

## Word and Flesh

By Wendell Berry

Toward the end of *As You Like It*, Orlando says: “I can live no longer by thinking.” He is ready to marry Rosalind. It is time for incarnation. Having thought too much, he is at one of the limits of human experience, or of human sanity. If his love does put on flesh, we know he must sooner or later arrive at the opposite limit, at which he will say, “I can live no longer without thinking.” Thought—even consciousness—seems to live between these limits: the abstract and the particular, the word and the flesh.

All public movements of thought quickly produce a language that works as a code, useless to the extent that it is abstract. It is readily evident, for example, that you can’t conduct a relationship with another person in terms of the rhetoric of the civil rights movement or the women’s movement—as useful as those rhetorics may initially have been to personal relationships.

The same is true of the environmental movement. The favorite adjective of this movement now seems to be “planetary.” This word is used, properly enough, to refer to the interdependence of places, and to the recognition, which is desirable and growing, that no place on the earth can be completely healthy until all places are.

But the word “planetary” also refers to an abstract anxiety or an abstract passion that is desperate and useless exactly to the extent that it is abstract. How, after all, can anybody—any particular body—do anything to heal a planet? The suggestion that anybody could do so is preposterous. The heroes of abstraction keep galloping in on their white horses to save the planet—and they keep falling off in front of the grandstand.

What we need, obviously, is a more intelligent—which is to say, a more accurate—description of the problem. The description of a problem as planetary arouses a motivation for which, of necessity, there is no employment. The adjective “planetary” describes a problem in such a way that it cannot be solved. In fact, though we now have serious problems nearly everywhere on the planet, we have no problem that can accurately be described as planetary. And, short of the total annihilation of the human race, there is no planetary solution.

There are also no national, state, or county problems, and no national, state, or county solutions. That will-o’-the-wisp, the large-scale solution to a large-scale problem, which is so dear to governments, universities, and corporations, serves mostly to distract people from the small, private problems that they may, in fact, have the power to solve.

The problems, if we describe them accurately, are all private and small. Or they are so initially.

The problems are our lives. In the “developed” countries, at least, the large problems occur because all of us are living either partly wrong or almost entirely wrong. It was not just the greed of corporate shareholders and the hubris of corporate executives that put the fate of Prince William Sound into one ship; it was also our demand that energy be cheap and plentiful.

The economies of our communities and households are wrong. The answers to the human problems of ecology are to be found in economy. And the answers to the problems of economy are to be found in culture and character. To fail to see this is to go on dividing the world falsely between guilty producers and innocent consumers.

The planetary versions—the heroic versions—of our problems have attracted great intelligence. But these problems, as they are caused and suffered in our lives, our households, and our communities, have attracted very little intelligence.

There are some notable exceptions. A few people have learned to do a few things better. But it is discouraging to reflect that, though we have been talking about most of our problems for decades, we are still mainly *talking* about them. The civil rights movement has not given us better communities. The women’s movement has not given us better marriages or better households. The environmental movement has not changed our parasitic relationship to nature.

We have failed to produce new examples of good home and community economies, and we have nearly completed the destruction of the examples we once had. Without examples, we are left with theory and the bureaucracy and meddling that come with theory. We change our principles, our thoughts, and our words, but these are changes made in the air. Our lives go on unchanged.

For the most part, the subcultures, the counter-cultures, the dissenters, and the opponents continue mindlessly—or perhaps just helplessly—to follow the pattern of the dominant society in its extravagance, its wastefulness, its dependencies, and its addictions. The old problem remains: How do you get intelligence *out* of an institution or an organization?

My small community in Kentucky has lived and dwindled for at least a century under the influence of four kinds of organizations: governments, corporations, schools, and churches—all of which are

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*Vermont Commons* is a print and online forum for exploring the idea of Vermont independence—political, economic, social, and spiritual. Look for us the last Friday of every month in the *Vermont Guardian*, and join our ongoing blog at [www.vtcommons.org](http://www.vtcommons.org). We are unaffiliated with any other organization or media, and interested in all points of view. We welcome your letters, thoughts, and participation.

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### Where’s June?

No, you didn’t miss the June issue. Since our issues come out the last Friday of every month, starting with this issue we will date the issue with the following month, when you’re most likely to be reading it. Who says secessionists aren’t reasonable?

## The Cultivation of Our Own Traditions

Those of us who lived in Vermont in decades past, and flew in and out of the state periodically, have all had a certain airport experience. No matter where your connection was for your flight to Burlington—Newark or Philadelphia or Cleveland—as you approached the gate for the flight home, you *knew* it was the Vermont gate without checking the Departures screen. There were still overalls and white beards. The dental care was spotty. There was no sheen to the crowd. You might have been flying to Albania.

This isn't as true as it once was. In some ways, Vermont has caught up with the rest of the country, or, rather, the country has infiltrated Vermont. But it still holds. I still have no trouble distinguishing the Vermont gate from the others. There's a little less makeup, lower heels. People are more likely to be clutching books, more likely to wear their gray hair with pride.

Vermont's difference is even more profound when you enter the state by highway. An immediate sense of peace and well-being sets in, and it usually takes a few miles before you realize this is because the billboards are no longer blaring at you. Instead, the big green curtain has taken over.

Vermont is simply *different* from the rest of the nation—geographically, politically, and culturally—and its difference can be felt at all levels of being. That is exceedingly rare in twenty-first-century America, and it alone may be enough of a reason to take extraordinary steps to preserve that difference. Not long before his death, in a letter to Second Vermont Republic founder Thomas Naylor, the eminent U.S. Ambassador George Kennan wrote, "All power to Vermont in its effort to distinguish itself from the USA as a whole, and to pursue in its own way the cultivation of its own tradition." I like that phrase a lot. *The cultivation of its own tradition*. It nails what may be the best argument for Vermont independence.

We live in a world that is virtually at war with tradition. Tradition is anti-progress. Tradition gets in the way of economic efficiency. And since we are tied into an economy in which dollars are the only acceptable measure of value (it's how we judge paintings, movie stars, hurricanes, and antiques), this makes tradition unjustifiable.

Which means Vermont is in trouble. The National Trust for Historic Preservation just named the entire state of Vermont as one of the nation's most endangered historic places for the second time. That's because we can't justify our small towns, small schools, local agriculture, or traditional patterns of land use in terms of dollars alone. A community isn't worth a dime—at least, not on the open market.

If we are to cultivate our own traditions—to let thrive those things that make Vermont unique—we need to detach from the national system. So long as decisions about our schools, forests, and water are being made by senators from South Carolina, presidents from Texas, and judges from Chicago, Vermont's best interests are not going to be kept in mind. Why should they be? What makes sense for Miami or Des Moines does not necessar-

ily make sense for Vermont. How can Miami and Moretown possibly both cultivate their own traditions under the same set of guidelines—especially when those guidelines are being set in a city hundreds of miles from both? Being part of a gigantic system gives one the illusion of participating in "big" and "important" events, such as wars and billion-dollar elections, but in reality it just allows us to take our eyes off the ball of the "small-time" local issues that have more direct presence in our lives, and that we can truly influence.

I think it's a mistake to pursue Vermont independence as a protest against anything. It makes the movement symbolic, and the tremendous effort independence will take should not be wasted on symbolism. I don't care about "sending a message." What I do care about, deeply, is allowing all that is precious in Vermont to survive, and to thrive. Our village commons, our working farms, our loons and moose and thrushes. Our traditions of open-mindedness, self-sufficiency, and generosity. Movements started in anger spark great initial passion, then become lost when the spark flares out, or the target of the anger disappears. Movements started out of love have staying power.

There's no question that the things that make Vermont Vermont are under increasing pressure from a variety of external sources. The question is what to do about it. Does Vermont make more sense, does it become more *itself* somehow, by going its own way? Evolutionary biology recognizes that species diverge from each other all the time. A subspecies develops and, adapting to its unique geography or biological community, it evolves, until the differences between it and the original species are so stark that it must be recognized as its own species. If two creatures look different, and act different, then we might as well call

'em like we see 'em. Has Vermont evolved far enough away from the rest of the U.S. that the time has come to codify these differences?

