozens of cities and towns, and to ensure that any others considering locating there would think twice and keep moving.

Throughout the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys particularly and across the western United States generally, Americans became convinced that hordes of exiled professional gamblers were heading their way, and they were determined not to sit idly by and watch the anticipated influx. In New Orleans and Natchez and Mobile, in Little Rock and St. Louis, in Memphis and Nashville, in Lexington and Louisville, in Cincinnati and Wheeling, and in innumerable smaller places throughout the region, residents sometimes warned gamblers out with deadlines and promises of lynching, sometimes physically assaulted them and destroyed their equipment, sometimes arrested and jailed them, and sometimes convened large public meetings whose attendees formed

anti-gambling societies and vowed to help authorities enforce local anti-gambling and vagrancy laws. Hezekiah Niles concluded in his Weekly Register that “all the river towns are alarmed at the fearful introduction of a ‘legion of devils’ amongst them,” but he underestimated matters substantially by limiting his observations to riparian areas. In truth, during the summer and fall of 1835, it seemed no place in the west was big enough to absorb the swarms of gamblers imagined to be aimlessly floating western rivers and traipsing western roads, and no place was too small to fear rumors of being the next target of the gamblers’ supposed depredations.⁴⁹

That a reaction against gamblers was most marked in the west is unsurprising. Although it is impossible to determine with any accuracy how many Americans made their living as professional gamblers, and although there were men who did so in every city and town in the United States, there do seem to have been an exceptionally large number of professional gamblers in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys during the Jacksonian era. Drawn by a profusion of cash among a fluid population of risk-takers, by steamboat and river systems that facilitated movement from place to place, and by the relative inability and unwillingness of police and other forces of legal authority to take concerted action against them, gamblers found the region fertile ground for their enterprises. It is not without justice that one historian has referred to the antebellum southwest as “the headquarters for the emergence of the professional gambler.”⁵⁰

It is also worth observing that the Vicksburg riot in particular reflected certain southern and western cultural characteristics. William Mills sprinkled his reporting on the riot with allusions to how gamblers threatened the honor of other white men in Vicksburg, for instance, and the use of music and ritual humiliation in chasing gamblers

from the city suggests the charivari that scholars like Bertram Wyatt-Brown have argued was peculiarly southern.⁵¹ Violence in general seems to have been more prevalent in the southwest than elsewhere in the United States as well, even excluding the inherent violence of slavery that undergirded American settlement of the region. Travelers reported disproportionate numbers of armed young white men with short tempers in every town they visited, and most took for granted that given the ferocity of economic competition, the impotence of criminal law enforcement, and the voluminous amounts of alcohol consumed by many migrants, interpersonal violence broke out with less provocation in frontier areas than in other parts of the country.⁵²

Vicksburg displayed many of these attributes. One need only to read William Gray's account of two very prominent and very drunken lawyers fighting in the muddy streets, or his recounting of a man shot to death in the thoroughfare on Christmas Day whose corpse still lay there the next morning to get a sense that Vicksburg was an extraordinarily and even casually violent place.⁵³ And one need only glance at census totals to determine who likely bore primary responsibility for these sorts of outbursts. In 1830, the census taker for Warren County counted 1.59 white men in the county between the ages of fifteen and thirty for every white woman of that demographic, and 1.77 white men that age for every white man between the ages of thirty and fifty. In 1840, the census taker separated out the numbers for Vicksburg from those of the county more generally, pointing to similar skews for the city. That year, for every white woman between the ages of fifteen and thirty, there were 1.71 white men in the city of the same age, and 1.65 white men between fifteen and thirty for every white man between thirty and fifty. Living in Vicksburg was clearly a young man's game.⁵⁴

And yet, for whatever regional tendencies were reflected in the anti-gambling movement of 1835, that movement was undeniably national. Efforts and calls for efforts to evict or arrest gamblers appeared just not in cities like New Orleans and Natchez but in Norfolk and Richmond, Baltimore and Philadelphia, and even into New York.⁵⁵ And in the newspapers, the language editors used to describe professional gamblers was revealing, as it spoke to similar sorts of concerns and fears as those expressed by rioters in Vicksburg. Few editors supported the extralegal violence carried out by the Vicksburg mob, but along with their condemnations of Vicksburgers for hanging five men without trial came almost universal agreement that those men were among the most miserable human beings to walk the earth. All across America, professional gamblers were not merely dangerous criminals. Rather, they were “vampyres,” “blood-suckers,” “vultures,” “harpies,” “living ulcers,” “plague spots,” “blood-gouts,” and “upas”: seductive men who alternately fed off and introduced toxic impurities to the healthy energies and vitalities of others.⁵⁶ They left their victims dead or desperate shells of their former selves, in turn doing inestimable damage to the larger society. As the New York Sun put matters, somewhat mixing the corporeal metaphor through which many Americans expressed their revulsion, gamblers were “bullying blackguards . . . who have been long draining the life blood from the moral walk of the community.”⁵⁷

