

Summer History & Heritage -- #2 (July 8)

This 2nd post of the season follows on the 1st with more on William Gilmore Simms.

Anti-Slavery Movement --- (*Bloodstains*; Howard Ray White)

This 19th-century political movement, dealing with the nation's gravest crisis, included partisans of three distinct types: abolitionists, exclusionists, & deportationists? Abolitionists, a tiny fraction in the North, demanded that bonded African-Americans be freed unconditionally and allowed to settle as equals anywhere in the U.S. Exclusionists, as an expedient for the time being, wanted them kept out of the western territories, while deportationists supported their resettlement abroad after emancipation.

(It is fair to say that, by the 1850s, both Abraham Lincoln and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* author Harriet Beecher Stowe fit the description of exclusionist and deportationist.)

Remembering William Gilmore Simms - (Robert D. Lurie; *Chronicles*, June 2013)

Our own cultural elite has forgotten, and would just as soon forget, the likes of the South Carolinian man of letters, **William Gilmore Simms (1806--1870)**. But there's no denying his immense popularity and influence in the antebellum era, including a substantial readership in the Northern States. Consider the estimate of no less a contemporary than Edgar Allan Poe: "It may be said, on the whole, that while there are several of our native writers who excel [Simms] at particular points, there is, nevertheless, not one who surpasses him in the aggregate of the higher excellences of fiction." His prose style, critics say, may be too wordy, too descriptive, too detailed for modern readers; yet it suited his own era well, providing a near-cinematic view of the Old South for many who had never seen it for themselves. His poetry, heralded by James Everett Kibler of the University of Georgia and others, is more like a fine wine, aging well and worthy of recognition as among the best of the 19th-century.

Simms's promotion of regional writing—not merely for the sake of its own place and time, but as the true path to an authentic national literature—especially merits our attention. "To be national in literature," he argued in the preface to a short-story collection of his published in 1856, "one must needs be sectional. No one mind can fully illustrate the characteristics of any great country, and he who depicts one section faithfully has made his proper and sufficient contribution to the great work of national illustration." Later on, the acclaimed **William Faulkner (1897--1962)** came to a similar conclusion, basing nearly all his novels in Yoknapatawpha County, a "little postage stamp of native soil" patterned after his birthplace, Lafayette County, Mississippi.

By neglecting Simms, writes Robert Dean Lurie, "we neglect a pivotal force in the early development of American letters. . . a progenitor of the rich Southern literary tradition that flourishes to this day."