A simple test helps answer this. If Vermont had been an independent republic all along, would you now vote for it to join the United States? Of course not. It would be unthinkable. Which makes inertia the only true argument for sticking with the United States. And inertia has never been the Vermont way.

—ROWAN JACOBSEN



### Contributors

**Wendell Berry**, essayist, poet, and farmer, is author of more than thirty books, including *In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World* and *Citizens Dissent: Security, Morality, and Leadership in an Age of Terror*.

**Jeff Bickart** works on his family's land and teaches courses in field ornithology, plant identification, fiber arts, and technologies of traditional cultures at Sterling College.

**John Remington Graham** is the author of *A Constitutional History of Secession*.

**James Hogue** is an actor and former teacher who spends most of his time farming and tilting at the windmills of 9/11 and election fraud. He and his cohorts at Vermonters for Voting Integrity wrote the Vermont law banning electronic voting.

**Rowan Jacobsen** is editor of *Vermont Commons*, managing editor of *The Art of Eating*, and ghost-writer of many books he'd rather not tell you about.

**Thomas Naylor** is Professor Emeritus of Economics at Duke University, founder of the Second Vermont Republic, and author of thirty books, including *The Vermont Manifesto*, *Downsizing the U.S.A.*, and *Affluenza*.

**Kirkpatrick Sale** is the author of twelve books, including *Human Scale*, *The Conquest of Paradise*, *Rebels Against the Future*, and *The Fire of His Genius: Robert Fulton and the American Dream*.

**Rob Williams** is a teacher, historian, writer, and musician. He is cofounder of the film production company memeFILMS, board president of the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME), and associate publisher of *Vermont Commons*.

## Letters

### More Self-Determination Needed

I hope your efforts for Vermont will help to call attention to the need in every state for a reasonable measure of local self-determination and self-sufficiency.

WENDELL BERRY  
Port Royal, Kentucky

### May the Republic Rise!

Congratulations on *Vermont Commons*. The quality of the content and writing is outstanding. I'm doing what I can to recruit SVR members. May the Republic rise from its slumbers!

J. MYERS  
Calais, Vermont

### Don't Discount Christians

I read with interest the lead article "A Brief Welcome to the Long Emergency" by James Howard Kunstler in the second issue of *Vermont Commons*. It is because of such informed and stimulating essays that I am a subscriber. However, I wonder if I can indulge one minor quibble. In forecasting some of the possible outcomes of a future rendered much less economically robust by an oil shortage, Mr. Kunstler warns of the potential actions emanating from "the delusions of Pentecostal Christian Extremism." I don't think either the writer or the readers of *Vermont Commons* should be too concerned in this regard. Converse to what many in the "mainstream" would describe as fundamentalist Christians overreacting to future economic and social instability, Christians are in fact already taking the lead in forming countercultures that will go a long way in successfully navigating such a state of affairs, and in providing many valuable examples for the independence-minded among us.

Whether it's Mormons out in Utah who were forming mutual welfare societies and agricultural co-ops over a century ago, contemporary Pentecostal Christians seceding from government brainwashing pens otherwise known as public schools by choosing to home school their children, Baptists electing to reject the culture of death by unplugging their televisions and seeking community in things greater than consumerism, or other Christian denominations large and small forming bedrock communities that to a large degree already defy and live independent of the degenerate sewer that passes for American culture, these are the least of Mr. Kunstler's problems. He might want to spend more time worrying about those cosmopolitan snobs in the urban areas who are going to have to find a way to exist without their double-mocha espressos and wonder why their subscriptions to *Adbusters*, *Mother Jones*, and the *New York Times* aren't turning up in the mail.

Christians have a long history of transcending the comings and goings of individual states and surviving a host of calamities both social and political. Since we're not going anywhere—here in Vermont or throughout the rest of the country—I suggest Mr. Kunstler and other fair-minded individuals transcend crude stereotypes and begin building bridges to some friends they might not even know they have. Long live the Second Republic!

DAVID A. WHITE  
Montpelier, Vermont

### Wal-Mart Plays Tough

James Kunstler's "A Brief Welcome to the Long Emergency" certainly made for good reading! It felt like a preview to a remake of *The Day After Tomorrow*. It was interesting to read someone's take on what a world with ever-diminishing oil stocks would look like, and what chaos it will ren-

der. However, I found the article long on conjecture but short on facts. That's fine, if indeed that was the author's intent. I'm no lover of Wal-Mart; in fact, I may be the only American in middle adulthood who has never stepped into one. But to imply that they will simply vanish in the course of a few short years of downturn in oil stocks is ludicrous. Wal-Mart is where they are today because they made a lot of money and they play smart. You can bet that they'll fight tooth and nail to do whatever it takes to keep their business afloat, with the best minds and most powerful connections they can find. Waiting to take Wal-Mart down with oil is a long shot at best. Better to start doing it now by the best means at your disposal—your wallet.

MICHAEL GEORGE  
Burlington, Vermont

## News and Upcoming Events

### Windsor Town Meeting

The Second Vermont Republic will hold a town meeting on the Constitution House lawn in Windsor on July 9 to celebrate the signing of the Vermont Constitution in 1777. The meeting will begin with traditional Irish music by Knotwork at 1:30 pm. The Reverend Ben Matchstick will be presiding. A \$4 admissions fee will be charged. For information, contact Larry Dupre at 802-674-9113 or Rick Foley at 802-254-4698.

### SVR Independence Float in Warren

Look for Ethan Allen and Second Vermont Republic founder Thomas Naylor to be stirring the masses as the Second Vermont Republic float goes by at the famed Warren Independence Day Parade. This is a great chance to pick up free SVR paraphernalia and to celebrate independence with the SVR at a party to follow the parade.

### Independence Trilogy a Success

Twenty-five people gathered at lovely Knoll Farm on June 3 to view Rob Williams's film *Independence Trilogy*. A spirited discussion followed, with topics ranging from how to avoid paying federal income taxes to the true causes of the civil war, and the friendly arguments around the bonfire continued deep into the night. To get a copy of the film and stage your own showing, call Rob Williams at 802-496-5199 or [webeditor@vtcommons.org](mailto:webeditor@vtcommons.org).

### VERMONT COMMONS

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distant (either actually or in interest), centralized, and consequently abstract in their concerns.

Governments and corporations (except for employees) have no presence in our community at all, which is perhaps fortunate for us, but we nevertheless feel the indifference or the contempt of governments and corporations for communities such as ours.

We have had no school of our own for nearly thirty years. The school system takes our young people, prepares them for “the world of tomorrow”—which it does not expect to take place in any rural area—and gives back “expert” (that is, extremely generalized) ideas.

The church is present in the town. We have two churches. But both have been used by their denominations, for almost a century, to provide training and income for student ministers, who do not stay long enough even to become disillusioned.

For a long time, then, the minds that have most influenced our town have not been *of* the town and so have not tried even to perceive, much less to honor, the good possibilities that are there. They have not wondered on what terms a good and conserving life might be lived there. In this my community is not unique but is like almost every other neighborhood in our country and in the “developed” world.

The question that *must* be addressed, therefore, is not how to care for the planet, but how to care for each of the planet’s millions of human and natural neighborhoods, each of its millions of small pieces and parcels of land, each one which is in some precious way different from all the others. Our understandable wish to preserve the planet must somehow be reduced to the scale of our competence—that is, to the wish to preserve all of its humble households and neighborhoods.

What can accomplish this reduction? I will say again, without overweening hope but with certainty nonetheless, that only love can do it. Only love can bring intelligence out of the institutions and organizations, where it aggrandizes itself, into the presence of the work that must be done.

Love is never abstract. It does not adhere to the universe or the planet or the nation or the institution or the profession, but to the singular sparrows of the street, the lilies of the field, “the least of these my brethren.” Love is not, by its own desire, heroic. It is heroic only when compelled to be. It exists by its willingness to be anonymous, humble, and unrewarded.

The older love becomes, the more clearly it understands its involvement in partiality, imperfection, suffering, and mortality. Even so, it longs for incarnation. It can live no longer by thinking.