Most specifically, like William Mills, editors in other parts of the country lamented that gamblers ruined enterprising and industrious young men, men like Hugh Bodley. Aspiring to become professionals, clerks, and members of other white-collar occupations, young men drawn to cities by the prospect of economic opportunity were hungry to make their fortunes, optimistic about their futures, in possession of some cash,

and hopelessly naïve, making them easy targets for gamblers who would steal their virtue and undermine their morals as they took their money. The Philadelphia Inquirer, for example, noting that “the recent scenes in Vicksburg have induced hundreds to contemplate” gambling and gamblers, argued that the “merchants and wholesale dealers” of its city and every other city on the Atlantic seaboard ought to consider remedies to the problem. Merchants in particular, the paper noted, had “young men in their service as clerks, book-keepers, and so forth” and “in nine cases out of ten” it was young men in such occupational circumstances who were most “tempted to the gaming table.” They were “ardent, unsuspecting, and inexperienced,” susceptible to the wiles of professional gamblers who disguised themselves as “gentlemen” and who would in short order unburden the credulous “of every thing worth taking.” By forming anti-gambling societies, breaking up gambling halls and arresting those found on the premises, and publishing the names of known gamblers in the newspapers, the Inquirer argued, “citizens” could collectively prove that “the public mind was never more alive to the horrors of gambling.”⁵⁸

Tellingly, while the editor of the Inquirer managed to muster enough outrage to call for a crackdown on professional gamblers and their havens, he neglected to link that call to the larger economic temptations that so many young American men found impossible to deny in the 1830s. For the editor of the Inquirer, as for many of the ministers, advice writers, editors, and others who devoted their energies to condemning gamblers and the gambling that took place in the demoniac “hells” of antebellum America, it was easy to see a class of malevolent villains and deceivers who schemed to seduce the upstanding and virtuous with dreams of riches only to leave them morally and

financially bankrupt.⁵⁹ It was harder and required more abstract vision to see that their seductions worked so well because they offered the promise of the flush times—fast fortunes from nothing more than willingness to take a risk—in one turn of the cards or one spin of the wheel. That professional gamblers presented false fronts, plied customers with alcohol, and cheated may have all been true, but it was the prospect of easy money pervading American economic life that got young men to sidle up to the faro table.

There were some, though, who recognized the broader economic trends that sat at the heart of the moral and cultural crisis the Vicksburg riot laid bare. Some recognized that thousands of Americans who might never consider setting foot in a gambling hall were nonetheless putting their money into bank and railroad stocks, speculative land schemes, and other sorts of ventures no less dangerous or reckless than taking one's chances playing poker with a professional gambler. "Speculation in stocks and real property," one paper noted in the spring of 1835, "is more general and extravagant than it has been before for many years, in all our principal cities. . . . Multitudes are now prominent and desperate dealers in the stock and other speculation markets, of all classes and ages, callings and positions in life, that formerly were never seen nor expected and themselves never thought of action, in such scenes. Small tradesmen, shopkeepers, clerks of all degrees, operatives of town and country, members of the learned professions, students in the offices, beginners in the world without capital or with a little, all frequent the exchanges and the auction grounds to try their fortunes as with the lotteries." Such economic behavior courted disaster. "This diffusive excitement," the author continued, "subject as it is to rumors and various chances of the day or hour, is unfavorable to productive industry, to steady habits and sure aims, and to morals which are always more

or less in danger when hazard whets cupidity, governs action, and determines fate in a general whirl of spirits and thoughts.”⁶⁰

As Americans looked for moral clarity amidst the amoral murk of the market revolution, the concern that many might be enticed by mirages of easy gain rather than struggle to make their fortunes through traditional forms of productive labor was widespread. The figure of the professional gambler served as a useful crystallization of the larger misgivings about what College of William and Mary president Thomas Dew described in the spring of 1835 as a “reckless, profligate, gambling spirit . . . spread through the country.”⁶¹ Only after the bubble of the flush times burst in the Panic of 1837, however, did more Americans come to draw direct connections between their collective national economic behavior and that of professional gamblers.⁶² When minister and reformer Henry Ward Beecher offered moral instruction to an audience of young men in Indianapolis late in 1843, for example, he lambasted professional gamblers as a “vulture-flock,” as “bloodsucker[s]” and “jackall[s].”⁶³ But he also saw speculative capitalism itself as inherently corrupt and criminal, and for the same reasons. “Indeed,” he argued, “a Speculator on the exchange, and a Gambler at his table, follow one vocation, only with different instruments. One employs cards or dice, the other property. . . Both burn with unhealthy excitement; both are avaricious of gains . . . both depend more upon fortune than skill; they have a common distaste for labor; with each, right and wrong are only the accidents of a game; neither would scruple in any hour to set his whole being on the edge of ruin, and going over, to pull down, if possible, a hundred others.”⁶⁴

The anxieties present in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1835 were thus like those evident in many other parts of the United States, and the anti-gambling riot just one facet of the larger negotiation Americans were making with the market revolution. Situated in the southwest, Vicksburg perhaps represented America in the flush times at its most exaggerated. But its residents, like those in other American cities and towns, were not unusual in finding the consequences of an expanding national market economy confusing and sometimes enraging. Americans everywhere struggled with uncertainty and ambivalence as they confronted life amidst transient and anonymous populations. Vicksburg was a “world of strangers” filled with the dangers of hypocrites and confidence men as much as that inhabited by the northeastern middle classes.⁶⁵ Americans everywhere tried to forge new forms of community and respectable morality amidst unfamiliar and uncertain social and economic environments, whether they lived in the bustling industrial cities of the northeast or the frontier commercial depots of the southwest. And though optimistic, Americans everywhere wondered apprehensively whether the desire for individual gain unleashed in a speculative economic world would lead to untrammelled greed, recklessness, and financial ruin. If in Vicksburg, some Americans found violence as appropriate a way to stifle those apprehensions on the path to rectitude as sermons and advice manuals, that decision was brutal, but it was an impulse felt throughout the nation.

