



# Lincoln Lore

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## MISCEGENATION: BROAD FARCE OR POLITICAL DIRTY TRICK?

"If any fact is well established in history, it is that the miscegenetic or mixed races are much superior, mentally, physically, and morally, to those pure or unmixed." Such was the startling doctrine announced in a pamphlet published in early 1864 entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*. One of the few pamphlets published during the Civil War which dealt with long-range solutions rather than immediate and sensational military or political headlines, *Miscegenation* argued that the solution to America's race problem, now that the black man looked forward to a future of freedom, lay in intermarriage. By blending the races into a bronze middle ground of color, there would no longer be cause for race prejudice in America.

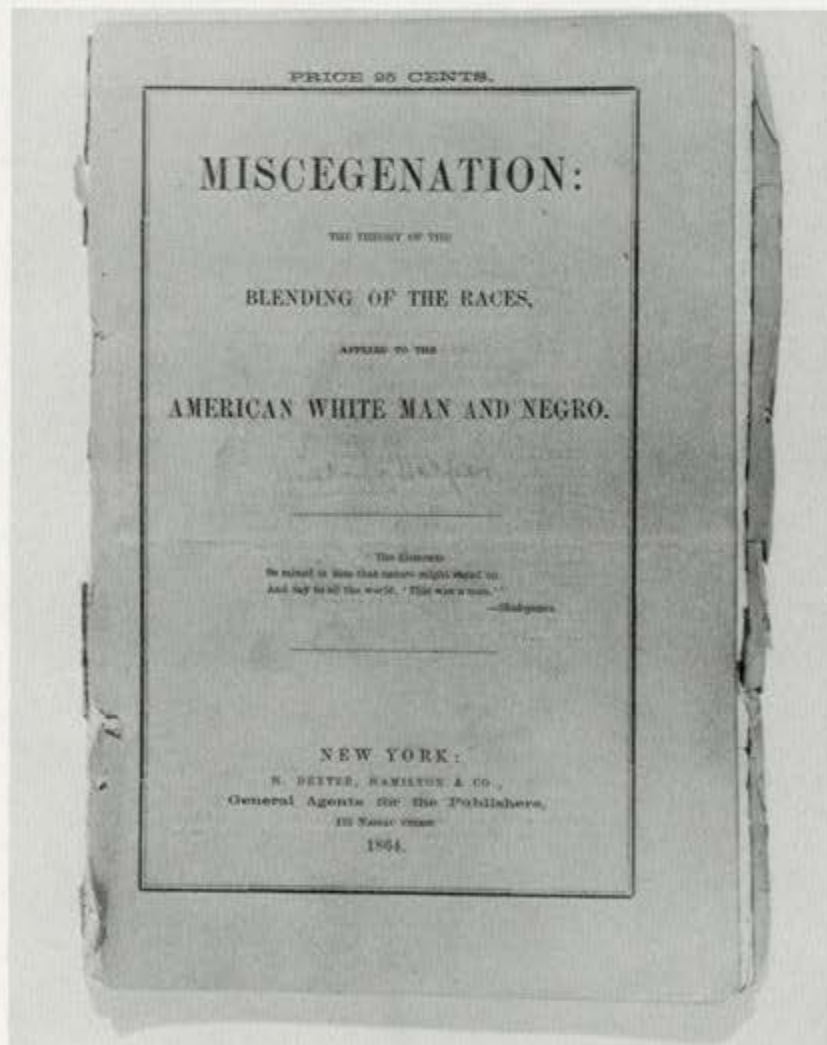
Recently, a rare-book catalogue offered a copy of *Miscegenation* at a price ten to twenty times higher than that customary for Civil War pamphlets. It is not the fame of the pamphlet's authors that accounts for its extraordinary value. The pamphlet was published anonymously, but the identity of the authors, David G. Croly and George Wakeman (two employees of the Democratic newspaper, the *New York World*), has been known to historians and book collectors for many years. Croly did have a famous son, Herbert Croly, whose book, *The Promise of American Life*, was a sort of manual for Progressivism as Theodore Roosevelt conceived it. However, it is the subject of *Miscegenation* that makes it important. According to the recent catalogue listing, the pamphlet was "the first work advocating this solution to the race problem"; it is therefore "scarce, topical and atypical for its time." The catalogue might have stated further that *Miscegenation* added a new word to the English language; until

this publication, intermarriage between whites and blacks was called "amalgamation."

