The Censoring of Lorenzo Sherwood: The Politics of Railroads, Slavery and Southernism in Antebellum Texas

John Moretta

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Prior to the late 1850s, Texans' values, attitudes, and interests more often reflected those of their former home states than those of their new one. Texans by and large were recent emigres clustered into homogenous groups that preserved native folkways and ideals. Less than one-fourth of the population in 1860 could claim residence before statehood in 1845. The immigrants' cohesiveness, the dramatically varied Texas climate and terrain, and the lack of adequate transportation in many portions of the state made the economic interests of Texas as diverse as its population sources. Germans in the Hill Country, tejanos in San Antonio, cotton planters from the Lower South along the Brazos or Colorado rivers, or Yankee merchants in Houston or Galveston, had different concerns and values. Then, during the 1850s, a consensus emerged in Texas that reflected the ideology and partisanship of the Lower South. On the surface such empathy seemed impossible. Climate, geography, history, population makeup, and regional characteristics all made Texas appear different from the South, but these differences were not enough to prevent Texans from identifying with the other cotton growing states. In the dozen years after annexation in 1845, the economy, culture, and ideology of the plantation South extended beyond East Texas to influence Texans in all regions of the state. Several years before Texans voted to secede from the Union the majority had become convinced that their society's future status, stability, and prosperity depended in some way upon slavery and the promotion of railroad construction that would further stimulate an already growing cotton-based market economy.

Southern loyalty symbolized more than just a proper reverence for slavery. As Lower South ideology captured more Southern hearts and minds, those opposed to such extremism risked the same sort of public censure or even violence that the most ardent of antislavery men received at the hands of Southern vigilants. Southern radicals commonly applied the epithet abolitionist to political enemies who questioned or resisted any expression of Southern rights other than that of the lower South ethos. The same methods used to intimidate or punish racial disloyalty proved equally effective in castigating political dissenters or any other perceived violator of "Southern principles." Southerners were determined to purge from their society individuals or ideas that threatened their social, political, or economic institutions. These vigilant Southerners used a variety of tactics to suppress heresy, or to convince their friends and colleagues of the error of their ways. As a result of their increased identification with the Lower South, Texans displayed the same zeal for ferreting out and disciplining individuals or groups who violated their perception of what should be every white Texans' attitude toward the peculiar

John Moretta lives in Houston, Texas.
institutions. Such was the experience of Galvestonian Lorenzo Sherwood and his supporters during Texas' first intrastate "railroad war."

There were two things Texas needed to utilize the millions of acres of potential cotton land: slaves and railroads. The slaves could be obtained by reopening the African slave trade; the railroads could and would be built. According to E.H. Cushing, editor of the Houston Telegraph, Texas had close to eighteen million acres suitable for cotton cultivation. Cushing claimed that it would be "criminal folly" to deprive the state of such potential economic greatness. Though Cushing's figures were exaggerated, the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of the Census for 1900 shows that Texans planted 7,360,000 acres in cotton and produced 3,438,000 bales. These figures illustrate the potential in Lone Star cotton production. It is no wonder that throughout the 1850s leading citizens, businessmen, planters, and lawyers flooded local newspapers with long missives insisting that Texas' future prosperity and greatness could not be realized without the building of a vast railway network and the importation of African slaves. Although all Texans agreed on the need for railroads, a great political contest erupted in which the politics of slavery and southernism determined the outcome.

Railroad construction in Texas began in earnest with the chartering in 1850 of the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado line. This road was constructed to bring the staples of the lower Brazos and Colorado valleys to port at Harrisburg. A great boon was the state's acquisition of $10,000,000 in United States bonds. This money was part of the Compromise "package" of 1850; Texas would receive the money for relinquishing claim to eastern New Mexico and other portions of the Southwest. In 1851 Governor Peter H. Bell called for part of the funds to be used in a state-wide internal improvements enterprise that promoted rail and water transportation.