In the end, when the economic depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s did come to the southwest, thousands were ruined, including many in the city of Vicksburg. Presbyterian minister J.R. Hutchison saw a busy Vicksburg in which “every speculator was buying lots” when he arrived in 1836. By 1838, economic failures were widespread

and depression “spread like a funeral pall” over the city, which “became but the shadow of its former self. Its wealth had taken to itself wings like an eagle, and had fled.”⁶⁶

Perhaps William Mills laid the blame for such an economic cataclysm on professional gamblers, as he did for so many other things in Vicksburg. Certainly gambling, in some measure, was at fault. Gauging Mills’ reaction, however, is impossible. In the fall of 1835, he had sold his interest in the Vicksburg Register and stopped serving as its editor. He had clearly begun thinking about a different sort of life away from the city. By 1840, he owned several thousand acres of farmland in the Walnut Hills outside Vicksburg, along with more than eighty slaves. As if there was any doubt, in 1850 he identified himself to the census taker as a planter. Sometimes, apparently, gambling in the southwest really paid off.⁶⁷

¹ Vicksburg Register, July 9, 1835.

² Works on the post-Revolutionary settlement and economic development of the region known in the antebellum era as the “southwest” include Joan E. Cashin, A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Thomas D. Clark and John D.W. Guice, Frontiers in Conflict: The Old Southwest, 1795-1830 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989); William C. Davis, A Way through the Wilderness: The Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier (New York: HarperCollins, 1995); Don H. Doyle, Faulkner’s County: The Historical Roots of Yoknapatawpha (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), esp. chs. 1-4; Daniel S. DuPre, Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama 1800-1840 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); David J. Libby, Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004); John Hebron Moore, The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Christopher Morris, Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); James Oakes, The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders (New York: Vintage Books, 1982); Malcolm J. Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Adam Rothman, Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

³ The historiography of the social and cultural consequences of the so-called market revolution in the United States has become quite extensive, even when one delimits that historiography to scholarship centering on the formation of the northeastern middle class. The most provocative and important synthesis remains Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Other useful and important works include but are hardly limited to Thomas Augst, The Clerk’s Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 2003); Stuart M. Blumin, The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Christopher Clark, The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Rodney Hessinger, Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Paul E. Johnson, A Shopkeepers' Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979); John F. Kasson, Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); Scott C. Martin, ed., Cultural Change and the Market Revolution in America, 1789-1860 (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); Steven Mintz, Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); David J. Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Onieda County, New York, 1790-1865 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); and Ronald G. Walters, American Reformers, 1815-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997 [revised edition]). For a critical perspective on the utility of the market revolution as an analytical construct, see Daniel Feller, "The Market Revolution Ate My Homework," Reviews in American History, Vol. 25, no. 3 (September 1997), pp. 408-415.

⁴ The most thorough work on mob violence in antebellum America is David Grimsted, David. American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Also see Richard Maxwell Brown, Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Michael Feldberg, The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Paul A. Gilje, The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), and Gilje, Rioting in America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Leonard L. Richards, Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); and Christopher Waldrep, The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), chs. 1-2.

⁵ On the history of gambling in antebellum America, see especially Ann Fabian, Card Sharps, Dream Books, and Bucket Shops: Gambling in 19th-Century America (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). Also see John M. Findlay, People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chs. 1-3; and Jackson Lears, Something for Nothing: Luck in America (New York: Viking, 2003). Far less scholarly if no less entertaining works include Herbert Asbury, Sucker's Progress: An Informal History of Gambling in America from the Colonies to Canfield (New York, 1938); and Henry Chafetz, Play the Devil: A History of Gambling in the United States from 1492 to 1950 (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1960).

⁶ As Ann Fabian argues about gambling and its critics in the nineteenth century, "those who gambled and those who wrote about gambling as well as those who wrote about the economy with the aid of gambling metaphors frequently raised the very questions that troubled serious political economists. They used gambling, both overtly and implicitly, to construct the ordered economic rationality so necessary to a liberal political economy. What was to assure stability in individuals bent on gain? When would the search for wealth turn dangerous and destructive? Who had a right to profits generated by the ever more rapid transfer of property and by the seemingly magical fertility of speculative markets?" Ultimately, Fabian concludes, gambling "became a 'negative analogue,' the one form of gain that made all other efforts to get rich appear normal, natural, and socially salubrious." Scott Sandage, meanwhile, argues that Americans trying to draw the sorts of economic distinctions entailed in critiques of gambling often failed to recognize the complicity of so many of their fellow citizens in the "gambles" of the market economy. As Sandage notes, men in the "go-ahead" age following recovery from the Panic of 1819 felt constant and relentless striving for financial gain to be the only satisfactory way to move in the world. But such economic attitudes

also effectively sanctioned engagement in reckless speculative endeavors and the resort to various forms of dishonest “humbug” as ways of making money. Sandage concludes that although Americans of the era frequently denounced speculators who failed financially as antagonists of the “honest man,” in fact drawing such “sharp distinctions and extreme examples deflected awareness that even the simplest Americans were becoming part of this world—whether they knew it or not. . . . In theory, the ‘go-ahead (i.e. go-headlong) speculator,’ as one critic put it, was an enemy of the people. In practice, he was the people.” (Fabian, Card Sharps, Dream Books, and Bucket Shops, pp. 3, 4-5; Scott A. Sandage, Born Losers: A History of Failure in America [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005], ch. 3, quotation on p. 89).