Although the pamphlet's authorship was a well-kept secret at the time, the authors were properly identified at least as early as the 1880's. A well-researched article by Sidney Kaplan in the *Journal of Negro History* in July, 1949, "The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864," told the full story of the pamphlet's authorship and of the controversy which followed its publication. In 1958, a solidly documented little book appeared which should have laid to rest for good any of the mysteries surrounding *Miscegenation*. However, the author, J. M. Bloch of Queen's College, chose as the title for his book,

*Miscegenation, Melaleukation, and Mr. Lincoln's Dog*. Instead of arousing curiosity, Professor Bloch's bizarre title probably doomed the book to obscurity. "Melaleukation" was another word coined by Croly and Wakeman in the pamphlet, and it did not, thank goodness, survive as a permanent addition to the language. Its presence in the title of Bloch's book baffles the reader, and the obscure reference to "Mr. Lincoln's dog" (derived from Bloch's sketchy analysis of a scarce political cartoon) seems to suggest a trivial subject and not a piece of serious scholarship. Professor Kaplan's article may have been doomed to obscurity by the fact that it was published in the *Journal of Negro History* before interest in black history had caused a large number of readers to check the articles in that fine journal regularly.

Bloch's and Kaplan's efforts should have ended speculation, but they eluded many readers, including the rare-book dealer who most recently listed Croly's pamphlet. That dealer was thus the victim of a hoax, for *Miscegenation* can be characterized as the



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FIGURE 1. One owner of the Lincoln Library and Museum's copy of Croly and Wakeman's anonymous pamphlet identified the author (in pencil on the cover) as Hinton Helper. The price indicates that the pamphlet was meant for broad popular circulation.

first work to recommend such a solution to the race problem only in an odd sense. Croly and Wakeman did not seriously recommend miscegenation; they published the pamphlet as a joke and as an attempt to suggest that such would be the logical outcome of the policies of Abraham Lincoln and his Republican party. It was a pamphlet written to sound as though a wild-eyed abolitionist had written it. *Miscegenation* was, therefore, only one attempt in a long line of attempts by Democrats to imply that the logical outcome of opposition to slavery's expansion would be intermarriage (the most famous of these attempts, of course, taking place in the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858).

Few abolitionists, probably no Republican politicians, and certainly no Democrats were recommending miscegenation to the American people in 1864. To know only that the author was connected with the Democratic newspaper, the *New York World*, should have been enough to reveal that the pamphlet was a hoax. Nevertheless, and despite the efforts of Bloch, Kaplan, and others who have benefited from their detective work (George Fredrickson in *The Black Image in the White Mind* and Forrest Wood in *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation*), considerable confusion still surrounds the pamphlet *Miscegenation*.

The major question is not whether the pamphlet was sincere in its recommendation or not, but whether it was a lightly-intended parody or a more sinister attempt to cause the Republicans and abolitionists political misery. Professor Bloch concludes that the pamphlet was, by and large, a joke, but one at which "no one laughed." *Miscegenation* was, as Bloch says, "gravely interpreted, gravely defended, gravely refuted." Friends and enemies of the Republicans were simply gulled, and their serious and often impassioned answers to the pamphlet showed them to be fools. Bloch further supports his case by arguing that the pamphlet was a joke on racists as well as extreme abolitionists. Since it did not have one clearly defined enemy but rather aimed its barbs at extremists of all kinds, it seems, Bloch argues, not to be a piece of party chicanery. This is the way Bloch puts it:

