



Apostles of Equality: The Birneys, the Republicans, and the Civil War

D. Laurence Rogers

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FINALLY, a new viewpoint on the cause of the Civil War. The war did not erupt because the Union was outraged about black slavery -- that was only the abolitionists -- but because of the threat of WHITE SLAVERY. This book makes that case based on the Republican campaign strategy outlined in Bulletin No. 9 that was circulated in Northern industrial areas in 1856. Also, Henry Clay earlier had stated the Southern intention on the floor of the U.S. Senate: "If we cannot have black slaves, we must have white ones," As a result of the threat, Northern working people became very nervous and more willing to shift allegiance to the anti-slavery Republican cause. Thus, the author observes, arose the "Republican Revolution, an unprecedented shift in public opinion, and a powerful voting trend. The threat of white working class slavery, while perhaps not realistic, had been transmitted to very real politics." The Union military juggernaut of white troops was soon rolling South, not to save the enslaved blacks but to prevent their own slavery as threatened by the Southern oligarchy.

The first biographical account of the life of James Gillespie Birney in more than fifty years, this fabulously insightful history illuminates and elevates an all-but-forgotten figure whose political career contributed mightily to the American political fabric. Birney was a southern-born politician at the heart of the antislavery movement, with two southern-born sons who were major generals involved in key Union Army activities, including the leadership of the black troops. The interaction of the Birneys with historical figures (Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Henry Clay) highlights the significance of the family's activities in politics and war. D. Laurence Rogers offers a unique historiography of the abolition movement, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the experiences of one family navigating momentous developments from the founding of the Republic until the late 19th century.

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Samantha Smith:

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