And yet to put on flesh and do the flesh’s work, it must think.

In his essay on Kipling, George Orwell wrote: “All left-wing parties in the highly industrialized countries are at bottom a sham, because they make it their business to fight against something which they do not really wish to destroy. They have internationalist aims, and at the same time they struggle to keep up a standard of life with which those aims are incompatible. We all live by robbing Asiatic coolies, and those of us who are ‘enlightened’ all maintain that those coolies ought



Shaping Community Solutions: The Yestermorrow Design/Build School in Warren offers a workshop in Biodiesel and Vegetable Oil Fuel conversion.

PHOTO COURTESY YESTERMORROW DESIGN/BUILD SCHOOL

to be set free; but our standard of living, and hence our ‘enlightenment,’ demands that the robbery shall continue.”

This statement of Orwell’s is clearly applicable to our situation now; all we need to do is change a few nouns. The religion and the environmentalism of the highly industrialized countries are at bottom a sham, because they make it their business to fight against something they do not really wish to destroy. We all live by robbing nature, but our standard of living demands that the robbery shall continue.

We must achieve the character and acquire the skills to live much poorer than we do. We must waste less. We must do more for ourselves and each other. It is either that or continue merely to think and talk about changes that we are inviting catastrophe to make.

The great obstacle is simply this: the conviction that we cannot change because we are dependent on what is wrong. But that is the addict’s excuse, and we know that it will not do.

How dependent, in fact, are we? How dependent are our neighborhoods and communities? How might our dependencies be reduced? To answer these questions will require better thoughts and better deeds than we have been capable of so far.

We must have the sense and the courage, for example, to see that the ability to transport food for hundreds or thousands of miles does not necessarily mean that we are well off. It means that the food supply is more vulnerable and more costly than a local food supply would be. It means that consumers do not control or influence the healthfulness of their food supply and that they are at the mercy of people who have the control and influence. It means that, in eating, people are using large quantities of petroleum that other people in another time are almost certain to need.

Our most serious problem, perhaps, is that we have become a nation of fantasists. We believe, apparently, in the infinite availability of finite resources. We persist in land-use methods that

reduce the potentially infinite power of soil fertility to a finite quantity, which we then proceed to waste as if it were an infinite quantity. We have an economy that depends not on the quality and quantity of necessary goods and services, but on the moods of a few stockbrokers. We believe that democratic freedom can be preserved by people ignorant of the history of democracy and indifferent to the responsibilities of freedom.

Our leaders have been for many years as oblivious to the realities and dangers of their time as were George III and Lord North. They believe that the difference between war and peace is still the overriding political difference—when, in fact, the difference has diminished to the point of insignificance. How would you describe the difference between modern war and modern industry—between, say, bombing and strip mining, or between chemical warfare and chemical manufacturing? The difference seems to be only that in war the victimization of humans is directly intentional and in industry it is “accepted” as a “trade-off.”

Were the catastrophes of Love Canal, Bhopal, Chernobyl, and the *Exxon Valdez* episodes of war or of peace? They were, in fact, peacetime acts of aggression, intentional to the extent that the risks were known and ignored.

We are involved unremittably in a war not against “foreign enemies,” but against the world, against our freedom, and indeed against our existence. Our so-called industrial accidents should be looked upon as revenges of Nature. We forget that Nature is necessarily party to all of our enterprises and that she imposes conditions of her own.

Now she is plainly saying to us: “If you put the fates of whole communities or cities or regions or ecosystems at risk in single ships or factories or powerplants, then I will furnish the drunk or the fool or the imbecile who will make the necessary small mistake.”•

From *What Are People For?*, © 1990 by Wendell Berry, reprinted by permission of the author.

## Crafting Nativeness

By Jeff Bickart

I know some native Vermonters, all residents here for quite some time, all with a deep understanding of this place, all able to make their lives here perfectly, without excess and without waste, from the materials and resources they find around them, using only the tools given to them by birth. You know them too: sugar maples, black spruces, and Green Mountain maidenhair ferns; moose, deer, and fisher; the common whitetail dragonfly and the eastern tiger swallowtail; boreal chickadees, ravens, and Bicknell's thrushes; spring peepers and painted turtles. And a few hundred others. There are even more I haven't met yet. All these native Vermonters have likely been here for tens of thousands of generations, notwithstanding some long stays in the south when their home ground was buried in thick ice or still warming up after a few millennia of arctic weather. I don't know any Vermont people who are native like this.

I don't expect us, of course, to live up to the same high standards set by saw-whet owls and yellow birches. For us, being native to a place is a much more difficult task. It is, in fact, a *becoming*, a development of nativeness over generations—but not just generations of simply being born in a place. That may be only accident or happenstance. For people, complete nativeness is earned: being, or becoming, a native Vermonter must be a conscious act. And it must be renewed, revitalized, and strengthened with every generation.

There can be no doubt that knowledge of and personal connection to the human history of a place is part of being native. Growing up on the farm that has been in one's family for decades, a century, or more, could be nothing but deeply meaningful. Newcomers like me will never have that blood connection. We are not going to know, for example, what it means to get up at 3:30 every morning, in every sort of weather, to go out to milk in the same barn that one's grandfather, or great-grandfather, or great-great-grandfather went out to; we will not ourselves know what it means to look out over fields once hayed with scythes by the sweat of one's own family, and still kept productive by ferociously hard work. We can only hope that our children will choose to come back and settle here after the wanderings and explorings of young adulthood, and carry on with making a family history.

Two miles down the road from our place, Robert Linck has come back to Craftsbury after college in New York and a bachelor's degree in anthropology. His mother's family has been here since the 1830s. During summers in college and after graduating, Robert worked for Pete Johnson, a local organic vegetable grower. Now he's moved an old trailer onto the family land, has planted 500 black currant bushes, and has additional plans. His sister has also moved back, with a passion for sheep and organic dairying, after college and a stint teaching high school in Massachusetts.

Family history and continuity are important, but are only one part of being native. I was born

in Baltimore, Maryland, and grew up in Syracuse, New York. I've lived in Maine and Vermont all but two of the past eighteen years, since 1998 in Craftsbury. The biomes of the northern deciduous forest and the boreal forest are where my heart is, and where I have chosen to make my home. In a slim volume titled *The Rediscovery of North America*, author Barry Lopez writes of the Spanish word *querencia*, "a place on the ground where one feels secure, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn . . . a place in which we know exactly who we are . . . from which we speak our deepest beliefs." The northern forest, and the farm country that has been made from some of that forest, are my *querencia*. To here I always come back, here I gather strength, to this land I have pledged my life and my fidelity.

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**We need an expanded nativeness, a flourishing of people committed to place in the deepest possible ways. Indeed, I believe that our survival depends on this: we can no longer keep moving on. We must decide, at last, to settle, to become as much at home as the black-capped chickadee and the red squirrel; to make the best of what is at hand.**

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Americans have almost always been happy to move on to the next chance, the beckoning frontier, the unsettled country. We are mobile. And our willingness to imagine, to head down a fresh trail, to throw everything we've got into something new, to take risks, has shaped us deeply. But we have often left wreckage behind—worn-out farms, cutover forests, cities with severe problems. Some people, however, have always stayed behind, for whatever reasons, in difficult places, on difficult land. Some have used these places poorly, but also some well, with great care, with love, with slowly growing knowledge and understanding.

We need an expanded nativeness, a flourishing of people committed to place in the deepest possible ways. Indeed, I believe that our survival depends on this: we can no longer keep moving on. We must decide, at last, to settle, to become as much at home as the black-capped chickadee and the red squirrel; to make the best of what is at hand. The first standard of our success must be the health of the land. No true native, by his actions, leaves the land in worse condition at the end of his life than at the beginning, for all lives, whether in the city or in the country, ultimately

derive their good health from the good health of the land. (And no true native, loving deeply her own home, willingly or happily makes choices that harm the homes of others.) We will not achieve this in one generation, or several; it is a project of centuries, but we must get started.