... Croly and Wakeman, in their travesty on the beliefs of the small group of pro-Negro extremists, paradoxically held up to ridicule the similar but widely accepted "reasoning" of the believers in Negro anatomical and physiological inferiority. [English anatomist Thomas Henry] Huxley alone recognized the seemingly obvious: that the "aberrations from scientific fact" exemplified by a work as "hopelessly absurd" as *Miscegenation* simply confirmed "the preposterous ignorance, exaggeration, and misstatement" in which the opposite faction indulged. . . . The serious "scientific" exponents of Negro inferiority could no longer distinguish between truth and nonsense, scientific argument and flagrant travesty. . . . Some beliefs are too widely held, just as some faces are too grotesque, to be caricatured.

Like some abolitionists then, systematic advocates of Negro inferiority took the pamphlet seriously; but Croly and Wakeman meant to gull them all.

On the whole, Bloch is probably right, but his argument would benefit from three refinements. First, the pamphlet contains enough political themes and tactics in it to be worthy of mention. Second, the true indicators of the farcical nature of the pamphlet are allusions other than the ones made to nineteenth-century science. It is impossible to tell whether Croly recognized the speciousness of "scientific" racism. Third, the evidence that the pamphlet also jabbed at pseudo-scientific theories of race is purely circumstantial and is based largely on hindsight. Croly may have intended the scientific allusions as additions to the pamphlet's air of serious intent rather than as paradoxical jabs at pseudo-scientific racism.

### I. Political Ideology

Bloch argues that the pamphlet appeared in the winter of 1864 (that is, in January) because Croly knew that this was a time when the press would give it maximum play for want of any other news to report. Winter always brought a lull in war news as the generals rested in winter quarters or geared up for spring campaigns. The autumn elections of 1863 were over and those of 1864

were a long way off. If the authors had had serious political mischief for Lincoln and the Republicans in mind, Bloch implies, they would have published it nearer election times.

It would be a mistake, however, to ignore the degree to which the outlook of the pamphlet was determined by the perspectives of northern Democratic ideology and particularly by the perspectives of New York City Democrats. One striking theme in *Miscegenation* is its attempt to outrage Irish immigrants, a traditional bastion of Democratic voting. The Irish were characterized by Croly (himself an Irish immigrant) and Wakeman as "the lowest people, . . . in the scale of civilization in Europe." Section IX of the pamphlet was devoted entirely to the subject of the "Present and Future of the Irish and the Negro." There the authors argued that "Notwithstanding the apparent antagonism which exists between the Irish and negroes on this continent, there are the strongest reasons for believing that the first movement towards a melaleuketic union [race-mixing] will take place between these two races." Such a remark depended for its rough humor, of course, on the fresh memory of the New York City draft riots of July, 1863, when antagonisms between blacks and Irish working men had erupted into open violence. *Miscegenation* referred to the riots as "an expiring spasm of . . . prejudice" which "had only the effect of increasing the public sentiment of respect and regard for negroes." Croly and Wakeman suggested that the Irish, who were "coarse-grained, revengeful, unintellectual, with very few of the finer instincts of humanity," would be uplifted by unions with the blacks, unions which the pamphlet insinuated were already taking place. Finally, the pamphlet indulged in racial stereotyping for the Irish that was highly reminiscent of the villains of some pro-Republican political cartoons (see Figure 2):