In September 1852 a railroad convention, meeting in Austin, supported Bell's suggestion. The delegates proposed legislation to authorize loans of boundary-settlement bonds to railroad companies. The amount received by the companies was restricted to $12,000 per mile of track. The convention also called for legislation that awarded companies 5,000 acres of land for each mile of road constructed.

Not all Texans approved of the idea of state aid to private railroad enterprises. Two months before the Austin convention, promoters of a state-constructed and owned thousand-mile railroad complex met in Galveston. The proposal's most passionate advocate was Galveston attorney Lorenzo Sherwood, who became one of the most publicly maligned men in antebellum Texas because of his "peculiar financial notions" and alleged abolitionism.

Sherwood was born in New York in 1808, became a lawyer at the age of twenty, and for several years served in the state legislature. Before migrating to Texas, Sherwood helped draft a new state constitution for New York in 1846.

While participating in the state constitutional convention, Sherwood
gained a reputation as an opponent of private canal and railroad enterprises and as an advocate for utilizing state credit to finance internal improvements. Sherwood believed that it was wrong for the public to be burdened with the large interest and service costs that private promoters charged to finance, build, and operate needed transportation systems. For his time, Sherwood possessed a remarkable understanding of economics, and much to his adversaries' annoyance, exposed their peculations and sophistries by presenting their financial statements to the public.

In 1846 Sherwood moved his wife, son, and law practice to Galveston and within a few years his firm was handling the affairs of some of the most prominent men in Texas as well as foreign shipping firms carrying trade into Texas. Over the years, Sherwood earned the enmity of several powerful Galvestonians such as Samuel May Williams and Robert Mills, as well as the open hostility of the several railroad-promoting combines then operating in the Lone Star state. By originating and advocating the State Plan, Lorenzo Sherwood set the stage for a rancorous intrastate struggle over competing ideas regarding railroad policy.

The Corporate or State Loan Plan was favored by the majority of railroad developers throughout the state, with the most determined efforts to boost the scheme emanating from Houston. Entrepreneurs, led by William March Rice, Thomas William House, and Henry Sampson, saw railroad construction as their long-awaited opportunity to dethrone Galveston and make Houston the state's leading entrepot. Houstonians, along with other advocates of the plan, wanted the system to be built by private funds. "Corporators" urged the state to grant substantial portions of the public domain as well the extension of loans as incentives to those entrepreneurs willing to undertake the risk of constructing the state's rail system. The promoters recommended that sixteen sections of land and advances as high as $10,000 be given to the companies for each mile of track actually laid. The corporators maintained that generous land grants and loans were essential if Texas hoped to attract domestic investors who would supply the additional money to complete the network.

The majority of speculators behind the Corporate Plan were a loose combination of transcontinental "paper railroaders" - Northeastern "stock jobbers" - out to make handsome returns on Texas railroad bonds circulated in both Europe and the United States. Houston's merchant princes also were attracted to the plan because they saw an opportunity to augment their incomes from a rail system that tied their city to the transcontinental system then being discussed in Congress.

The plan gained initial momentum with the election of Elisha M. Pease as governor in 1853. Pease had endorsed the plan during the campaign, promising as governor that he would support loans and land grants to promote private railroad construction in Texas. Although willing to advance state assistance to private railroad development, Pease simultaneously pushed legislation to protect the state from purely speculative railroad schemes. His program called for all investors to pay a percentage of their stock upon sub-
scription, and no charters would be granted until companies demonstrated possession of sufficient cash to begin construction. Contracts also would designate the exact terminals on the road, the date construction was to begin, and the number of miles of track to be laid annually until the line was completed. Despite his progressive proposals, Pease was committed to private railroad construction sustained by state resources. Thus, in 1854 Pease signed into law one of the most important pieces of *antebellum* railroad legislation: a bill authorizing the state to grant to all companies thereafter sixteen sections of land for each mile of track laid.\(^7\)

The majority of Galveston's business and professional classes supported the Corporate Plan even though Sherwood's State Plan favored the Island City. The mercantile and banking interests of both Houston and Galveston championed the Corporate Plan, hoping to profit by selling railroad contractors essential supplies. Galvestonians, however, were confronted with an interesting predicament: they opposed both a state-controlled system and a Houston-dominated railway, even though Sherwood's plan intimated that the line would be Galveston-centered.\(^6\)