Vermont, with relatively few people, with small cities and much of the population living in rural areas, with a strong attachment to small-scale agriculture, with abundant resources for self-reliance, is a good place to begin to craft this new nativeness. It will be difficult, because people everywhere have become very nearly locked into an economic system that (thanks to inexpensive petroleum) supplies local needs with stuff brought in from around the globe. But there are numerous examples around this state of Vermonters figuring out how to do things differently. Vermonters getting local fresh vegetables onto the tables of our citizens. Vermonters learning how to milk sheep and make exquisite cheeses. Vermonters turning wood from our forests, and wool from our pastures, and wind from our ridgelines into what we need to thrive. It is continuously inspiring and energizing. What I see in Vermont is a drive everywhere toward a renewed, invigorated nativeness that respects and draws on the good knowledge, traditions, and connectedness of the people whose family names are on the headstones, combining that with the energies of those who are just now establishing homes here.

My wife and I bought our place, 87 acres on the Wild Branch River, in 1999, just a few days after our first child was born in Burlington. Slowly we are coming to know it. We have planted more than 300 fruit trees, bushes, vines, and canes, learning the nature of our soil by digging holes for them each spring. We ate our first own apples last year. More of them are flowering this spring. We expect the grapes to bear this summer. The currants, gooseberries, blueberries, and raspberries are fruitful. We are learning which varieties do well here, which don't. A great help in our work, through his books, has been Lewis Hill of Greensboro. His experiences over decades of fruit growing and propagating in the cold Northeast Kingdom inform what we do in trying to establish our own orchard.

Our vegetable gardens are well established and fertile, enriched by the manure given back to us by the neighboring dairy farmer who hays our fields. We save our vegetable seeds for the next season, and replant our garlic and potatoes from year to year. The asparagus and rhubarb are flourishing. We cut some of our own firewood. The rest we buy from our neighbor, Andy Moffat.

His family has lived on this road since the 1930s. There are now four houses, three for family and one with renters. The business is Christmas trees, with a side of firewood and sometimes of syrup. Working to unload several cords of wood at our woodshed from Andy's truck, we've learned the

unrecorded history of our area. When the road was paved. The house on the corner of Denton Hill Road that used to be the one-room schoolhouse that Andy went to. What the river looked like before the floods (not long before we arrived) that transformed it. Andy has filled out our scanty knowledge of our own place. The first barn burned when he was a child, and he was at the fire. I'd figured out that there was a substantial sugarbush on our land at least sixty years ago, but he was able to tell us what happened to it.

Food is always on people's minds, and in Vermont the activity aimed at growing our own seems almost hyperactive. The event calendars sent out by the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture and NOFA-Vermont are stuffed: grazing seminars, dairy goat nutrition, cheesemaking, on-farm composting, soil ecology, northern Vermont slaughterhouse feasibility, direct marketing of farm-raised meats, organic vegetable seed production, and on and on.

In Westfield, Butterworks Farm, owned by the Lazor family, produces from its dairy herd its incomparable yogurt, sold around the state, as well as grains, dry beans, sunflower oil, and other products, in a nearly closed system with almost no purchased inputs, while building the health of the soil; they, and many other farmers looking for new possibilities, are showing that we can supply more of our own food than we have thought we could.

To the degree that we depend on resources or finished products brought in from outside our region, we are not native. Can one truly be a native Vermonter (Coloradan, Michigander, North Dakotan) if most everything one needs—food, clothing, building materials, tools, energy and fuels, and so on—comes in from somewhere else? If being native to a place means anything, it must include making one's life from the resources of that place—and doing so in a way that does not degrade that place, that does not make it impossible for our children and grandchildren also to make native lives. But we have moved so far from local and regional self-reliance that this is a very difficult business.

For the past sixteen months, as part of developing a new course for Sterling College, where I teach, I've been slowly making clothes. Garments straight from the soil of Vermont, from this ground that I love—from pastures, forests, roadsides, overgrown fields. I have washed, carded, spun, knitted, woven, and felted wool from Craftsbury sheep. I'm working with local llama fiber, alpaca, and mohair. I've gathered milkweed, dogbane, and nettle to experiment with the beautiful and strong fibers found in the stalks of those plants, and have grown flax. I have tanned the hides of deer and stillborn calves to make buckskin clothing and leather for shoes. We could do much more here to supply one of the most basic human needs—clothing—from local resources. This has become very nearly a thing of the past: our clothes are made of cotton, wool, silk, leather, nylon, polyester, acrylic, whatever, grown/raised/extracted, and processed and assembled we know not where or by whom, with unaccountable environmental and social costs. Could we change this just a little bit? Could Vermonters produce locally more of



**Crafting nativeness in Craftsbury: the author's farm**

what they wear? Would it make some sense? At one time New England mills turned out lots of clothing and employed thousands of people. Now those mills are mostly silent, those people moved on to some other work, many of them somewhere else. Why? Can we not do for ourselves? What would it take? Would there be rewards that we must now re-imagine?

In summer 2004, several visionary entrepreneurs opened the doors of Vermont Premium Fiber Company in an old mill building in Johnson. With custom-made, small-scale, but state-of-the-art equipment, they offer complete processing for the small farmer and the fiber artisan. They can turn the fleeces of sheep, goats, alpacas, and llamas into roving, batts, yarn, or felt, working with amounts as little as a couple of pounds or as much as hundreds. They have been flooded with business, and they are showing that we don't have to send all this work to China or India or Vietnam. We can do it here.

My friend Jody Stoddard grew up in Pennsylvania, came to Craftsbury for college, and married into one of the town's old dairy-farming families. Jody has a small cottage industry handspinning wool into yarn for sale, and she knits exquisite lace shawls. She's experimented quite a bit with dyeing her yarn naturally from wild and garden plants. And other artisans I know, turning bowls, weaving black-ash baskets, making snowshoes, carving beautiful doors, are all making connections to this land, crafting nativeness.

A new nativeness must also take delight in and continually expand our understanding of the wild creatures with which we share this place. The citizenry of the woods and the fields; the lakes, ponds, and rivers; the marshes and swamps and bogs; the alpine summits. Being able to recognize

the field marks and songs of many of Vermont's two to three hundred species of birds, for example, enriches every walk and enriches life, brings more meaning and sense to what one sees and hears every day. It brings more beauty into one's life, blurriness resolving into individual creatures whose ways of living one can gradually come to know, to admire, and to cherish.

After decades of studying birds and plants, I have undertaken to become more acquainted with insects. In the past few years, outstanding guides have been published for a few groups. More than 130 kinds of dragonflies and damselflies here? Who would have guessed! They've flown back and forth past me for years and I've never taken a close look. And the butterflies! How easy it is to overlook all but the most obvious, the morning cloaks, the swallowtails, the monarchs, the white admirals. But down there in the grasses and weeds are the dozens of kinds of skippers, doing whatever it is skippers do, I don't know, but I want to find out. What a richness there is, how endless the pleasure of discovery, and how satisfying to come to understand better who else lives here.

We must craft our native hearts and native minds. Hearts and minds that can learn how to carefully and properly shape to our use the land and resources of Vermont, that find deep pleasure in making here a lasting human culture that also embraces the lives of the non-human, and that understands, too, when wildness ought to be left alone. And we must allow ourselves in turn to be changed by this place, as all native creatures are changed and shaped by their places, as over generations they adapt and become embodiments of their places. We must, literally, incorporate lush fields, fertile river bottomlands, windy lakeshores, tumbling rocky streams, and green mountains. Otherwise, in the end, we are all just visitors. •

# Subverting Power with Complementary Currency

By Jim Hogue

“Give me control over a nation’s currency and I care not who makes its laws.”

BARON M.A. ROTHCHILD

If Vermont, or any other society, is to survive in an age of diminishing resources, it needs to move toward a system of polycentrism, in which there is little centralized authority and in which rules and institutions work toward the improvement of the commonweal. The was, of course, the state of events when Vermont was an independent republic from 1777 to 1791. For more than two hundred years, that polycentrism has slowly eroded.

Perhaps more than other states, Vermont is in a position to at least preserve those aspects of polycentric governance that it still clings to. Perhaps the most important of these is town meeting. Though local autonomy is now minimal, we must keep the structure of town meeting in place, and reclaim the powers that town meeting should afford. Powers we don’t use, we lose. Liberties are lost more through erosion and negligence than through blatant acts of tyranny.