⁷ Though there is no lengthy study of the Vicksburg gambling riot, a number of historians have at least briefly examined the event. Most have understood it primarily as a reflection of peculiarly southern sensibilities and cultural systems like the code of honor, as a typical manifestation of frontier violence intended to “clean up” Vicksburg by importing “eastern” moral standards to the west, or some combination of the two. See, for example, Fabian, Card Sharps, Dream Books, and Bucket Shops, pp. 29-38; Findlay, People of Chance, pp. 64-69; Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 135-145; and Grimsted, American Mobbing, pp. 14-15. Also see Morris, Becoming Southern, pp. 120-122, which situates the gambling riot amidst a more generalized fear of “outsiders” in Vicksburg. Christopher Waldrep has recently placed the gambling riot and the public debates that followed in its aftermath within the context of the era’s larger political battles over Jacksonian Democracy and the emerging abolitionist movement, focusing particularly on how Americans manipulated the word “lynching” for political purposes. See Waldrep, Many Faces of Judge Lynch, ch. 2.

⁸ All quotations in this section, unless otherwise noted, come from the Vicksburg Register, July 9, 1835.

⁹ In fact, criminal prosecutions for gambling were on the rise in Vicksburg’s Warren County during the 1830s. Christopher Waldrep notes that there was only one instance of a gambler being prosecuted in the county between 1817 and 1822, but that during the 1830s, there were twenty-eight such cases. Waldrep concludes that during the 1830s, Mississippians had begun serious efforts to use courts as “a place where the community regulated the behavior of individuals for the good of the whole.” (Christopher Waldrep, Roots of Disorder: Race and Criminal Justice in the American South, 1817-80 [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998], p. 43). I have yet to make my own way through the court records for Vicksburg and Warren County, but Waldrep’s findings suggest several possible readings. On one hand, increasing prosecutions for gambling might undermine Mills’ claims that courts were useless in dealing with gamblers, as grand juries were increasingly willing to bring indictments against them. On the other hand, Waldrep does not indicate how often prosecuted gamblers actually got convicted, and if prosecutions generally ended in acquittals, it might suggest some roots of the frustration Mills and other Vicksburgers claimed to have with the judicial system. Either way, Mills’ notion that gamblers bore ultimate responsibility for every crime and disturbance in Vicksburg would seem to require either a very expansive definition of “gambler” or a very narrow definition of “disturbances and crimes.”

¹⁰ Mills published the content of the prepared toasts for the day in the July 16, 1835 issue of the Register. Fairly typical for the era, they included salutes to the signers of the Declaration of Independence, veterans of the American Revolution, George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette, the American flag, the American army, and the states of the Union. The thirteenth toast, as had become common in many places, was drunk to women as a gender. On celebrations of the Fourth of July in the early republic, see Len Travers, Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); and David Waldstreicher, In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹¹ Baltimore Gazette, August 1, 1835 (“tragedy”); Louisiana Advertiser, in Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette, August 4, 1835 (“outrage”); Niles’ Weekly Register, August 1, 1835 (“outrage”); Albany Daily Advertiser, in New York Evening Post, August 3, 1835 (“outrage”); Georgetown Metropolitan, in Baltimore American, August 7, 1835 (“murders”); and Richmond Enquirer, July 28, 1835 (“butchery”).

¹² New York Evening Post, August 4, 1835.

¹³ New Orleans American, in New York Evening Post, July 31, 1835. Similarly, the editor of the Louisville Advertiser wrote that gamblers “are men—equally under the protection of the law with other citizens; equally entitled to all the advantages of a full and impartial trial. When those who wish to put them down cast aside the restraints of law to effect their object, the subjects of their pursuit finding the law inadequate to their protection, necessarily resort to force to repel the attack. And though the attacking party may be able to accomplish their design, yet they set an example which will be sure to be followed whenever any of its members become obnoxious.” (Louisville Advertiser, in New York Evening Post, July 31, 1835. For examples of similar positions taken by editors in every part of the United States, see St. Louis Herald, in Chicago American, August 8, 1835; The Liberator, August 22, 1835; Baltimore American, August 6, 1835; Arkansas Advocate and Georgetown Metropolitan, both in Baltimore American, August 7, 1835; and Lexington Intelligencer, November 24, 1835).

¹⁴ Hartford Times, in Portland Eastern Argus, August 26, 1835.

¹⁵ Niles’ Weekly Register, August 1, 1835.

¹⁶ The Louisiana Advertiser story appeared in whole or in part in many newspapers, but this summary comes from the story as it appeared in the Boston Daily Courier, August 1, 1835.

¹⁷ Vicksburg Register, July 23, 1835.

¹⁸ Vicksburg Register, August 6, 1835.

¹⁹ Some details of what transpired, such as the punishment suffered by Francis Cabler, seem fairly well established, and it is almost certain that five men were hanged on July 6. But many rumors circulated after the riot whose substance is less sure. An informant who had been in Vicksburg, for example, told the Natchez Courier that another unnamed gambler was lynched on the night of July 5, even before the twenty-four hour evacuation deadline established by the courthouse meeting had expired. A number of papers, meanwhile, reported a story that initially appeared in the Louisville Journal, in which an eyewitness wrote that after hanging North and the men in his house, the crowd in Vicksburg severely whipped and then mutilated for their own amusement a sixth man by “sticking pins through his nose and ears.” (Natchez Courier, in Grand Gulf [Mississippi] Advertiser, July 14, 1835; Louisville Journal, in Lexington Intelligencer, July 24, 1835, and Baltimore Gazette, July 30, 1835. Also see the United States Telegraph, July 25, 1835, which published an article from a New Orleans paper claiming that two other gamblers were lynched in addition to the five who were hanged).