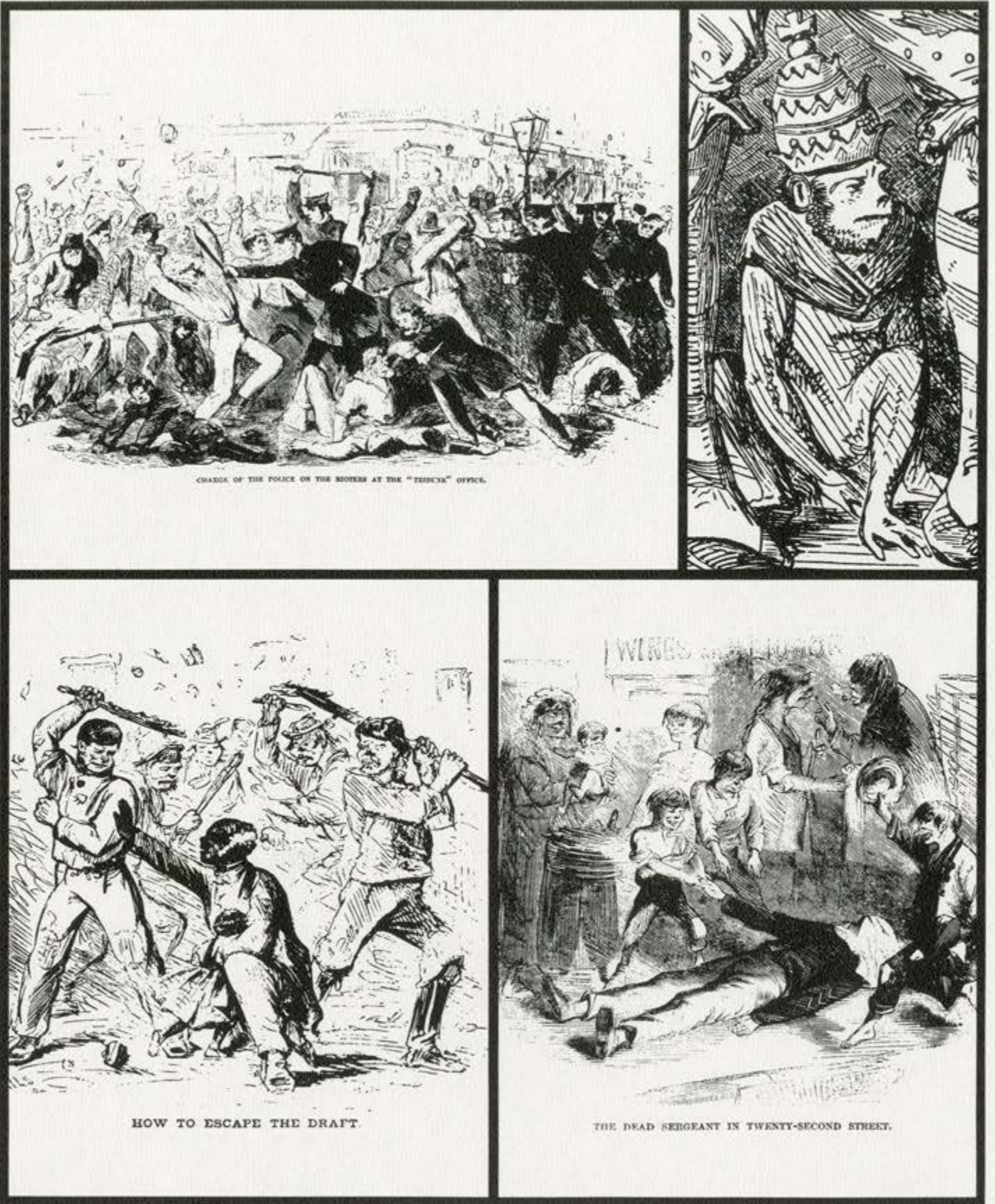
One of the evidences of degeneracy which has been pointed out in certain of the negro races has been the prognathous skull, the projecting mouth, the flat and open nostril. Yet this is a characteristic as true of certain portions of the people of Ireland as of the Guinea African. The Inhabitants of Sligo and Mayo, portions of Ireland under peculiarly bad government, have developed these precise types of feature. The people have become thin-legged, potbellied, with mouth projected, head sloped, nostril distended. . . .

In short, *Miscegenation* did its best to show that the abolitionist loved the black man but hated the white Irishman.