Other spheres of influence in Vermont are unions, churches, school boards, arts councils, lobbying groups, civic groups, town clerks, selectmen, clubs and organizations, media, and individuals. If Vermont is to prosper, these power structures must grow in influence in relation to the state—both the State of Vermont and the federal government. Today, state power is overwhelming. Only through incrementally reclaiming our sovereignty as individuals, towns, and finally the Republic of Vermont will we survive the tyranny of the federal government and its eventual collapse.

Frank Bryan states in the first issue of *Vermont Commons* that Vermonters can be proud of the many times they have stood up to the federal government. There have been several more such instances within the last few years: treaties to ban landmines, resistance to GMOs, an Iraq Resolution regarding deployment of our National Guard, resistance to the USAPA by librarians, and the first law in the country forbidding touch-screen voting.

But despite a proud history of defiance, there is an equally shameful history in recent years of obeisance, complicity, and silence on the part of our salaried public servants when action was called for and none was taken. I refer here to complicity in the theft of two herds of perfectly healthy East Friesian sheep, surrendering congressional authority to the executive branch, support for the pursuit of empire in Afghanistan and Iraq, silence on election fraud, depleted uranium, the welcoming of Homeland Security, and the apparent support of the U.S.-led coup (and slaughter) in Haiti and the failed U.S.-led coup in Venezuela. While our delegation dances on the head of a pin, the U.S. has lost credibility and respect on the world stage and our coffers have gone from surplus to unimaginable debt.

I list these few examples because there are local solutions.

We have the flexibility to experiment with alternative energy, sustainable communities, health care, and even the formation of mini-congresses and city states. We can pass laws protecting crops from GMO pollution and dishonest labeling. Our legislature can nullify laws that violate the Constitution. We can put our taxes in escrow when they would be used illegally.

Of course the most direct route to all of the above is secession. But since secession is somewhat down the road, let’s do what we can to save our economy, our property, and our rights as citizens. Let’s start where it will do us the most good, and where it will do the runaway government the most harm: with money. We can create a complementary currency.

A complementary currency is an agreement within a community to create a currency to match unmet needs with unused resources. It addresses several of the ills described above:

1. It stimulates the local economy, whose activity does not depend on scarce dollars, but on the goods and services we provide to one another.
2. It enriches local communities.
3. It frees up dollars.
4. It insulates against the fall of the dollar.
5. It helps to create sustainable communities.
6. It is flexible and almost infinite in its uses within the community.
7. It is almost impossible to monitor and tax.
8. It starves the beast. It does not feed the tapeworm economy of waste, debt, and corruption.
9. It feeds your neighbors and preserves local capital.
10. It can be loaned and borrowed without interest.
11. It is inflation-proof.
12. It can be conceived as either a saving currency (compare it to a tree that grows in value and has multiple uses) or tender (compare it to time or service).
13. It does not impede one’s ability to earn dollars, but rather it directly adds tax-free wealth to the community.
14. It remains in place and functioning in the event of economic collapse such as the fall in value of the currencies of Germany and Austria after 1923.
15. It is most beneficial to those in need, with the residual benefits to the community (in that it does not drain dollars).
16. It encourages recycling, entrepreneurship, self sufficiency, and creativity.
17. It may be used to eliminate dollar indebtedness (interest payments) in return for goods and services. (Peter pays off Jack’s debt to the bank, and Jack owes Peter goods and services or local currency. Peter and Jack both gain while flying beneath the radar of the state.)
18. It drives the central banks crazy. (In fact, complementary currencies were so successful during the Weimar depression in reviving the economies of Germany and Austria that the central banks persuaded their governments to outlaw them—ditto in the U.S. under FDR. The depression in Germany and Austria, which could have been avoided, aided the rise of Adolph Hitler.
19. It can be used at any level and for any purpose: from a few craftsmen and farmers trading skills, time, and produce, to an entire state. Japan has a complementary currency in 372 towns just for eldercare. Today, England, Canada, New Zealand, Senegal, Switzerland, Germany, Thailand, and Bali have significant complementary currencies. Ithaca, New York uses Ithaca HOURS.
20. It costs nothing; and if its participants find it of no value, they can opt out.
21. It is already in place. Thousands of Vermonters and millions of Americans utilize various forms of complementary currency every day. All it needs now is the understanding of what the dollar is: a promise to pay, and a promise that has been gradually and consistently broken.

A cord of wood is worth a cord of wood. It hasn’t changed in value. It costs more dollars now because the value of the dollar has dropped. Are the services provided by your town worth more? Is that why your taxes are several times what they were? Of course not. The services are the same; the value of the dollar has dropped. Which would you rather have: the goods and services you need, or the dollars that are a mere promise to pay for them?

Inflation is not inevitable. It is a broken promise, a deliberate devaluation through greed, waste, and debt. We can break the cycle by understanding what money is, where it comes from, and how we are held hostage to the central banks. By claiming our rights and acting as independent citizens, we can claim some financial autonomy as well. •

*Some of the material for this article was gleaned from the works of Boudewijn Bouckaert (polycentrism) and Bernard Lietaer (complementary currencies).*

**To see a complementary  
currency system at work  
in Vermont, go to  
[www.greenbarter.com](http://www.greenbarter.com)**

# A Constitutional History of Secession

By John Remington Graham

On November 27, 1688, King James II met in London with the House of Lords, which then sat as a *Magnum Concilium*, a council of titled nobility and reverend bishops summoned to advise the Crown in a season of grave crisis. England was in a state of upheaval against repeated acts of royal misgovernment and repeated infractions of fundamental law. William of Orange, a prince of royal blood, marched his troops forward, and the King's armies melted without offering resistance. The lords temporal and spiritual advised the King to grant pardons with liberality, to negotiate with William of Orange, to call a free Parliament, and to endorse constitutional reforms which were by then long overdue. The King failed to act upon this advice. Instead, he fled the realm and joined his Queen and royal heir, Prince James Edward Stuart, at the Palais de St.-Germain in France.

A number of eminent peers and subjects then met with William of Orange, who issued a writ calling for the election and assembling of a Convention Parliament, which met and deliberated. On January 25, 1689, a body calling itself the House of Commons passed a resolution which read:

That King James the Second, having endeavoured to subvert the constitution of the kingdom by breaking the original compact between the King and people, and by the advice of Jesuits and other wicked persons having violated the fundamental laws and withdrawn himself from the kingdom, hath abdicated the government, and that the throne is thereby vacant.

On February 12, 1689, the House of Lords agreed. On February 13, 1689, the Crown was tendered to and accepted by William of Orange and his wife Mary, who thereby became King William III and Queen Mary II of England. The occasion was commemorated by Acts of the Convention Parliament of 1689, and later by the Act of Settlement in 1701. These several organic statutes instituted constitutional reforms and established a new succession of the Crown which, excluding the heirs of James II, has continued without interruption to the present day.

Had it not been for this transformation of government, fondly called the Glorious Revolution, there would have been no lawful government in England over the past three hundred years, King George III could not have proclaimed British government in Canada in 1763 or conceded American independence in 1783, Queen Victoria could not have given her royal sanction to the British North America Act of 1867, nor would there be any legal order in Canada today, and Elizabeth II would not presently be Queen of Great Britain and Canada.

Yet the transfer of the Crown from James II to William and Mary occurred contrary to all ordinary forms of law existing at the time. By constitutional custom, only the King of right by royal

blood could assemble a lawful Parliament. The lawful King did not call the Convention Parliament of 1689. The accession of William and Mary was predicated on the abdication of James II. But James II never abdicated, and in fact claimed to be king until his death, as he undeniably was by ordinary forms of law. And even if James II had abdicated in some constructive sense, his son was his lawful heir and would immediately have become king in his place. The accession of William and Mary was, therefore, an unlawful event, yet it was authorized by the extraordinary forms of English constitutional law.