²⁰ See, for example, George W. Featherstonhaugh, Excursion through the Slave States (New York, 1844), p. 138; Wynkoop letter, dated Oct. 1, 1836, published in the Vicksburg Daily Herald, December 27, 1912; and letter from L.S. Houghton to Henry Bosworth, July 10, 1835, typescript in “Hanging of Gamblers” vertical file, Old Court House Museum, Vicksburg. Also see William F. Gray, From Virginia to Texas, 1835 (Houston, 1909), October 31 and November 9, 1835, pp. 26, 31-32. Gray was a Virginia lawyer who visited the southwest as a land agent for two men from Washington D.C. He was not present in Vicksburg when the riot occurred. But he did spend several months in and around the city late in 1835, and his description of the Vicksburg Volunteers as a sort of ragtag bunch of roughly forty men led by a man named George Brungard and accompanied by a small band of musicians closely matches how the Louisiana Advertiser described the unit. The Advertiser’s informants, of course, could have easily folded an accurate portrayal of the Vicksburg militia into a larger narrative that denied the participation of hundreds of other people in routing the city’s gamblers. But given the consistency of Gray’s portrayal of the militia with that of the Advertiser, along with accounts of the riot provided by the sources listed above, the notion posed by the Advertiser that the few dozen members of the militia bore essential responsibility for the riot and the hangings seems at least plausible.

- ²¹ Morris, Becoming Southern, pp. 105, 108-109. On the perceived beauty of Vicksburg's scenery, J.H. Ingraham, The South-West by a Yankee (New York, 1835, 2 vols.), v. 2, p. 170; Wynkoop letter; and Charles Augustus Murray, Travels in North America during the Years 1834, 1835, and 1836 (London, 1839, 2 vols.), v. 2, p. 175.
- ²² Morris, Becoming Southern, pp. 40-41, 109-110, 137-138; Libby, Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, pp. 101-103; Clark and Guice, Frontiers in Conflict, ch. 12; Samuel J. Wells, "Federal Indian Policy: From Accommodation to Removal," in Carolyn Keller Reeves, ed., The Choctaw Before Removal (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), pp. 181-213; Robert V. Remini, Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars (New York: Penguin, 2001), chs. 11 and 14; Waldrep, Roots of Disorder, pp. 8-10; Baltimore American, September 9, 1835; Jackson Mississippian, January 10, 1834; Wynkoop letter; Timothy Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932; orig. published Boston, 1826), pp. 282-283; Ingraham, South-West by a Yankee, v. 2, pp. 169-170 (quotation on 170).
- ²³ Herbert Kellar, "A Journey Through the South in 1836: Diary of James D. Davidson," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (Aug. 1935), November 1, 1836, p. 356; Wynkoop letter; Morris, Becoming Southern, pp. 118-119.
- ²⁴ Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel (New York, 1838, 2 vols.), v. 2, p. 17; Gray, From Virginia to Texas, November 4, 1835, pp. 25-26, 27, 29 ("dirt and rubbish" and "very badly"), and 52; Featherstonhaugh, Excursion through the Slave States, p. 137; Jackson Mississippian, January 10, 1834; Wynkoop letter; Morris, Becoming Southern, p. 123. In a history of Vicksburg and Warren County, Pamela Lea Grillis suggests that residents of the city whose denomination lacked a church building sometimes gathered in private homes to worship, and she does note that one private academy, the Vicksburg Institute, had opened in 1831. The status of that school by 1835 is unclear. (Grillis, Vicksburg and Warren County: A History of People and Place [Vicksburg: Dancing Rabbit Books, 1992], p. 41).
- ²⁵ Gray, From Virginia to Texas, October 26 and November 1, 1835, pp. 26 and 27 ("this is a busy place" and "Sabbath but little observed"); Wynkoop letter ("more like a holliday"); Jackson Mississippian, January 10, 1834 ("connected with making DOLLARS and CENTS").
- ²⁶ Diary of James Davidson, November 1, 1836, p. 356.
- ²⁷ The Natchez Courier, for instance, noted that North's establishment in Vicksburg was known as the Vicksburg Coffee House. (Natchez Courier, in Grand Gulf [Miss.] Advertiser, July 14, 1835. Also see Jackson Mississippian, August 15, 1834; Asbury, Sucker's Progress, chs. 7 and 9; and Findlay, People of Chance, ch. 2. Joseph Ingraham provided a lengthy description of a New Orleans gambling hall in South-West by a Yankee, vol. 1, pp. 126-135. Also see the narratives of former professional gamblers such as John O'Connor, Wanderings of a Vagabond [New York, 1873, edited pseudonymously under the name John Morris]; George Devol, Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi [New York, 1926; orig. published 1887]; or many of the works of self-proclaimed "reformed gambler" Jonathan H. Green, such as The Gambler's Life [Philadelphia, 1857]).
- ²⁸ See, for example, Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, pp. 135-145; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 339-350.
- ²⁹ Joseph G. Baldwin, The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957; orig. published 1853), p. 61.
- ³⁰ Despite the claims of southern historians, it seems debatable that the love observers universally saw southwestern men had for gambling marked a distinctive regional cultural attribute grounded in honor. As John Findlay argues, the ways and extent to which Americans gambled in the Jacksonian era reflected a more general spirit of the age that, like southern honor, also mixed pretenses to both equality and hierarchy. Gambling, Findlay writes, "reiterated the nation's egalitarian premise at the same time that it generated the vital differences, the wins and losses, that distinguished between equals. . . . Almost every American prided

himself on his country's democratic condition, but he simultaneously strove to prove that he was better than others by making the most of his opportunities to stand apart from the undifferentiated mass. Gambling facilitated this quest ideally." (Findlay, People of Chance, pp. 50-51). Different people and groups of people preferred wagering on different things and at different games, and the act of gambling itself surely meant different things to different people depending on, among many other factors, cultural context. But by the nineteenth century gambling was a distillation of a larger cultural ethos as well as an especially popular pastime for southerners. That white southwesterners gambled with a particular fever may have had something to do with a cultural heritage many of them carried from the places they were born, but their "southern-ness" alone does not entirely explain their avidity. Jackson Lears, in fact, suggests that the cultural appeal and power of gambling in the southwest had less to do with how much that place and its inhabitants were like other southerners and more with how much it and they were like eastern American cities. Distinguishing among the cultural meanings of gambling in different parts of the antebellum United States, Lears writes that "in the Southeast, gambling continued to express notions of masculine honor and social hierarchy; in the Southwest and in the major cities it provided occasions to enact more fluid, egalitarian, and individualistic forms of male rivalry." (Lears, Something for Nothing, p. 112).