As the railroad debate intensified, it was obvious to all Texans that regardless of which plan was adopted it would either be Houston or Galveston money that financed and controlled the system. Much to Houstonians' delight, Galveston's leaders had no real desire to control the network or any interest in supporting a plan that benefited their city. They were content with their port monopoly. Unfortunately for Galveston, self-interest rather than public interest prevailed among the city's elite, who saw in the Corporate Plan another means of securing their personal fortunes. The zeal with which Galveston's city fathers supported the scheme eventually made Houston the railroad focus of Texas and the center of a Southern transcontinental system and relegated the Island City to a satellite status.

Houston corporate boosters were especially pleased by Governor Pease's decision to pursue his predecessor's recommendation that Texas secure a segment of the possible Southern transcontinental railroad route. In 1853, with Pease's approval, the legislature passed the Mississippi and Pacific Act, which instructed the governor to contract with a company to build an 800-mile road westward through the state at the 32nd parallel. The bill also stipulated that the state would donate twenty sections of public land to the contractors for every mile of track laid, which would total eleven million acres. The company awarded the contract also had to deposit $300,000 in specie or federal or state securities with the state which would be forfeited if at least fifty miles of road were not built within eighteen months.\(^9\)

Only one association, the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company of New York, responded. Its directors were rather prominent individuals: Robert J. Walker, former secretary of the treasury during the Polk Administration; Georgia political leader and railroad speculator, T. Butler King; and Anson Jones, long-time Texas lawmaker, entrepreneur, and last president of the Republic of Texas. Within a few months several respected publications such
as the New York Examiner and the American Railroad Journal reported that the company was a facade for a group of ruthless and penniless speculators out to swindle honest investors to their railroad schemes. After learning of the company's dealings, Pease had reservations about awarding them the contract. After months of negotiation and warnings from Senators Thomas J. Rusk and Sam Houston to "not let these men fasten themselves upon Texas," the governor decided in November 1854 to nullify the state's contract with the consortium after the company failed to deposit the required $300,000.11

Although northern and eastern Texans criticized Pease's decision, the majority of citizens applauded the governor's firmness. Public approval of Pease's resistance to the machinations of the A&P helped him to win reelection in 1855. However, Pease's experience with the company made him a less sanguine supporter of the Corporate Plan. Pease almost committed political suicide just before the gubernatorial campaign of 1855 began when he completely reversed his general railroad policy and publicly endorsed Sherwood's State Plan with some modifications. Pease was swayed by the State Plan lobby to conclude that 1200 miles of road could be built with state funds over the next several years, creating a public cost of $19,000,000 owed to private investors. This deficit would be eradicated by an internal improvements tax, sale of public land, and by the appropriation of some of the money obtained by the boundary settlement. Pease's new policy found few enthusiasts outside Galveston. Many interior Texans charged that Pease was in collusion with leading Galvestonians to enrich further the island's already fat commercial interests. Other critics declared that "corporate promotion" such as railroad building was not a proper function of the government, and that similar projects not only failed in other states but in the process left behind a legacy of corruption, fraud, and bitter intrastate rivalry.12

Despite public opposition, Pease remained committed to the State Plan with his proposed revisions. He was willing to consider state aid to private contractors if they were regulated properly. He rejected the idea of providing state funds for miles of track completed. For a moment it appeared that State Plan advocates were on the verge of victory when the Texas House's internal improvements committee reported favorably on the proposal. Unfortunately, that was the extent of their endorsement. Legislation sanctioning the state to loan money or iron to railroad companies also was voted down, and the session came to an end on February 1, 1855, without any legislative consensus on railroad policy. Pease was disturbed by the legislature's lack of initiative and immediately announced he would call lawmakers back into session in July.12