We may define the principle of the Glorious Revolution as a constitutional custom prevailing over all organic statutes, and all customs and conventions of fundamental law in Great Britain: In

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**There is no reason why in due course of time we cannot enjoy a rebirth of authentic constitutional government in the United States.**

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extraordinary circumstances, there may be a peaceful transformation of government, even if contrary to existing forms of law, by means of a convention of the people and estates of the kingdom, assembled in as orderly a way as possible by the natural leaders of the realm for the purpose of reassuming the attributes of sovereign power, repairing or ordaining the constitution so as to make it operable, and resettling the government of the land. This principle contemplates a revolution that is peaceable, necessary, and beneficial—a revolution which, however ironic it may seem, is authorized by the constitution itself.

Another striking case of this kind occurred in the independence of Rhode Island from the British Empire, wholly apart from the independence of the United States. On May 4, 1776, the legislature and governor of Rhode Island met in an extraordinary assembly and adopted a statute that strikingly resembles the first Act of the Convention Parliament which transferred the Crown from James II to William and Mary. The statute recited that George III had broken the compact between the King and people, and ordained that thenceforward all writs would issue and all laws would be passed, not in the name of the Crown, but in the name of the governor and company of Rhode Island. Not a shot was fired. The next day courts opened and business was conducted as usual. The event was a perfect recurrence of the Glorious Revolution.

Several other states individually seceded from the British Empire. In Virginia, the House of Burgesses adjourned and issued writs of election for a convention which met in the name of the

People, and assumed all the attributes of sovereignty. And on June 29, 1776, this convention proclaimed a formal constitution of the Commonwealth, whereof the preamble recited the wrongs done by or in the name of George III, then totally dissolved the government previously exercised by the Crown over Virginia. The event was, again, a perfect recurrence of the Glorious Revolution.

The first written constitution of the United States was the Articles of Confederation, which were adopted by the legislatures of all thirteen states. The 13th article of the Confederation ordained, "The articles of this Confederation shall be inviolably observed by every State, and the Union shall be perpetual; nor shall any alteration be made in any of them, unless such alteration be agreed to in a Congress of the United States, and be afterwards confirmed by the legislatures of every State."

Once the pressures of the War for American Independence were removed by the restoration of peace, the Confederation proved to be unworkable. Requisitions by Congress upon the states became massively delinquent. Without adequate resources in the treasury of the Confederation, the United States could not defend its territory. It was not possible even to pay the interest due on loans which had been advanced by the friends of the United States. Attempts were made to give Congress limited powers of taxation and to facilitate the reckoning and collection of requisitions. But every proposed amendment to the articles was blocked by Rhode Island, whereupon the Confederation began to flounder, and the United States fell into mortal danger.

At length the Philadelphia Convention was called to frame more effective articles of Union. Rhode Island, which had blocked all previous attempts at constitutional reform, did not even bother to send delegates. Everybody knew that a new constitution would not be adopted by the legislatures of all thirteen states. To deal with this problem, the framers adopted Article VII of the United States Constitution, which says, "The Ratification of the Conventions of nine States shall be sufficient to the Establishment of this Constitution between the States so ratifying the Same." The critical debate on this clause was on July 23, 1787, and in this debate the rationale of the framers is made clear. In each state, there was to be a convention of the people, modeled after the Convention Parliament of 1689, which could exercise sovereign power to secede from the old Confederation and join the new Union. And since each State acting by such a convention could secede from the old Confederation and join a new Union, each State necessarily enjoyed the reserved right, by means of such a convention, to secede from the new Union whenever extraordinary circumstances might make such an act necessary.

In the Virginia Convention of 1788, a young lawyer and politician by the name of John Marshall, who later became Chief Justice of the United

States, articulated the principle as it was understood by all. "It is the people who give the power, and can take it back." It is difficult to believe that John Marshall actually conceded the right of a state to secede from the Union when the United States Constitution was adopted. Yet he did endorse the right of a state to secede from the Union as an antidote to abuse of power by the federal government, and the same right of secession was also conceded in those days by such prominent federalists as Alexander Hamilton and James Madison.

Before the fateful year 1860, the strongest movement for secession from the United States was in New England. The War of 1812 was imposed by southern politicians upon the states of New England, which had no desire for such an encounter with Great Britain and Canada. Not only was the war unjust and unnecessary, it was poorly managed to such an extent that the states of New England saw the need to provide for their own defense and negotiate a separate peace with the British Empire. The ultimate aggravation was a proposal by the secretary of war to conscript armies for an invasion of Canada, which was regarded not only as oppressive, but also unconstitutional. For in Article I, Section 8 of the United States Constitution, Congress is granted powers to raise armies for any and all military purposes, and call forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions, subject to important rights of the several states. If Congress could conscript armies, the elaborate limitations and reservations on the militia would be pointless. And the power to raise armies was actually intended by the framers as a power to raise regular troops by enlistment only and never by conscription. The power to regulate and call forth the militia was intended as the exclusive yet ample means of compelling citizens to render military service. These principles, now beyond the comprehension of most Americans today, were then clearly understood by the people of New England, for the militia of those states had already disobeyed the President and refused to serve for invasion of Canada, and the general population was not about to be drafted into the armies of the Union for any similar purpose.

In response to the crisis, the legislature of Massachusetts invited the states of New England to meet in a convention similar to the First Continental Congress, which had met before the American Revolution to petition the King for redress of grievances. Delegates from Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island met in Hartford, Connecticut, on December 14, 1814, and deliberated until January 5, 1815, when they promulgated their report and resolutions. Notwithstanding the florid denials of Daniel Webster in his reply to Robert Hayne some years later in the United States Senate, the Hartford Convention met to consider secession from the Union, and actually concluded and urged that secession from the Union might be the best

course. It is no less true that the Hartford Convention, not the Battle of New Orleans, brought the War of 1812 to an end, and restored peace between the United States and the British Empire.

New England, in any event, has a secessionist tradition as good as anything ever heard of beneath the Mason-Dixon Line and the River Ohio. Today, there are those who, for reasons highly interesting, dream of a Second Vermont Republic. These dreams are worthy to contemplate, because we Americans are losing our local distinctness and character in a homogenized culture and government that has been imposed on us. But the people of Vermont must recall that this homogenized culture and government is the result of the consolidation of the United States from the American Civil War.

It will here be fitting to reflect on the words of Alexander Stephens, the great southern statesman who served as Vice President of the Confederate States, yet died in office as Governor of Georgia so beloved across the country that, upon his passing, the flag of the Union was lowered to half mast at the statehouse in Montpelier, Vermont. On June 5, 1865, as he lingered in prison in Boston harbor, Stephens wrote these moving words in his diary:

The people of the South conscientiously believed that the old Union was a compact between sovereign and independent States. Only certain powers named in the Constitution had been delegated by the States separately to the central government. Among these was not ultimate sovereignty, this being retained by the States separately in the reserved powers. Each State had the right to withdraw from the central government the powers delegated by repealing the ordinance that conferred them, and herself resuming their full exercise as a free, independent, and sovereign State, such as she was when the compact of the Union under the Constitution was formed. These principles and doctrines the great majority cherished as sacred and as underlying the whole framework of American constitutional liberty. Thousands who disapproved of secession as a measure did not question it as a matter of right. The war waged by the central government against the States, striking at their sovereignty, and causing as it would, if successful, their complete subjugation, these people considered unconstitutional, monstrously aggressive, and utterly destructive of everything dear to them as freemen."