³¹ On Jackson's efforts to undermine the Bank of the United States, see Robert V. Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Bank War (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967); Sellers, Market Revolution, chs. 10-11; John M. McFaul, The Politics of Jacksonian Finance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); William G. Shade, Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972); and Jean Alexander Wilburn, Biddle's Bank: The Crucial Years (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

³² Diary of James Davidson, November 1, 1836, p. 355.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jonathan H. Green, An Exposure of the Arts and Miseries of Gambling (Cincinnati, 1843), p. 212.

³⁵ H.S. Fulkerson, Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi (Vicksburg, 1885), p. 95. On Vicksburgers and their affection for gambling, also see O'Connor, Wanderings of a Vagabond, pp. 340 and 341; Green, The Gambler's Life, p. 137; Wynkoop letter; and Featherstonhaugh, Excursion through the Slave States, pp. 134-139.

³⁶ Vicksburg Register, July 9, 1835.

³⁷ "Vicksburg's Hills Alive with Gambling Legacy," Jackson Clarion-Ledger, May 4, 1986, p. A1.

³⁸ The Bodley memorial was placed originally in the yard of the Presbyterian Church, which donated a small piece of land for the site in 1838. That the Presbyterian churchyard was chosen as the site is in and of itself telling. In life, Bodley was an Episcopalian, but the Presbyterian Church was one of the few physical symbols of traditional morality in Vicksburg in the 1830s and thus a logical spot for a monument that effectively served as a public declaration of respectability. The Bodley monument sat in the churchyard into the twentieth century. After the church sold its lot and building, the monument was relocated to a small triangular spot at the intersection of Openwood, First East, and Farmer Streets in Vicksburg, where it still stands. Hilariously, when riverboat casinos began opening in Vicksburg in the early 1990s, the builders of one casino suggested moving the monument to its entrance, presumably as a way of creating some sort of tangible, if artificial, historical connection between the city and their facility. They decided against the idea once informed of the events memorialized by the monument. (Frank E. Everett, Jr., "History of the First Presbyterian Church, Vicksburg, Mississippi, in the Nineteenth Century," p. 28, "Hanging of Gamblers" vertical file, Old Court House Museum, Vicksburg, Mississippi; "Vicksburg Gamblers" subject file, Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Jackson, Mississippi.

³⁹ Vicksburg Register, July 9, 1835.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, the elder Bodley invested in speculative land purchases, was ruined financially during the Panic of 1819, and was forced to sell the mansion house he had bought in Lexington less than a decade earlier. His economic misfortunes do not seem to have affected the esteem he received from friends and neighbors in Kentucky, where he had lived since the late eighteenth century. It is hard not to wonder whether anyone in the subsequent generation of Bodleys chose a speculative economic environment in which to try and make his fortune, and whether the outcome proved more successful than the first two. (See the discussion of Thomas Bodley and the Bodley-Bullock House, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, at http://www.rootsweb.com/~kyfayett/dunn/bodley_house.htm. Also see Lewis Collins, History of Kentucky [Covington, Ky., 1874, 2 vols.], v. 1, pp. 368-369 and 524-525).

⁴¹ Vicksburg Register, July 9, 1835. Hugh Bodley first placed an advertisement in the Register in May 1833 offering his services as a physician, and he paid only a poll tax in Warren County in 1834 and 1835. (Warren County Combination Tax Rolls, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; Vicksburg Register, January 2 and May 1, 1833). A letter Bodley's father wrote to him early in 1833 indicates that the elder Bodley knew his son was somewhere in the southwest but that he was not quite sure exactly where his son was, where he would eventually settle, or when or whether he would return to Kentucky. Thomas Bodley knew Hugh had been in Vicksburg at some point visiting another of Thomas' sons, Hugh's older brother William. But Thomas Bodley did not mail letters to Hugh in Vicksburg, presumably because he could not be sure when or if Hugh would return there to receive them. Instead, Thomas mailed letters for Hugh to Memphis in care of his son-in-law, who lived in the city at the time. Even so, he had no idea whether Hugh had received any of those letters, because he had received no letters in reply. He hoped, though, to receive some sort of response soon, as he and Hugh's mother were both "anxious to know your views as to locating yourself." (Thomas Bodley to Hugh S. Bodley, February 24, 1833, Trigg Family Papers, Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Jackson, Mississippi).

⁴² William Bodley, a lawyer, first appeared on the Warren County tax rolls in 1831. By 1833, he did own property in the city, and was either in the process of building or had just completed building a sizeable house that still stands on Locust Street in Vicksburg. At some point between when Hugh Bodley decided to settle in Vicksburg and the time he died, his and William's sister Anne moved to Vicksburg as well, along with her husband, a lawyer named William Henry Hurst, though the Hursts did not purchase property in Vicksburg until late in 1835. (Warren County Combination Tax Rolls; Warren County Deed Book G, p. 873, December 27, 1835).