During the interim both State and Corporate Plan proponents lobbied hard for their respective agendas. Lorenzo Sherwood urged Pease to reject his opponent's claims that the State Plan was all but defeated, and that he should continue being "discreetly active" in its behalf. Sherwood was confident that with "proper exertion" the State plan would emerge victorious after the summer session. Corporate lobbyists counseled Pease to abandon the state system. They reminded the governor that his advocacy of the plan just a few
months earlier nearly cost him reelection. They also impressed upon Pease the fate of Sam Houston, who had destroyed himself politically by opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act contrary to his constituents' wishes.15

It is doubtful that any Corporate Plan supporter was that familiar with early socialist doctrine. They simply used the term for propaganda purposes in their attacks on Sherwood and his plan. Sherwood was no socialist; yet to label him as such created an image of an "outsider" trying to impose upon Texas ideas that were antithetical and subversive to the Jacksonian creed of laissez faire capitalism to which most Texans were devoted. In fairness to the corporate faction, Sherwood's "political economy" not only was unorthodox but woefully complex and cumbersome for the more pedestrian Jacksonian economic mind. Corporators saw Sherwood's proposals as wasteful expenditures of public money and felt the private sector could undertake the project more efficiently.

The cornerstone of Sherwood's fiscal program for Texas was his assertion that the institutions of banking and transportation should be founded upon the state's great natural wealth - land - of which Texas had an abundance to offer as security to both foreign and domestic investors for internal improvements. Sherwood also contended that the federal bonds presently sitting in the state treasury were equally attractive to investors. The notes could be used in conjunction with a carefully planned expenditure of the public domain to create a viable credit base for banks and railroads. Sherwood believed once the state established such policies, low-interest foreign loans for railroads and sound paper for banking would flow into Texas as a "natural" result of such prudent management of state resources. Sherwood warned that if the Corporators had their way, "our public lands, public money, and later the public credit would be exhausted piecemeal, and the consequences would be the horrible, selfish exploitation of the public domain and the corruption of legislators, governors, and whomever else may fall victim to their falsehoods and deceptions."14

Sherwood also contended that the general concept of incorporation as it had evolved in the 1850s had brought "nothing but disorder and conflict." If Texans hoped to prevent the Corporators from taking control of the state "with their slander and machinations," then the people must be willing to create a state-regulated system of finance and internal improvements. Sherwood insisted that all corporate property should be regulated by law to accept liability for the acts of its agents. "Let us adopt a constitutional provision making the stockholders in all corporations, created for business profit, personally responsible for the debts of the company; and we would have no more trouble from them than we would from mosquitoes or horse flies, when the mercury stood at zero." Sherwood always closed his editorials and public addresses by reminding his audience that the fate of Texas banking and transportation was ultimately in their hands. The people were "the one arena, the one tribunal on earth where it is possible to check its (the corporation's) overgrowth and awe it into subjection and decency."15

The Corporators found a particularly receptive forum for their campaign
against Sherwood in the editorial columns of the Houston Telegraph. The paper’s editor, E.H. Cushing, was one of the faction’s most determined and vitriolic members. In numerous editorials Cushing attacked Sherwood and the State Plan from every possible angle, even accusing the New Yorker of using his program for personal gain. “How much money do Sherwood and his disciples expect to get out of the State Plan? If Mr. Sherwood’s ideas were ever to become a reality, all manner of corruption would be introduced into the Legislative body.” Cushing was convinced that state funds would be “squandered in reckless and extravagant expenditure,” and that it would be impossible to determine “who of Sherwood’s lackeys would be on the receiving end of this endeavor.”

Despite the attacks by Cushing and others, the project remained popular with most Galvestonians and with a majority of mainland Texans who had been suspicious of promoters from the outset. Most Texans were more interested in getting the lines operating than in securing a profit or advantage from their construction. Sherwood further augmented his growing support by vigorously exploiting his talents as an extremely skillful and scholarly debater whose knowledge of economics and public transportation, especially railroads, was overwhelming. Together with his invaluable ally, publisher Willard Richardson of the Galveston News, the New Yorker appeared invincible. Richardson’s paper enjoyed one of the widest circulations in the state, and through it Sherwood broadly disseminated his views. Between April and July 1856, Sherwood, Richardson, and other State Plan advocates filled the News with spirited commentaries. As summer approached, the Corporate faction concluded that if Sherwood was not silenced their Loan Bill would fail. The Corporator’s anxiety intensified when Governor Pease publicly endorsed Sherwood’s agenda. With such support a State Plan victory seemed inevitable.