We are fortunate that, upon this continent, in our own time, the baneful legacy of the American Civil War has been given a judicial rebuke, and the results have been edifying, signaling hope to our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Most of us know something of the antagonisms that erupted during the last quarter of the 20th

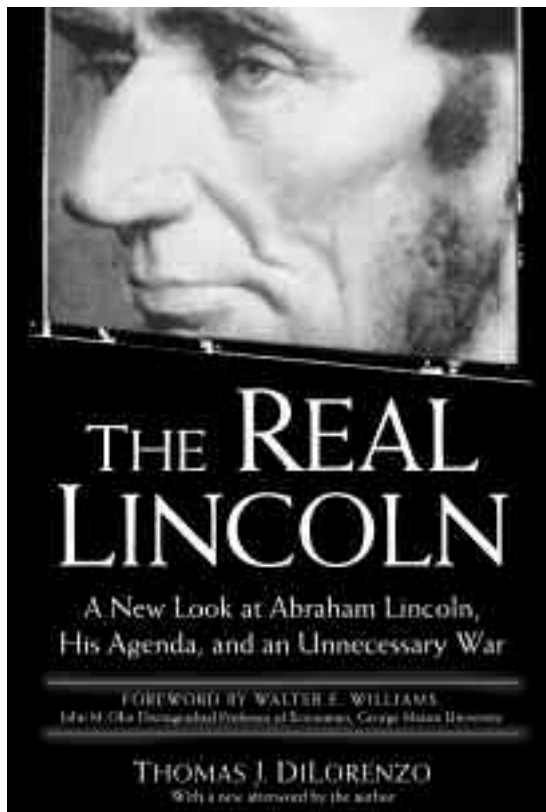
century between French-speaking and English-speaking citizens in Canada. These antagonisms grew out of overcentralization of the Dominion, arraying nine provinces of Anglo-Canada against Quebec as the geopolitical bastion of French Canada. There was a clash of two civilizations not unlike that which erupted in the United States in 1860 between the North and the South. The result was a powerful separatist movement in Quebec that repeatedly elected governments to govern the province, and offered two referendums on independence, in the second of which the vote for secession from the Union nearly carried.

The question then arose whether the Constitution of Canada permits secession of a province from the Confederation. Under the organic statutes, there is no express right or formal mechanism for secession. But Canada is blessed by the customs and conventions of the British Constitution, which were conveyed to the Dominion by the preamble of the British North America Act of 1867, including the principle of the Glorious Revolution on which the Crown rests: in extraordinary circumstances, the constitutional right of the people to free, peaceable, and orderly reformation of the government, even if contrary to the usual forms of fundamental law, might take the form of secession from the Union. Accordingly, in the *Reference on certain Questions concerning the Secession of Quebec from Canada*, the Queen's judges advised that the people of Quebec enjoy a constitutional right to aspire for independence, and a constitutional right to enjoy a free and peaceable referendum on independence at public expense whenever their elected government determines; that, if in such a referendum the people of Quebec vote by clear majority on a clear proposition for independence, the government of Canada will have a constitutional duty to negotiate terms of separation, nor may the government of Canada in such a situation threaten or use force of arms to resist secession; and that, if negotiations fail, and the government of Quebec unilaterally proceeds to independence which is recognized by other nations of the earth, a new constitutional order will then be established.

The consequences of this judgment have been remarkable. The antagonisms between Anglo-Canada and Quebec have essentially evaporated. The people of Quebec have reacted to the concession of their rights within the Union by electing a federalist government. By operation of moral causes, the Canadian Confederation waxes strong.

There is no reason why in due course of time we also cannot enjoy such a rebirth of authentic constitutional government in the United States. A right of secession was ordained by our forefathers as a shield protecting the distinctive civilizations across our continent. And it is particularly meaningful that this timeless and indispensable principle should be asserted again here in Vermont, allowing her priceless culture and heritage to be transmitted without blemish to the next generation. •

## Book Review



*The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War*  
By Thomas J. DiLorenzo  
Three Rivers Press, \$14.95 (2002)

“The Union was formed by the voluntary agreement of all the States; in uniting together they have not forfeited their nationality, nor have they been reduced to the condition of one and the same people. . . . If one of the states chooses to withdraw from the compact, it would be difficult to disapprove its right of doing so, and the Federal Government would have no means of maintaining its claims directly either by force or right.”

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

For any Vermonter (or American) considering the “secession question,” the mythology surrounding Abraham Lincoln is mighty indeed. From grade school, we are taught to remember Lincoln with monikers that capture his alleged virtues: Honest Abe. The Great Emancipator. The Rail Splitter. The Man Who Saved the Union. “O Captain, my Captain,” wrote Walt Whitman in his famous tribute to a martyred Lincoln. In colleges and bookstores, meanwhile, the hagiographic halo encircling Lincoln’s memory is blinding, coming, as it does, from all sides of the political spectrum. (Consider left-of-center author Garry Wills’s popular book *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The*

*Words That Remade America* or the praise heaped on Lincoln by Patrick Buchanan, to name but two strange bedfellows.) How could anyone but the disgruntled great-grandnephews of slave-loving Southerners possibly challenge Lincoln’s political legacy or his hold on our popular imagination?

Yet Loyola College professor of economics Thomas DiLorenzo does just this, in his provocative book *The Real Lincoln*. DiLorenzo argues that, throughout his decades-long political career, Lincoln’s primary political goal was the creation of a more mercantilist centralized American state through the enactment of a series of three policy initiatives popularized as “the American System” by Kentucky politician and slaveholder Henry Clay. “I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by my friends to become a candidate for the legislature,” Lincoln stated in 1832. “My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman’s dance. I am in favor of a national bank . . . in favor of internal improvements system and a high protective tariff.”

Students of U.S. history will rightly recognize this as the core of the Whig Party mercantilist philosophy in the years before the Civil War, and Clay and Lincoln were its two biggest champions. Economist Murray Rothbard defined “mercantilism” as “a system of statism which employed economic fallacy to build up a structure of imperial state power, as well as special subsidy and monopolistic privilege to individuals or groups favored by the state,” in their time and in ours. Consider:

1. Higher tariffs legally protect U.S.-based manufacturers and corporations from foreign competition (and gouge U.S. consumers because U.S. corporations can then inflate prices for goods).
2. National banking disguises corporate subsidies as inflationary spending (printing more money to finance the building of canals, railroads, or highways) rather than imposing unpopular (but more honest) higher taxes on citizens up front.
3. Internal improvements, called “corporate welfare” today, allow governments to grant special subsidies and favors to private corporations in exchange for their financial and political support.

As DiLorenzo shows, Lincoln and Clay’s “American System” proved demonstrably anti-capitalist, generated stupendous corruption, and further cemented the alliance between an emerging corporate class and national political leaders. Sound familiar?

But Lincoln’s great genius in his own time was using the Civil War as a bloody vehicle for solidifying the American System as the United States’

dominant economic model. Lincoln and Congressional Republicans made all three planks—tariff, national bank, and “internal improvements”—an integral part of national economic life by 1863 (with half the nation in rebellion). The rest of Lincoln’s shrewd brilliance came with his powerful rhetoric, ultimately backed up by the entire Union army, in which he invented an entirely novel (and inaccurate) Constitutional framework to squash the legitimacy of “secession” and the very notion of state sovereignty and the “compact theory” (unquestioned by both Northerners and Southerners until after the Civil War) to secede if they so chose, by waging an unrelenting and bloody four-year struggle to “preserve the Union.” Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation to “free the slaves,” meanwhile, was admitted by Lincoln himself to be little more than a political ploy designed to halt European aid to the South and curry favor with “radical” abolitionists. DiLorenzo also looks closely at Lincoln’s dictatorial political and military policies during war time, and considers what might have happened to southern slaves over time if the Civil War and subsequent bitterness of the “Reconstruction” period had never happened.

John Calhoun, perhaps South Carolina’s most articulate antebellum political philosopher, framed the federal dilemma best in 1831. “Stripped of all its covering, the naked question is, whether ours is a federal or consolidated government; a constitutional or absolute one; a government resting solidly on the basis of the sovereignty of the States, or on the unrestrained will of a majority; a form of government, as in all other unlimited ones, in which injustice, violence, and force must ultimately prevail.”

As the Great Centralizer, Lincoln prosecuted the “War Between the States” from 1861–1865 to reinvent America in his own image. DiLorenzo’s book raises important questions about one of America’s most powerful political leaders, questions that take on a new urgency in an age which Lincoln himself set in motion, one of unbridled corporate power, militarism, violence, and Empire-building. And it is little wonder that DiLorenzo’s book has been most savagely attacked by today’s neoconservatives, themselves disciples and practitioners of Lincoln’s own brand of imperialist and mercantilist politics.