⁴³ Vicksburg Register, January 7, 1836.

⁴⁴ Brungard was practically an old-timer in Vicksburg, having moved there in the late 1820s. The Louisiana Advertiser story about the gambling riot noted that the militia unit comprising the mob was led by a "Capt. Baumgard," which was clearly a misspelling of Brungard, who made no secret at the ceremony described above that he had led the militia in the raid on North's gambling house and in hanging the prisoners taken from it. (Warren County Combination Tax Rolls, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; Vicksburg Register, February 12, 1834; Louisiana Advertiser, in Boston Daily Courier, August 1, 1835).

⁴⁵ Vicksburg Register, January 7, 1836. At least one newspaper in the aftermath of the gambling riot suggested that the planners of Fourth of July ceremonies in 1835 had intended them before Francis Cabler ever arrived on the scene to be an implicit confirmation of legitimacy on the "citizens" of Vicksburg as the proper leaders of their city, in direct opposition to professional gamblers. As the Lexington Intelligencer reported hearing from one witness, "the citizens of the place had determined to discountenance a gang of black-legs, that infested their society, and, in their celebration of the 4th of July, made arrangements for peaceably excluding them, by a use of tickets, from the public festivities of the occasion; notwithstanding which, they made their appearance at the dinner table. The President knowing the feelings and determinations of the citizens, deemed it his duty to apprise these men of the facts at the time, and to require their absence from the table. Public excitement was so great against them for thus pushing themselves into a company where their presence was a manifest intrusion, that they were told to leave the town." The New Orleans Observer, meanwhile, was bothered that only some Americans would be

embraced on Independence Day, writing that “we are coming to a pretty pass indeed in this boasted land of Liberty, when citizens liable to taxation and military duty are refused permission to join in a public celebration of the Anniversary of our Independence; and who for protecting themselves against outrage, are tarred, feathered and hung without Judge or Jury!” Such scolding may have been misplaced, and the exclusionary nature of the celebration less unusual than the Observer presumed. As Len Travers has argued, by the Jacksonian era Fourth of July celebrations were hardly always the unifying events that some liked to pretend and that the Observer’s criticism suggested ought to be so. On the contrary, noting the varied social and political meanings with which Americans invested celebrations of the Fourth (and how for some it was simply an excuse to get drunk), Travers writes that “as Americans approached the middle of the nineteenth century, Independence Day increasingly revealed not so much what they held in common as what separated them.” (Lexington Intelligencer, July 21, 1835; New Orleans Observer, in New York Evening Post, July 31, 1835; Travers, Celebrating the Fourth, p. 222).

⁴⁶ Vicksburg Register, July 9, 1835. Although the Natchez Courier reported that the “North” hanged in July 1835 was named Alfred North, no available record I have located suggests anyone by that name lived in Vicksburg at the time. Several pieces of evidence point instead to Truman North was the man in question. First, he was the only man with the surname North who paid taxes in Vicksburg in 1835 or any of the preceding years, initially appearing on the tax rolls in 1832. Second, the land North owned in Vicksburg sat directly adjacent to land owned in part by a man named James Hoard, who William Mills noted in his reporting on the riot was also a gambler but had managed to leave town before the mob could get hold of him. Although gambling houses could be located in just about any given part of any American town or city in the antebellum era, they tended to be clustered relatively close together. It seems unlikely that a man named by Mills as a professional gambler just happened to own a building next to Truman North’s building but that Truman North was an entirely different North than the one who hanged during the gambling riot. Third, and finally, the taxes paid on Truman North’s land in 1836 were paid by his estate, indicating that he died sometime between January 1835 and January 1836. (Natchez Courier, in Grand Gulf [Mississippi] Advertiser, July 14, 1835; Vicksburg Register, July 9, 1835; Warren County Combination Tax Rolls, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; Warren County Deed Book F, pp. 335-336, April 8, 1833; Warren County Deed Book G, pp. 581-582, June 1, 1835).

⁴⁷ William Winans Papers, J.B. Cain Archives, Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi, Box 17, Letter Book 8, pp. 162-163, letter from William Winans to Rev. Benjamin A. Houghton, August 29, 1835.

⁴⁸ Winans Papers, Box 20, folder 8, letter from Rev. Benjamin A. Houghton to William Winans, January 16, 1836.

⁴⁹ Niles’ Weekly Register, August 8, 1835. That same issue of the Weekly Register alone carried accounts of public anti-gambling meetings held in New Orleans and Mobile, of a gambling house destroyed by a mob in Covington, Kentucky, of a public proclamation issued by the mayor of Cincinnati announcing that up to six hundred men stood ready to assist the police both in evicting gamblers from the city and in preventing mob violence rumored to be planned against supposed gamblers and their haunts, and of a published warning to “exiled blacklegs” in a Louisville newspaper. Also in Louisville, attendees at a public meeting gave professional gamblers twenty-four hours to leave the city, asserting that they would take legal or, if necessary, extralegal action against any who ignored the warning. In Lexington, attendees at a public meeting formed an anti-gambling society, expressed their disapproval for gambling in all forms, and vowed to prosecute and expel gamblers from city limits. (Lexington Intelligencer, July 31 and August 4, 1835). In addition to the eleven western locales listed above, I have found, between July and October 1835 alone, meetings held, warnings issued, anti-gambling societies formed, and other actions taken against gamblers in Clinton, Pontotoc, Columbus, Washington, Grand Gulf, and Woodville, Mississippi; Carroll, East Feliciana, West Feliciana, and St. Helena Parishes in Louisiana; in Tuscaloosa and Huntsville, Alabama; in Washington, Helena, and Red River, Arkansas; in Maysville, Kentucky; in Jacksonville, Illinois; in Dubuques, Missouri; and in LaPorte, Indiana. Surely this list, which includes only those activities that appeared in the newspapers, is not exhaustive. (See Vicksburg Register, July 9 and 23, August 13 and 27, and September 10 and 24, 1835; Baltimore Gazette, July 29, August 17 and 25, September 10, and October 26, 1835; New Orleans Bee, July 13, and August 19 and 26, 1835; Niles’ Weekly Register, August 22 and