If there was one area where Sherwood was vulnerable it was on the issue of slavery—a subject on which he was portrayed as having “unsound” attitudes. In the fall of 1855 Sherwood publicly debated Louis T. Wigfall, a rabid secessionist, and long-time Texas politico and “southerner,” Dr. Ashbel Smith. It was from the context of that discussion that the Loan men based their accusations. By June 1856, Sherwood was called a “Negro-loving abolitionist, a low cunning political viper,” who secretly was being “pensioned by his Northern allies to help spread their incendiary doctrine of negro abolitionism across Texas.” Sherwood was a “Northern intruder” whose “years of study had enabled him to tell lies with statistics.” No matter how legitimate Sherwood’s agenda might be, no Texan should listen to a man who failed to take “a sound Southern tone on slavery.” It was time for loyal Texans to “strip the false hearted pretensions to public welfare paraded” by an individual who was “really a negro-loving abolitionist.” The Houston Telegraph went so far as to question the southernism of Galvestonians, whom, it declared, “astonished” other Texans by their support of the “insidious machinations and other acts of humbuggery by Sherwood on railroad matters.” If Islanders did not rid themselves of Sherwood, they would be confirming in the minds of loyal
Texans that Galvestonians were not to be "trusted," for they had "forsaken their Southern heritage" and joined the ranks of Sherwood's abolitionists.16

To what degree Sherwood was genuinely "unsound" on the issues of slavery, secession, and the African slave trade was moot. Closer scrutiny of the October debate between Smith, Wigfall, and Sherwood revealed that the New Yorker was opposed to slavery's expansion but not the institution. Sherwood made it perfectly clear that he had "no desire to interfere with the institution in States where it now existed." Moreover, living in the South had convinced Sherwood "that there was much that was good in the institution of slavery—it is neither all black nor all white." Any decision to abolish slavery "must come from the people in their sovereign capacity," and Southerners must never be "threatened with the use of force in order to have them relinquish their slaves." Sherwood even believed that most slaveholders and Southern whites in general "never pretended to vindicate slavery in the abstract." It was an "evil" that had been "introduced without the fault of the present generation." Sherwood, however, admitted that he would be "most gratified" if slavery was abolished. Although Sherwood was willing to tolerate slavery as a temporary labor system, human bondage was unacceptable as a permanent institution because of the incongruity it represented for a democratic society. Sherwood saw the reopening of the African slave trade as the "conspiracy of a few fanatics and mercenaries" who not only hoped to profit from the sale of human flesh, but to perpetuate as well a labor system that denigrated "all white men" and kept the South "a backward and isolated region."17

Sherwood was not alone in his opposition to the reopening of the trade. Other prominent Galvestonians and Texans also tried to block legislation that would resurrect "an evil piracy," as Judge John H. Reagan called it. Joining Sherwood in a coalition to "silence this reckless discussion," were fellow Galvestonians Judge James Love, Oscar Farish, Ferdinand Flake, editor of the German weekly Die Union, Hamilton Stuart, editor of the Galveston Civilian, and Judge Peter Gray of Houston. These individuals challenged every argument in favor of the trade, even the assertion that reopening of the slave trade would "make good Christians of them (the Africans) and raise them to the level of our negroes. The work is one of philanthropy and patriotism."20 That the federal laws against the trade were "impeding God's work," Hamilton Stuart replied "that no greater insult could be made upon the intelligence of the People of Texas than that recently made in the Telegraph, that the importing of Africans would be their Salvation. Any church going Texan who believes that the reopening of the slave trade would Christianize African negroes, has succumbed to a double-faced plea of self-interest among slave traders and planters whose only concern is for individual profit."21