The United States was founded on the twin principles of “secession” and “state sovereignty.” De Tocqueville’s epigraph still rings true. Will we have the courage to challenge Lincoln’s reckless economic policies and misguided constitutional ambitions in our own time?

—ROB WILLIAMS

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**Will we have the courage to challenge Lincoln’s reckless economic policies and misguided constitutional ambitions in our own time?**

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## DISPERSIONS *By Kirkpatrick Sale*

### Small is Powerful

When you have a bunch of crushed grapes and introduce yeast cells, you produce one of the most energetic and successful events in biology. The yeast eats up the sugar of the grape and produces alcohol as a waste byproduct, and keeps on eating and eating, happy as a well, yeast in juice—until there is no more sugar to eat, or the alcohol content gets close to 14 percent, at which point the yeast can no longer survive. It chokes, more or less, in its own waste. And the wine is made.

This is a process ecologists call *drawdown*. The next steps are bloom, crash, diedown, and die-out. That is the process of many species. It is the process through which industrial civilization is going today—only we are still in the first two phases of it. *Drawdown* of the world's resources at an alarming rate—to the point where the distinguished Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson has declared that "Earth's capacity to support our species is approaching the limit." *Bloom*, though of course not for everyone, but about a fifth of the world's population, and at levels of grandeur never before known to the earth.

But it is obvious that the other three ecological stages are upon us. We can already see that *crash* is coming. Wilson again: "The appropriation of productive land—the ecological footprint—is already too large for the planet to sustain" and "has stressed the earth beyond its ability to regenerate." That means that unless we drastically change our ways, soon, our species—the one that calls itself sapient—will crash and die down and possibly even die out, taking with us a great many other species on the surface of the earth.

It's very simple. There really is no argument about it. Not among serious people.

That's the problem. So what's the solution? Also simple: localism.

Now there are many ways of going about that, and one of the great strengths of localism is that it takes different forms in different places, adapted to its context. But there are two forms that I think hold some real promise for the future: bioregionalism and separatism.

I won't bore you with a lot of stuff about bioregionalism—I've written a book, still available, that spells it out in some detail. For all its 7-syllable grandeur, it just means life-place, the way that nature has patterned herself, the scale at which she has organized distinctive flora and fauna, water and climate, rocks and soils. The borders of such bioregions of course are fuzzy, but they are there: the world, the continents, are really made up of small self-defining regions.

As original people everywhere knew. Like American Indians. I have seen a map of Indian tribes' territories in the mid-19th century, when the American government was trying to draw up treaties with them. Almost all the territories

are watersheds of large rivers—in other words, bioregions that contain distinctive flora and fauna. That is the way the Indians naturally settled themselves, how they lived on the land.

As earth scientists know. The latest map from the U.S. Forest Service's Ecosystem Management Division in Fort Collins, Colorado, is of "Ecoregions of North America," with provinces mapped out by what can only be called a bioregional method, though naturally with an emphasis on trees because that's their charge. The result is essentially a map of bioregions.

As other professionals know. Geographers as long ago as 1985 began using the term; landscape architects, too, who were recently enjoined by the president of the American Society of Landscape Architects to operate with a "bioregional hypothesis."

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**At one time our diets, sex lives, family relations, education, and jobs were all under the serious and daily control of churches and kings. We are no longer under their thrall, at least not in this country. Is it so fantastic to think about being as free of the regular interference of the government of the nation-state?**

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As we all know, really, in our heart of hearts, when we stop to think of it. We know that we live in a natural region of some sort, with distinctive natural elements, a river, say, or a lake, or a mountain range. City dwellers tend to overlook this, and cities tend these days to ignore their hinterlands and look to the world. But most other people do see themselves as part of a region of some kind. They know where their water comes from and where it goes, what the typical animal and tree species are, and so on. Industrial capitalism has done much to destroy that identity, and globalism finds it anathema, but it is there nonetheless.

So bioregions are a reality, and bioregionalism is about trying to think about living, and growing and eating and traveling and using and eventually governing, within them. To put it briefly, the whole concept is simply trying to give people a new way of thinking about nature, and then acting within it.

That is the first, and the absolute necessary, principle by which we can think about localism. The other principle is separatism, which I take to encompass secession, regionalism, tribalism, self-determination, and all forms of devolution.

It is clearly a movement of our time, whatever counterforces of globalism and imperialism exist. It is, as I've noted before, the worldwide trend since World War II, capped most recently by the break-up of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. It is also a strong and growing trend in the United States, for all the superficial unity wrought by mass marketing and mass media. The red-state and blue-state divisions are only one form of it, though they point to a real and serious gulf in the land.

The response to the last presidential election in this country has been regional and holds the seeds of a real separatist movement. A group on the West Coast called MoveonCalifornia was established in November 2004 and has since been holding meetings under the rubric of a "Committee to Explore California Secession." The League of the South, which has been pressing for Southern secession for some decades, has found renewed fervor for its cause. A group in New Mexico has proposed a "Republica del Norte" that might include Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and southern Colorado. Hawaii has three secessionist organizations and there's a move to have a statewide referendum on a return to the independent state it once was. The Alaska Independence Party has been a real force in the state for years—it even got Walter Hickel elected governor on its slate in 1991, though he soon rejected the party—and now has grown to more than 20,000 members, the largest statewide third party in America. And a group in New York City, connected to a weekly called the *Brooklyn Rail*, has been writing and meeting and propagandizing for a Free NYC movement.

It's too soon to say what any of these organizations will achieve. But it's important to see that they exist and they express a very deep-seated attitude of regionalism in this country that goes way back and has recently been revived.

At one time our diets, sex lives, family relations, education, and jobs were all under the serious and daily control of churches and kings. We are no longer under their thrall, at least not in this country. Is it so fantastic to think about being as free of the regular interference of the government of the nation-state?

Let us think back to the emergence of the mammalian class, long eons ago. Their success was due to the fact that, unlike the dinosaurs that until then had dominated the earth, they were small and able to adapt to all kinds of diurnal and climatic conditions the big lizards were not. They were able to survive and eventually to proliferate, even dominate. Let us imagine we are in another political Eocene epoch now, again watching the emergence of nimble, smaller forms to challenge the old, collapsing dinosaurs of nation and empire. •

## Riding the Parti Québécois Roller Coaster

By Thomas Naylor and James Hogue

Going into its 15th National congress on June 3 in Quebec City, the Parti Québécois, the political voice of Canada's French separatist movement, never had it so good. The liberal government in Ottawa was involved in a major corruption scandal in which sleazy public relations firms were employed by the government to promote Canadian nationalism in Quebec after the 1995 sovereignty referendum. Public outrage at Ottawa had caused popular support for Quebec independence to rise to an unprecedented 54 percent. Quebec Premier Jean Charest had a disapproval rating of 77 percent.

Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe, the most popular of all of the Quebec sovereignty leaders, gave a rousing, barn-burning opening address at the congress, followed by a carefully crafted speech by PQ leader Bernard Landry. Landry

called for the creation of a new European-like democratic socialist country in North America which could become a role model for the rest of the world. Nine commissions worked throughout the weekend on such diverse topics as sovereignty, French language, participatory democracy, demographics, public services, poverty, economic development, the environment, and globalization. One heard expressions like "passionate intelligence" and "humanized globalization."

But there was a catch! Mr. Landry insisted on a poll of the 1,700 convention delegates so as to ascertain his level of political support. Before the vote began he proclaimed that, if he did not receive the support of at least 80 percent of the delegates, he would resign. When the results were announced early in the evening of the second day, Landry had received the support of only 76.2 per-

cent of the delegates. He promptly resigned, sending the separatist party into chaos.

What can the Second Vermont Republic learn from the experiences of the Parti Québécois? A lot!

Secession is a tough sell, whether in Canada, the United States, or the rest of the world. It is a radical act of peaceful rebellion against authority, often grounded in anger and fear. It requires discipline, perseverance, and lots of hard work. Maintaining the political support of a movement as diverse as the PQ is not an easy task. So too is the case with the Second Vermont Republic. •

*The writers represented the Second Vermont Republic at the national congress of the Parti Québécois in Quebec City on June 3-5 at the invitation of Vice Premier Marie Malavoy.*



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