The winter may have been a time of slumping availability of news from the military front, but Americans, especially in the nineteenth century when elections were occurring at all times in one part of the country or another, rarely failed to be interested in politics. And the coming presidential election was as much on the pamphleteers' minds as it was on the minds of others. Again, an entire section (XIX) was devoted to the subject of "Miscegenation in the Presidential Contest." The authors stated explicitly that the "question of miscegenetic reform should enter into the approaching presidential contest." The pamphlet was studded with references to specific Republican policies, references aimed at identifying the party with some of its more radical adherents and at implying thereby that Republican sponsorship of miscegenation was the next logical step.

One [party] presses forward and the other must follow even to fight it. Yet the one the most advanced has not reached the *ultima thule* of its theories. Four years ago the Democrats, so-called, defended slavery, and the Republicans only dared to assert an opposition to the extension of slavery. The Republican party to-day boldly demands that every black man in the land shall be free; that he shall stand side by side with the white soldier in the defense of liberty and law; that the plantations of the South shall be transferred to him from his rebel master; that by the Government and people his services shall be recognized. . . . The Democratic party hardly dares to oppose all this, but attempts to divert discussion to senseless side issues, such as peace, free speech, and personal and constitutional rights.

*Miscegenation* also carefully noted Lincoln's changing



*From the Lincoln National Life Foundation*

FIGURE 2. It is quite impossible to distinguish caricature from reportorial illustration in nineteenth-century illustrated newspapers, as *Harper's Weekly's* coverage of the New York City draft riots shows. In fact, the working-class rioters in the illustrations in the upper-left and lower-right corners are more grotesquely caricatured than the ones in the cartoon in the lower-left corner. The features attributed to the rioters are precisely those of the monkey in the upper-right corner. It was probably no accident that the cartoonist chose a monkey as a representative of the pope; Irish Catholic workingmen in New York City were only slightly less explicitly seen as monkeys. Do the pictures suggest that even illustrations were strictly propaganda, that illustrators never really saw the scenes they described to the newspaper's readers, or that prejudices were so ingrained from the culture that reporters actually perceived reality in that distorted fashion?

views and programs. Of the "colonization scheme of the President" which had "fallen stillborn from his pen," the authors noted:

The President of the United States, fortunately for the country, has made a great advance in the right direction. His first thought in connection with the enfranchisement of the slaves, was to send them from the country. He discovered first, that this was physically impossible, and second that the labor alone which would be lost to America and the world, would amount in value to more than the debts of all the nations of the earth. The negro is rooted on this continent; we cannot remove him; we must not hold him in bondage. The wisest course is to give him his rights, and let him alone; and by the certain influence of our institutions, he will become a component element of the American Man.

Croly and Wakeman were northern Democrats, and they were careful to distinguish their position from that of being pro-southern. Some of the pamphlet's sharpest barbs were reserved for the slaveholder. The degree to which the pamphlet bordered on appeals to prurient interests is apparent in this explanation of the "marvelous success of the Southern people in statesmanship and war":

The comments of the Northern press respecting the inferiority of the Southerners were true of the poor whites. . . . But these people are kept apart, by their unwholesome prejudices, from the negro. Because they cannot mingle with him in the capacity of slaveholder, they shut themselves up in their unnatural pride. . . . Their exclusiveness has been punished by their own physical inferiority. But it is otherwise with the so-called aristocratic classes of the South. The most intimate association exists. But the instinct here becomes a passion, and is often shameful and criminal.

On this point we might quote many pro and anti-slavery authorities, but the extracts would scarcely be fit for general reading. It is a notorious fact, however, that, for three generations back, the wealthy, educated, governing class of the South have mingled their blood with the enslaved race. These illicit unions, though sanctioned neither by law nor by conscience, and which, therefore, are degrading morally, have helped to strengthen the vitality and add to the mental force of the Southerner.

This accusation was a stock response of Republicans accused of leading the country to miscegenation. Croly and Wakeman made it a justification for confiscating plantations and dividing them among former slaves. The standard justification was that the blacks were the south's "only loyal population" to whom the land could be given.

But the negroes have another claim which is indisputable in law or justice — the claim of hereditary descent. Three-fourths of the four millions of the former slaves of the South have the blood of white aristocrats in their veins. They are, as the direct descendents of owners of plantations, entitled to share the property of their fathers, with their white brothers and sisters.