October 31, 1835; Mobile Commercial Register and Patriot, July 22, 1835; Portland Eastern Argus, August 26, September 15 and October 28, 1835; Huntsville Southern Advocate, October 13, 1835; Arkansas Gazette, July 14 and 28, August 25, September 1 and 8, and October 6, 1835; Cincinnati Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, August 6 and 13, 1835; Lexington Intelligencer, August 11, 1835; Nashville Republican, August 4, 20, and 27, 1835; Chicago American, July 11, August 29, and September 5, 1835; and United States Gazette, August 7 and October 5, 1835).

⁵⁰ Findlay, People of Chance, p. 46.

⁵¹ Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, ch. 16.

⁵² See, for example, Ingraham, Southwest by a Yankee, v. 2, pp. 45-50, and 166-169; Featherstonhaugh, Excursion through the Slave States, pp. 94-100; and Baldwin, Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi, pp. 42-43 and 61-62. Also see Cashin, A Family Venture, pp. 102-108.

⁵³ Gray, From Virginia to Texas, pp. 29 and 57.

⁵⁴ United States Census—Mississippi, Warren County, 1830 and 1840.

⁵⁵ For Norfolk, see Niles Weekly Register, August 8, 1835; Portland Eastern Argus, August 12, 1835; Baltimore Gazette, August 6 and September 10, 1835; New York Evening Post, August 8, 1835; United States Gazette, August 7, 1835; and Cincinnati Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, August 20, 1835. For Richmond, see United States Telegraph, August 20 and 24, 1835. For Baltimore, see Portland Eastern Argus, August 1, 1835; Chicago American, August 29, 1835; and Lexington Intelligencer, August 7, 1835. For Philadelphia, see Lexington Intelligencer, January 15, 1836; United States Gazette, August 5, 1835; and United States Telegraph, August 15, 1835. For New York, see Lexington Intelligencer, August 25, 1835; New York Evening Post, December 20, 1835; and United States Telegraph, August 15, 1835.

⁵⁶ Frankfort Commonwealth, in Lexington Intelligencer, July 28, 1835 (“vampyres”); Tuscaloosa (Ala.) Flag of the Union, in Huntsville Southern Advocate, October 13, 1835 (“vampyres”); Niles Weekly Register, August 1, 1835 (“upas” and “harpies”); Louisville Advertiser, in New York Evening Post, July 31, 1835 (“plague spots”); Chicago American, August 29, 1835 (“blood-gouts”); Huntsville (Ala.) Democrat, in Vicksburg Register, August 29, 1835 (“harpies” and “vultures”); Manchester (Miss.) Herald, in Vicksburg Register, July 20, 1835 (“blood-suckers”); Philadelphia Inquirer, in United States Telegraph, August 15, 1835 (“living ulcers”).

⁵⁷ New York Sun, in United States Telegraph, August 15, 1835.

⁵⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer, in United States Telegraph, August 15, 1835.

⁵⁹ Karen Haltunnen notes how the figure of the gambler was one of the most common forms of urban “confidence men” identified by authors of antebellum advice literature. See Haltunnen, Confidence Men and Painted Women, pp. 16-20.

⁶⁰ Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cincinnati Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, May 14, 1835.

⁶¹ Dew, in Richmond Enquirer, June 30, 1835.

⁶² As Jackson Lears notes, in the antebellum period American evangelical moralists increasingly tried to “distinguish between ventures at *vingt-et-un* and those on the stock exchange” and “to seek ways to separate legitimate from illegitimate risk,” in large measure by focusing concern on how gambling damaged the individual and his prospects for worldly success and eternal salvation rather than on how speculation more broadly did damage to the public good. The more generalized suspicion of speculative economic activities, submerged in this critique, re-emerged mostly in times of economic panic. (Lears, Something for Nothing, pp. 100, 101, and 128-129.)

⁶³ Henry Ward Beecher, Seven Lectures to Young Men, on Various Important Subjects; Delivered before the Young Men of Indianapolis, Indiana, during the Winter of 1843-4 (Indianapolis, 1844), pp. 105, 112.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 53.

⁶⁵ Haltunnen, Confidence Men and Painted Women, chs. 1-2. As Joseph Baldwin observed about the migrants who filled the southwest in the flush times, “men dropped down into their places as from the clouds. Nobody knew who or what they were, except as they claimed, or as a surface view of their characters indicated.” (Baldwin, Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi, p. 64).

⁶⁶ Rev. J.R. Hutchison, Reminiscences, sketches and addresses selected from my papers during a ministry of forty-five years in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas (Houston, 1874), p. 53.

⁶⁷ Tax records from 1836 suggest Mills purchased his first farmland in Warren County in 1835. By 1840, he owned more than 2,000 acres in the countryside in addition to a lot in the city. He paid taxes on thirty-three slaves, but the 1840 census indicates that eighty-three slaves lived in his household. (Vicksburg Register, October 29, 1835; Warren County Combination Tax Rolls, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson; United States Census—Mississippi, Warren County, 1840 and 1850).