On the question of secession Sherwood was a staunch Unionist. He warned Southerners "not to take a position so novel and ultra that it cannot be measured by the Constitution." There were "fourteen million" Northerners who opposed "any such talk" and would be ready "to defend the Constitution and the rights of the Federal Government to preserve and enforce its laws."22
Sherwood was a supremely self-confident individual who refused to succumb to "such blackhearted falsehoods." He dramatically and cogently defended his position in public forums and deflected his critics' every invective. The more he was denounced as an abolitionist, the more determined Sherwood was not to capitulate. He accused his adversaries of making "'nigger politics' your tilting ground. Will you tell the people what that has to do with the Internal Improvements Policy of the State? The People know I am no negrophile and that I am as loyal to the State as even the oldest of men who have resided here since its inception." Sherwood's critics ignored his queries and continued calling him "a wise-ace and a nigger lover," asserting that Texans would never agree with him either on his "nigger politics" or on his State Plan. "Can't you take a hint and leave?" Sherwood countered by telling Texans that his chief "pettifoggers" were "Loan men" whose sense of honor and decency has been so corrupted by their desire for profit that "they will engage in the most vile endeavors to have their way." If the Corporators "reckless schemes" were "fastened upon the People and Legislature," they would then bilk the state treasury "in order to make their worthless paper good."23

Since Sherwood refused to abandon his campaign for his railroad plan, the Corporators concluded that the only way to defeat the State Plan and pass their own was to force Sherwood to resign from the state legislature. The Corporators agreed that the most expedient means of accomplishing that objective was to intimidate Sherwood's disciples into withdrawing their pro-state support. By accusing Sherwood of being an abolitionist and an arrant traitor to Southern principles, the Corporators hoped to destroy his support among various groups of Texans, whom they hoped would abandon Sherwood for fear of being labeled disloyal as well. The Corporators extended their epithets to include anyone associated with "this intruder from the North." The Corporators also wanted to make sure that Sherwood would have "restricted" opportunities to address public gatherings.24

Sherwood was aware of his opponents' strategy. Hoping to counter their plan of removing him from the legislature, Sherwood and his more loyal supporters - those friends who had not been shaken by the charges of abolitionism - called for a meeting on the Island on July 7, 1856, to give Sherwood the opportunity to defend his railroad plan and answer his critics.25

The Loan men realized that their bill's only chance of being enacted was to prevent Sherwood from addressing the people of Galveston. They had but one day to rally their forces. They wasted no time in formulating a plan. On the morning of July 7 a meeting of "concerned citizens" was "convened to take into consideration the propriety of permitting Lorenzo Sherwood to address the people in defense of his course in the last legislature." Although the Corporators tried to conceal their true motive behind the facade of "public concern," the purpose of this special convocation was to censurate Lorenzo Sherwood. After explaining to the audience why the meeting was called, William Pitt Ballinger read a letter he had drafted to Sherwood, which he would deliver to "this intruder from New York." Ballinger's message was a demand for Sherwood's resignation for the legislature.26
Ballinger made it clear to Sherwood in his ultimatum that he “was not acting alone” and that he had the full support of not just prominent Galvestonians but of a “good number” of Texans throughout the state who were as concerned “as we are here of your lack of Southern principles.” Ballinger warned Sherwood that “neither you, nor anyone entertaining your views” would be allowed to address the public “either directly or indirectly on the subject of slavery.” Ballinger declared that Sherwood’s opinions on slavery, “whether expressed in a private or public setting,” would no longer be tolerated. Sherwood already had “tried the patience” of Texans on the issue, and it was obvious he had “no congeniality with them on that question.” Ballinger recognized that Sherwood had “some supporters in this community,” but if he attempted to test the situation by trying to discuss slavery before a Galveston audience, then “the people of this City will come forth and make this evening the occasion for the definite and final settlement of that issue, both as to you and to them.” Ballinger concluded his message by reminding Sherwood that any subsequent statements pertaining to slavery would be “the prompt signal for consequences to which we need not allude.”