Democratic politicians immediately recognized the usefulness of the pamphlet. Ohio's Samuel S. Cox read much of *Miscegenation* (amidst frequent outbursts of laughter) into the debates in Congress on February 17, 1864. Although he seized upon the pamphlet as evidence of the end to which Republican policies were leading, he did not defend the slaveholders from the Republican charge that miscegenation was rife only where slavery was extant.

Mr. Speaker, since I have been upon the floor, the [Republican] gentleman from Massachusetts more than hinted that the Democracy might desire to compete with his party in this new scheme of miscegenation. Not at all, sir. Our prejudices are strong, but they are in favor of our own color. We have, in times past, affiliated with the Democracy South, but I do not understand that the Democratic party North is responsible for what the Democratic party South did. . . . Thus the humor of the pamphlet was triple. On the one hand it caricatured the sort of abolitionist who accused the slaveholders of being the chief practitioners of miscegenation. On the other, in its very willingness to mention the sensitive topic it allowed the reader to derive

humor from the assumed truth of the abolition charge. Third, it capitalized on the nearest thing to a dirty joke that could be printed in Victorian America.

## II. Satire

Despite the evidence of careful political calculation in *Miscegenation*, it was largely a satire or parody. Though Bloch claims that it was a joke at which no one laughed, in fact Cox's introduction of the material into the Congressional debate over the proposed Freedmen's Bureau was greeted with laughter from both sides of Congress. When Cox read the list of subjects treated in the pamphlet, for example, the fourth item ("The Irish and Negro first to Commingle") was greeted, according to the *Congressional Globe*, with laughter. Everyone knew, in light of the recent evidence of civil disorder in New York City, that this was too ridiculous to be taken seriously. It was, no doubt, less a politic means of insulting Irishmen than the enunciation of a doctrine so counter to experience as to provoke only laughter at its absurdity. In general, such was true of the whole pamphlet.

There were other indications that the pamphleteers aimed less at drawing a believable portrait of an extreme abolitionist pamphlet than at arousing laughter by drawing a caricature of an abolitionist who held views too absurd to be taken seriously by anyone. Moreover, the reader was alerted early. On page 10 of the 72 page pamphlet, Croly and Wakeman argued that the

most promising nation in Europe is the Russian, and its future will be glorious, only because its people represents a greater variety of race than any other in Europe. . . . That great empire includes every variety of race, with the exception of the extreme black. It is now the dominant, and is yet destined to be the master-power of Europe. The time is coming when the Russian dominion will stretch to the Atlantic ocean. Nor should such an event be dreaded. What the barbarians did for demoralized and degenerate Rome, the Russians will do for the effete and worn-out populations of Western Europe. . . . the new infusion of a young and composite blood will regenerate the life of Europe, will give it a new and better civilization, because the German, French, Italian, Spanish, and English will be mixed with a miscegenetic and progressive people.

If there was anything upon which Americans of all parties agreed in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was that Russia constituted the most backward despotism in all of Europe. When Abraham Lincoln tried to think of the most degenerate and despotic country in Europe in 1855, Russia came immediately to mind:

I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except negroes." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics." When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty — to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.

On this matter, as on few others, Lincoln had agreed with his arch-rival Stephen A. Douglas, who had advocated an official American-government welcome for Hungarian revolutionary Louis Kossuth by saying, "Shall it be said that democratic America is not to be permitted to grant a hearty welcome to an exile who has become the representative of liberal principles throughout the world lest despotic Austria and Russia shall be offended?" To compare Russian domination of Europe with the barbarian invasion of Rome was to compound absurdity with irony. American education was still based on classical studies, and the prevalent view of world history saw the fall of the Roman empire as the blackout of civilization until the Renaissance and Reformation. Like the suggestion that the Irish would be in the vanguard of the movement for miscegenation, the argument from Russia's progressive promise was, within the assumptions and recent experience of the day, little more than laughable.

(to be continued)