After Ballinger’s message was approved by fellow Corporators, Ballinger, Samuel May Williams, Benjamin C. Franklin, and Colonel Ephraim McLean delivered the ultimatum to the “intruder.” The committee told Sherwood that if after reading Ballinger’s letter, he attempted to hold his meeting, he would be “visited” where he was speaking and “all possible means” would be “exercised to prevent you from addressing the people of Galveston.” The Corporators’ stratagem was to make it appear that Sherwood only was being denied the right to speak on the issue of slavery. By focusing on Sherwood’s alleged “abolitionist beliefs,” which Ballinger claimed his message was preventing Sherwood from propagating, the Corporators created the impression that Sherwood’s right of free speech was not being violated because he was still “allowed” to address other subjects.

At this critical juncture Sherwood’s most important and loyal ally, Williard Richardson of the Galveston News, repudiated his old friend and colleague. Richardson’s defection was a fatal blow to Sherwood’s cause and the Corporators were delighted. For several days prior to the meeting, the Corporators had tried to persuade Richardson to abandon Sherwood by reminding the editor that his support had caused many Galvestonians “to suspect your loyalty to Southern principles.” It was time for Richardson to decide whether he was “a true and devoted son of the South and all that it stands for,” or whether he had “betrayed” his heritage and had allied himself “with this Northern abolitionist and socialist.” Even though Richardson endorsed Sherwood’s railroad policies, he always made it clear that he opposed the New Yorker’s stand on slavery. Despite publicly denouncing Sherwood’s position on slavery, Richardson realized that continued support of his railroad agenda could cause the financial ruin of his paper. The last thing Richardson wanted was to be the next recipient of one of the elite’s “vigilance” letters. To abandon so abruptly Sherwood at this crucial moment was a painful decision for Richardson. Nonetheless, when confronted with the reality of
economic and political survival, Richardson chose the secure and practical rather than the idealistic course.

The response of Hamilton Stuart, editor of the Galveston *Civilian*, to this same crisis was dramatically different. Although opposing Sherwood throughout the decade on a variety of issues, Stuart believed that the censuring was morally wrong. Stuart was not known for his boldness of action; yet he came forward and defended Sherwood’s right of free speech. Stuart also led a group of citizens in protest from the meeting. Later, it was Stuart’s *Civilian* and not Richardson’s *News* that published and distributed Sherwood’s explanation of his views.30

Confronted with either submission or possible physical reprisal, Sherwood concluded that “wisdom was the better part of valor” and resigned as Galveston’s delegate to the state legislature. Although defeated, Sherwood was determined not to allow his “course to be misconstrued.” In a broadside printed by Stuart, Sherwood wanted it known that “for the peace and harmony of the community” he was willing to “waive for the present, the vindication of myself against the attacks of all those who have opposed me on this issue.”31

For a brief moment it appeared that Sherwood and his supporters would receive prompt vindication. Ignoring Sherwood’s request to let the matter die, his most loyal followers retaliated against the Corporators by circulating a petition on the island demanding that State Senator M.M. Potter, one of Sherwood’s most vitriolic critics, publicly “clarify” his stand on the railroad controversy. The petition placed Potter in a compromising position: he recently was elected to the legislature based on his support of the Galveston plan. Williard Richardson earlier had proposed an idea that became known as the “Galveston plan” which maintained that the contours of Texas geography, especially the Gulf Coast, “necessitated” a fanlike convergence of all Texas lines to Galveston. Richardson did not particularly care whether such a system was built by private or public funds. But as Sherwood’s friends revealed, Potter and others, all supposed advocates of the Galveston plan, for several months had assisted private railroad interests as lobbyists, “throwing money around in Austin in hopes of securing contracts for railroad builders out of New York.” As James Love confided to Thomas Jack, “Potter & the others are acting foolishly – they throw themselves at the feet of these moguls from N.Y. as if they were some sort of royalty. It is disgraceful. The Govr. is very wary of these men and I don’t believe any contracts will be forthcoming for them.” The funds Potter and his associates dispensed were provided by Robert Walker and T. Butler King, who had reorganized the old Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company into the Texas Western, and now pressed hard for a charter to build an east-west line through the state.32

Potter was not about to let Sherwood get the best of him. He quickly counterattacked by condemning the petition as one more “purulent” attempt by the “abolitionist and socialist” Sherwood to impose his ideas upon “the unsuspecting and honest people of Texas.” Potter shrewdly declared that he “forgave” those Galvestonians who signed the petition because they were
unaware that "its design was to once more vilify all those who had opposed his (Sherwood's) radical schemes to bring down upon our State, corruption, extravagance, and abolitionism."1

The final blow to the State Plan was Governor Elisha M. Pease's decision that continued endorsement in the face of Sherwood's censorship in Galveston could prove politically suicidal. Now that Sherwood was silenced by the Corporators, the State Plan was dead and Pease could withdraw his support without losing credibility. With Sherwood out of the way, when the legislature reconvened that summer it quickly passed a bill loaning railroad companies $6,000 of United States bonds in the permanent school fund for every mile of road built to assist further construction. Pease allowed the measure to become law without his signature. On August 13, 1856 the Loan Bill became law. Henceforth Texas railroads would be built by private enterprise generously aided by the state.2

By using the slavery issue the Corporators succeeded in destroying their ablest antagonist. As the experience of Lorenzo Sherwood confirmed, by the 1850s men who in any way questioned the "sanctity" of slavery were destined to suffer all manner of public humiliation, censorship, ostracism, and even death in extreme cases. From the moment he arrived from New York in 1846, Sherwood was viewed to be outside the political and cultural mainstreams of Texas society. Despite his statements to the contrary, by the time of the railroad controversy Sherwood's "northernism" made him vulnerable to his adversaries' charges of abolitionism and disloyalty to the South. No matter how forthright and sound the individual and his ideas, if they were perceived to threaten any aspect of Southern life or values, they would be subject to the same sort of reprisals as any other traitor to Southern communities. The censoring of Lorenzo Sherwood in 1856 was clearly the manifestation of Texans' identification with the Lower South ethos of the late 1850s and its aggressive vigilance to purge from Southern society all individuals and ideas that in any way challenged the virtue of Southern social, economic, and political institutions.

Notes
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EAST TEXAS HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

21Galveston Civilian, December 28, 1858. Also see similar comments made by Judge Peter Gray in Houston Telegraph, July 4, 13, 1859.
22Dallas Herald, October 15, 1855.
23Houston Telegraph, May 19, 1856.
24Galveston News, June 18, 1856.
26Galveston News, July 9, 11, 1856.
27See a draft copy of Ballinger’s letter to Sherwood in his personal papers for June-August 1856 in Ballinger Papers (Barker Texas History).
28Ballinger, draft copy; also see Ballinger to Guy Bryan, July 8, 1856, Ballinger Papers, Barker Texas History Center; Galveston News, July 7, 9, 11, 1856. Frederick Law Olmstead, traveling through Texas during the mid-1850s, witnessed Sherwood’s censoring at the hands of Galveston’s elite and wrote about it in the appendix of the 1857 edition of his Journey Through Texas, pp. 505-506.
29M.M. Potter to Richardson, July 14, 1856. Copy of letter found in William Pitt Ballinger and Associates Papers, Miscellaneous Letters, 1854-1874 (Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston, TX).
30Forrell, Galveston Era, p. 177; Galveston Civilian, July 12, 1856.
31Galveston Civilian, July 12, 1856. Also see complete copy of Sherwood’s broadside in Ballinger papers for July 1856.
32Houston Telegraph, July 14, 1856; James Love to Thomas Jack, July 17, 1856, Ballinger & Assoc. Papers, Houston Metropolitan Research Center.
33Houston Telegraph, August 4, 1856; Austin State Gazette, August 1, 1856; Sherwood Collection.
34Houston Telegraph, August 16, 1856; Austin Texas State Gazette, August 13, 1856; Richardson, Texas Almanac, 1860, pp. 129, 132-134; Gammel, Laws of Texas, IV, p. 449.